



Conducted by
James Gardiner

“ In Exod. 7 Moses and Aaron were sent to Pharaoh to persuade the king to release the children of Israel by performing wonders and signs. Why was it that the wise men and magicians of Egypt were able to perform the same miracles as were performed by Moses? Also, if Moses turned all the rivers, ponds and brooks into blood, how were the magicians able to do likewise, and where did the water come from? ”

As we can imagine, when Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh as representatives of God, the king was not long in asking for some evidence as proof that God, the God of Israel, was backing their demands. Thus it was arranged, that when Pharaoh demanded such proof (as in chap. 7:9) that Aaron was to cast his rod before the king and it would become a serpent. Aaron does as he is commanded and we would have imagined that Pharaoh would have been impressed. Pharaoh, it appears, regarded the wonder as a skilful piece of magic, and his reaction was to summon to his palace his wise men, sorcerers and magicians, no doubt assuring Moses that he could repeat Moses' trick of turning stick into serpent. The Egyptians were particularly clever sorcerers; and even today there are magicians in Egypt who are extremely adept at charming snakes. By pressing the nape of the neck they can throw snakes into a kind of catalepsy which renders them stiff and immovable—thus seeming to have transformed them into walking sticks. The magicians were summoned to the palace and, having had prior notice of what was required of them, they would come prepared. What they were not prepared for, however, was that Aaron's rod would swallow all the rods of the magicians, leaving them discomfitted and no doubt embarrassed. However, the fact that Pharaoh's magicians appeared to the king to have been successful in repeating the miracle of Aaron's was enough to assure the king that Aaron was guilty of legerdemain.

The next wonder performed by Moses and Aaron was in turning the mighty river Nile into blood, and all the other rivers in Egypt, and the streams, ponds, pools and even

the water in the water vessels. The question asks that if the waters of all the above descriptions in Egypt were turned to blood (as they indeed were, v. 20 of chap. 7) how was it possible for the sorcerers to do likewise and where could the water come from. This thing done to all the waters in Egypt must surely rank as one of the greatest wonders in the Bible, when we think about it, and yet we have to admit that in verse 23 "the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments." First of all with reference to the availability of water for the magicians to turn to blood, I suggest that verse 24 provides the answer: "And all the Egyptians digged about the river for water to drink." It appears that the water already absorbed by the earth in its natural way had not been contaminated and that if one dug a hole in the earth near the river it would eventually fill up with a certain amount of water. Of necessity, therefore, the "miracle" of the magicians turning water to blood must have been on a small scale, but still of sufficient skill and magnitude to convince the king. I believe it to be of great importance to notice the wording of verse 22—that the magicians accomplished the feat by the use of "*their enchantments.*" By contrast, Moses performed the working of his wonder *in the sight* of Pharaoh and all his servants. Also, notice well the similarity of this verse with verse 18 of chap. 8 which says, regarding the attempt of the magicians to turn dust into lice, that, "*the magicians did so with their enchantments, to bring forth lice, but they could not.*" To my mind, therefore, the interpretation to be put on the phrase, "the magicians did so with their enchantments," is merely another way of saying that the magicians brought all their skill and knowledge to bear and did all in their power to copy Moses' performance. In the cases of the rods turned to serpents, the water turned to blood, and the plague of frogs, they succeeded in giving a credible appearance of success, especially in the eyes of Pharaoh, but in each case it was accomplished by sleight of hand and cunning skill. It was of course a complete impossibility to turn rivers and ponds of water into blood if all such had already been turned into blood, and this miracle had probably been chosen by God quite purposely to confound the magicians. However, even the most cunning of the Egyptian sorcerers was unable to turn dust into lice and thus we read, "*And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not.*"

It is not quite accurate, therefore, to say as the question does, that the magicians of Egypt *did the same wonders* as Moses. Out of the ten plagues brought upon Egypt the magicians succeeded only in two cases in convincing the king that they had succeeded in matching the powers of Moses. They failed in the other eight instances:— the lice; the flies; the murrain of beasts; the boils; the hail and lightning; the locusts; the darkness and finally the death of the firstborn. In actual fact we read, in the case of the plague of boils, that (v. 11 of chap. 9) "the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boil was upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians."

Thus the magicians and sorcerers, clever and skilful as they no doubt appear to have been, were no match for the wonderful power of God through Moses and Aaron, and were forced to admit to Pharaoh (in verse 19 of chap. 8) "This is the finger of God."