

Jannes and Jambres

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2 TIMOTHY 3:1-4 describes a class of dissolute brothers and sisters that would arise from within the ecclesia “in the last days”. These reprobate brothers and sisters are summed up in verse 5 as being people “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof”.

Verse 6 outlines a key tactic of these corrupted brethren: “For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts”. Such people prefer to work privately to promote their views. Note Paul’s use of the sinister word ‘creep’. Sadly, this is consistent with how errors have been propagated in the ecclesia throughout history; we may expect it be so “in the last days”.

The victims of these false teachers are captives, “led away with divers lusts”. The false teachers tempt them, stimulating their desires. And to what desires or lusts does the teacher of error appeal? It is evident from verses 6 and 7 that novelty is the great lust to which they appeal. There is a certain mindset that is happy to discuss everything and settle nothing. Like the Athenians in Acts 17, there are many who love to “hear some new thing” (v. 21); Paul warns there will be some who are willing to play on this by promoting new theories and presenting what they claim are new facts. Those who have for any reason become disenchanted with ecclesial life and may have withdrawn somewhat from active ecclesial participation are particularly at risk of being captured by this means.

Verse 8 compares these false teachers to Jannes and Jambres: “Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith”. The word with which verse 8 commences has the idea of ‘just like’. In other words, the case of Jannes and Jambres is an example of the problem Paul has just been describing.

Who were Jannes and Jambres? They are not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, but they

are mentioned in Jewish traditions as two magicians in Egypt who confronted Moses at Pharaoh’s court. The Targum of Jonathan inserts their names into the text of Exodus 7:11. Some Jewish traditions suggest they were sons of Balaam, while other traditions suggest that they instigated the making of the golden calf in Exodus 32. *Hasting’s Bible Dictionary* says Jannes means ‘he who misleads’, while Jambres means ‘he who opposes’.¹ If this is correct it may suggest that the Jewish traditions adopted symbolic names to describe the effect of these men.

Most commentators regard these men as Egyptians, but this idea, if we give any credence to some of the traditions, seems at odds with the suggestion that they were with the Israelites in the wilderness. Brother Harry Whittaker, picking up on this, claims their names are Jewish, not Egyptian, and that Jannes and Jambres were renegade Jews who sided with the magicians against Moses.² This fits Paul’s comparison of them with false teachers who arise from within the ecclesia, who are “reprobate concerning the faith”.

Brother Whittaker aligns these men to the Judaisers in the first century who opposed Paul’s teaching. If we extend this line of reasoning to our own “last days” we may conclude that the concept applies to any individual or movement that arises from within the Christadelphian body which preaches a corrupt gospel and which seeks to capture and mislead the unwary.

We need not despair, however, that such reprobate influences arise, because verse 9 says these people will come to a sudden end. In the “last days” of the first century the Judaisers certainly met a sudden end when Jerusalem was sacked. In our day it will be the return of Christ which cuts short their work.

1. *Hasting’s Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 2, pp. 548-9.

2. *Bible Studies*, pp. 52-3.