

Exodus 7:8-13

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-7/exodus-78-13/>

Moses' conflict with Pharaoh begins in verse 8. The first confrontation is in 7:18-23. Here, the LORD instructed Moses and Aaron concerning what to do when Pharaoh asked for a miracle. Moses had Aaron cast down his staff in Pharaoh's presence, which became a serpent. Pharaoh's sorcerers duplicated the miracle, resulting in Pharaoh's heart being hardened. All this happened because the LORD planned it.

Now that Moses and Aaron have been given their orders concerning their confrontation with Pharaoh and the release of the Israelites, the LORD then told them what to do in their first encounter with him. It begins with *the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying*. In His grace, the LORD prepared Moses and Aaron for everything that came their way. They should not be surprised or caught off guard because He has in complete control.

The LORD predicted that Pharaoh would want some verification that Moses and Aaron were spokesmen for the God of Israel. He instructed them on what to do *When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Work a miracle,'*. Moses was told to *say to Aaron*, as per the LORD's instructions in 7:1-2. He was to tell Aaron *Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent*. The word for "serpent" used here (Hebrew *tannin*) is not the one normally used (Hebrew *nahash* – see [Genesis 3:1](#) and [Exodus 4:3](#)). Some think that *tannin* refers not to a snake but to a creature that lives in the river, such as a crocodile. However, since *nahash* is used to describe what Aaron's staff was transformed into in [Exodus 7:15](#), it seems best to think that *tannin* refers to a serpent in this context. Note also that *tannin* was a symbol for Egypt.

Having been given their instructions from the LORD, *Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, and thus they did just as the Lord had commanded*. Once again, it was noted that Moses and Aaron did exactly what the LORD wanted them to do. That is, *Aaron threw his staff down before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent*. Interestingly, the phrase "it became" is similar to "let it be" in the creation account in [Genesis 1](#). The LORD did an act of creation to convince Pharaoh that He is the sovereign One of the universe.

Instead of acknowledging the LORD's sovereignty, *Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same with their secret arts.* The "wise men" here probably refer to a class of priests that are skilled at divination and witchcraft. The "sorcerers" are related to witchcraft and practices of the occult. These two groups – referred to together as "the magicians of Egypt", duplicated the miracle by Aaron, *for each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents.* How did the Egyptian magicians do this? It could be that they were highly skilled at deception, similar to what illusionists do today. However, since the text tells us that Aaron's staff swallowed the other staffs, it seems more likely they used demonic power to accomplish this. The Bible states that Satan can perform "power, signs, and false wonders" ([2 Thessalonians 2:9](#)).

But then there was a startling development in verse 12. *Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs.* This was very significant because it demonstrates that God of the Hebrews would have victory over Pharaoh (who thought he was a god), and the serpent was a symbol of Egypt and Pharaoh's power.

In spite of this dire warning from the LORD, *Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.* The text does not say whether the hardening is from God or from himself. In either case, Pharaoh was not convinced by this incident that he needed to obey the sovereign LORD. As a result, the plagues were about to be unleashed on the Egyptian people.

In summary, the incident in verses 7-13 shows once again that the work of deliverance is the LORD's completely. He chooses to work through His messengers, but it is the LORD who is in control of all things. The only requirement placed upon Moses and Aaron was obedience to His commands.

This can be seen as the first of twelve miracles designed to cause the release of the Hebrews from Egypt. The next ten miracles are the ten plagues on Egypt, and the twelfth is the crossing of the Red Sea. The first miracle does not harm the Egyptians, but the remaining eleven do.

Biblical Text:

⁸ Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ⁹ "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Work a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw *it* down before Pharaoh, *that* it may become a serpent.'" ¹⁰ So Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, and thus they did just as the Lord had commanded; and Aaron threw his staff down before

Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. ¹¹ Then Pharaoh also called for *the* wise men and *the* sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same with their secret arts. ¹² For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. ¹³ Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.