

THE ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

Chapter 8:4 – 40

The gospel spreads beyond Jerusalem

- *What did the believers scattered by the persecution do?
- *What's the difference between a true miracle and a false miracle?
- *How did people get the ability to perform miraculous gifts by the Holy Spirit?
- *How are we forgiven when we sin after we are baptized?

Acts 8:4-8 Philip goes to Samaria

Remember that at the end of the last lesson, we saw the disciples being run out of Jerusalem by a major persecution. People like Saul would even invade the houses of believers and put them in jail. How did the disciples respond to such opposition and intimidation? Wherever they went outside of Jerusalem, they spread the gospel.

The passage here tells us how Philip, one of the servants chosen in Acts 7:5, preached about Jesus where he went, Samaria. Recall that Jesus had said that His message would be spread first in Jerusalem, then in the regions of Judea and Samaria, and then to all the earth (see 1:8). Now we are seeing the second step of Jesus' plan, and later in the book of Acts we will see the plan completed. In Samaria, Philip proclaimed what Jesus did, and showed the truth of the gospel by performing miracles, just like Jesus said (remember Mark 16:15-20). People were overjoyed at the good news of Jesus Christ and the power of God.

Note: From suffering to joy

Over and over in Acts we see how the Lord blesses His people that respond to life's troubles in a godly way. These disciples could have been upset with God for letting such a terrible persecution come upon them in Jerusalem; they certainly hadn't done anything bad to deserve it! And in the same way, we can often wonder why God allows such difficult troubles in our lives. But instead of giving up on faith in Christ, these believers determined to use the opportunity to spread the gospel even farther. They reacted well to the opposition, and, as a result, they and a whole other city ended up rejoicing greatly (verse 8)!

Acts 8:9-13 Simon the magician

This paragraph tells us how the people of Samaria left something false for the truth of Christ. There was a magician there named Simon who had deceived the people for a long time with his tricks. They believed his claims and thought he was “the Great Power of God.” However, when they saw true miracles performed by Philip in the name of Christ, they turned to the gospel instead. The adults who believed were baptized. Even the sorcerer himself, Simon, believed and was baptized!

Note: Bad reasons to believe

How had Simon fooled the Samaritans into thinking he was “the Great Power of God”? It was because the people based their beliefs on poor foundations. Let's avoid this same error when people teach something false to us today. We should never believe something just because:

1. A preacher claims it. Acts 8:9 says that Simon was “claiming to be someone great.” The Scriptures, including Jesus Himself (Mark 13:5-6), warn us many times that there will be teachers who will try to get us to believe something that is false. So, no matter how much we like a preacher, or how persuasive he is, if he says something that is not according to the Bible, we cannot follow him. One

- apostle wrote: “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8)
2. Everyone believes it. Acts 8:10 says that all the Samaritans, “from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to [Simon].” But just because everyone believes something, doesn't mean it is true, as in this case. In fact, Jesus said that the majority of people won't obey the truth; “for the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it” (Matthew 7:14).
 3. Educated people believe it. Even the “greatest” — the richest, most powerful, most well-educated — among the Samaritans believed in Simon the magician. Obviously, they believed what was false. And so it is today; many of the “greatest” among us believe what is untrue. Most famous people, scientists, and politicians don't believe in Jesus Christ, and they try to dissuade us from our belief. Yet God is far wiser than they are (1 Corinthians 1:18-31), and we should listen to God, not them.
 4. It's been believed for a long time. Simon “had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time” (Acts 8:11). Likewise, people today often practice their religion because it's something they're used to, or that they've always done. Their religious practices get handed down to them as traditions from their family, and they never pause to examine the truth of their beliefs. The Bible, in contrast, warns us to “test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).
 5. We have had some “religious experience.” The Samaritans had based their faith in Simon upon what appeared to be some incredible magic. In the same way, people today are still deceived by personal “experiences” or false miracles. A person may think he has had a dream from God, been touched by an angel, been guided miraculously by the Holy Spirit, or in some other way felt a supernatural influence. And very often we see people claim to do miracles, like healing the sick, handling venomous snakes, or speaking in tongues. Yet all these things we experience or hear about can be just as subjective and deceptive as the “magic” Simon was showing the Samaritans.

Let's be sure that what we believe in are truly signs from God. Is it impossible for a regular person to have dreams, or to pick up a rattlesnake, or to predict an event just a couple of years from now? Just because something is amazing does not mean it is from God. The Samaritans were used to seeing amazing things done by Simon. Yet when they saw the things Philip performed, they immediately believed the gospel instead of Simon's claims. Why? Because Philip was not just doing astonishing deeds; he was doing miracles, things absolutely impossible to do if they were not from God, like allowing paralyzed people to walk. Let's be careful not to believe the false messages of deceivers like Simon.

Acts 8:14-25

Simon tries to buy God's gift

Some people, like Philip, had the Holy Spirit with them to perform miracles. The disciples wanted the Samaritan believers to have such gifts, too, but not just anyone could pass on the gifts. Only the apostles could bestow the Holy Spirit. So, the apostles Peter and John came from Jerusalem to Samaria in order to give them the Spirit. Simon saw what was happening and tried to buy this ability from the apostles. Peter certainly did not think this was a good idea! He rebuked Simon sharply, and told him that he must repent and pray to God for forgiveness. We don't know whether or not Simon took the advice. The preachers who had gone to Samaria started back towards Jerusalem, proclaiming Christ in villages along the way.

Note: What Simon saw

Simon saw several things that men today often don't seem to see:

1. The difference between real miracles and counterfeit miracles (verse 12). New Testament miracle workers (like Jesus and the apostles) restored health immediately and were always successful, no matter what disease it was (Mark

- 1:29-34). They healed in public and did not use medical aids, mysticism, or mind-altering techniques (Acts 3:1-10). They did not ask for money afterwards or seek personal fame; they did it only to confirm their message (Acts 8:5-8, 18-20). Beware of those today who claim to do miracles, but their deeds don't follow these characteristics.
2. What you have to do to be saved (verse 13). Just like Jesus said to do in order to be saved (Mark 16:16), Simon believed and was baptized. We'll see another example of this later in the chapter.
 3. That miraculous gifts of the Spirit were given through the laying on the apostle's hands (vs. 18). Any believer could receive the ability to perform miracles by the Holy Spirit, but not everyone could pass them on. That's why the apostles Peter and John had to come from Jerusalem in order to bestow the gifts. Since none of the twelve apostles are still living, people today cannot receive these gifts. These miraculous signs have already served their purpose in confirming the gospel, so disciples today no longer need them.
 4. That you can't buy spiritual blessings with money (vs. 20). New life in Jesus is free. The Bible says, "let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost" (Revelation 22:17). Let's beware of those today who expect us to give them money in order to receive spiritual help.
 5. That you can fall from grace (vs. 23). Many people today think that once you are saved, then you cannot be lost. So after their conversion, they don't mind living sinfully again, because they believe it can't keep them from going to heaven. And yet, even though Simon was saved — he had believed and was baptized — when he sinned afterwards Peter told him that he was in the "bondage of iniquity." Sin had control over him, not Christ. People enslaved to sin cannot have eternal life (Romans 6:22). So even after we convert to Christ, we must continue striving to live a godly life (1 John 1:6-9).
 6. That believers who sin must repent and ask God's forgiveness to return to God. (vs. 22). On the day of Pentecost, when the people asked Peter how to receive God's forgiveness, he told them to "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:37-38). Does this mean we should be baptized every time we sin? No; look at Peter's advice to Simon, who had already been baptized when he first believed, about how to be forgiven: "Repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you" (verse 22). Once we become disciples, we need to repent and pray to God for forgiveness when we sin.

Acts 8:26-40

Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch

Whereas the other evangelists returned to Jerusalem, the Lord sent Philip to another place: a desert road. Philip obeyed, and on the road he saw a chariot that was traveling back to Ethiopia from Jerusalem. In it was a very high official of the queen of Ethiopia. He was a believer in the one, true God, and had come all the way from a country in Africa in order to worship in Jerusalem. This man was reading aloud as he went along in the chariot. Philip heard what he was reading: it was a writing from Isaiah the prophet talking about the Messiah (Isaiah 53). However, it was a passage that was hard to understand. The Messiah was supposed to be a great king, a conquering ruler. But this passage talked about Him suffering humbly. The eunuch was confused, and wasn't sure it was even talking about the Messiah; he thought that Isaiah might have been describing himself. So the eunuch invited Philip into the chariot and asked him to explain the Scripture. Philip explained how a man named Jesus fulfilled all the Scriptures. Jesus was a great King over a spiritual kingdom, and in order to save His people, He suffered humbly. Philip must have also explained about how to be saved, because the Ethiopian eunuch not only believed, but wanted to be baptized when they passed a pool of water on the road. After the eunuch confessed his faith that Jesus was the Son of God, Philip dipped him under the water in baptism. Philip had now done his job in helping the eunuch be saved, so the Holy Spirit took him away and put him in another place. Philip ended up at the city of Caesarea. The eunuch, however, went back home, rejoicing that He had found salvation.

Choose the right answer:

- ___ 1. In what regions did the disciples spread the gospel after they were scattered by the persecution in Jerusalem? a) Judea and Samaria, b) Tyre and Sidon, c) Sodom and Gomorrah, or d) North and South America.
- ___ 2. Who proclaimed Christ in the city of Samaria? a) Saul, b) Simon, c) Philip, or d) Stephen.
- ___ 3. Who had deceived the people of Samaria with magic arts? a) Candace, b) Peter, c) Simon, or d) Isaiah.
- ___ 4. Why should we believe a religious idea? a) because our parents and grandparents taught it to us, b) because all the smartest people believe it, c) because we feel in our hearts that it is true, or d) because genuine miracles have confirmed its truthfulness.
- ___ 5. Who had the ability to give the miraculous gifts of the Spirit by laying their hands on people? a) the apostles, b) those who pray for it, c) those who buy it from the Church, or d) nobody ever has.
- ___ 6. Which of the following is NOT a characteristic of true miracles: a) people were healed immediately and completely, b) there were no mind-altering techniques used, c) those who performed them asked for money, or d) they confirmed the word of Christ.
- ___ 7. Where was the eunuch from? a) Caesarea, b) Egypt, c) Ethiopia, or d) Galilee.
- ___ 8. What was the eunuch doing when Philip heard him in the chariot? a) singing praises to God, b) reading from the prophet Isaiah, c) cursing and swearing, or d) snoring.

True or false:

- ___ 1. Everyone in Samaria thought Simon was the “Great Power of God.”
- ___ 2. People thought Simon's magic was more impressive than Philip's miracles.
- ___ 3. Children and even babies in Samaria were baptized.
- ___ 4. Whenever someone is baptized, they receive the power to speak in tongues.
- ___ 5. The apostles Peter and John came from Jerusalem to give the Holy Spirit to believers in Samaria.
- ___ 6. You need to believe and be baptized to be saved.
- ___ 7. It is possible for a person to be lost even after they had been saved.
- ___ 8. You need to be rebaptized every time you sin.
- ___ 9. The eunuch wanted to be baptized as soon as he saw water.

After you've filled out the answers, send this lesson back to the person who sent it to you with your name and address. They will correct your answers and discuss any questions or comments you have on the text.

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