

Philip in Samaria / Simon the Sorcerer



Ice-Breaker

Who was your hero when you were 10? A movie star? An athlete? A comic book character? What ability did they have that you wanted for yourself?



Scripture Passage

Acts 8:4-25

⁴Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ⁵Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. ⁶When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷With shrieks, evil^b spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. ⁸So there was great joy in that city.

⁹Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, ¹⁰and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." ¹¹They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic. ¹²But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

¹³Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

¹⁴When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. ¹⁵When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into^c the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

¹⁸When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money ¹⁹and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

²⁰Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! ²¹You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. ²²Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. ²³For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

²⁴Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me."

²⁵When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

a [5] Or Messiah

b [7] Greek unclean

c [16] Or in



Bible Study

1. What did Simon and Phillip have in common (vv. 5-11)? How were they different? How did the crowd respond to both men?

2. Given that the Samaritans were considered outcasts by the Jews (see John 4:9), why would Peter and John come to them?

3. Why would the Father delay pouring out his Spirit until Peter and John were on the scene? Do you think this was a lesson for the Samaritans or for the apostles?
4. In what ways does Simon's reaction to the apostles (vv. 18-19) show his deep misunderstanding about the Gospel?
5. Do you think that Simon's words in verse 24 reveal a change in his heart?

Reference Notes

8:4-7 The story of the persecution (vv. 1-3) is told only so far as is needed to introduce Saul (v. 3) and to set the stage for Philip's visit to Samaria.

8:5 *Samaria*. When the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians (722 B.C.), many of its people were deported while exiles from elsewhere in the vast Assyrian empire were brought in (2 Kings 17:23-41). These people intermarried with the remaining Israelites and adopted some of their religious practices. As a result, the Jews of the southern kingdom considered the Samaritans as religious compromisers and racial half-breeds. By Jesus' day, strict Jews avoided Samaria and "Samaritan" was used as an insult (John 8:48). As a Greek-speaking Jew, Philip may have been less prejudiced against the Samaritans than the Palestinian Jews, allowing him to speak freely with them.

8:6-8 Philip's ministry was like that of the apostles' ministries, in that he too was empowered by the Spirit to perform signs and wonders that confirmed his message.

8:8 *great joy*. Joy is the characteristic emotion Luke ascribes to people when they place their faith in Jesus.

8:9 *Simon*. While biblical information about Simon is limited to this passage, church tradition is rich with stories. Superstition and the practice of the occult allow for the demonstration of supernatural powers which, merely because they are powerful, are often considered to be done by God.

8:12-13 Philip's message and signs attracted the attention even of Simon. His interest appears to have been in the miraculous aspect of Philip's ministry more than in the message of the kingdom of God which he preached.

8:14-17 Upon hearing that widespread faith in Jesus had broken out in Samaria, the apostles decided they needed to check out the situation (see Acts 11:22-23). Peter and John are sent as representatives to investigate. While there are various interpretations for the delay between the Samaritans' response of faith and their reception of the Spirit, the one that best fits the context of Acts is that it occurred so that the apostles could be convinced that God was indeed including the Samaritans as full members of his church (Acts 1:8; see also 10:44-45; 11:15). While water baptism and the reception of the Spirit are clearly linked in Acts, there is no fixed chronological formula for the connection. Luke's theological emphasis implies that each situation is governed by his desire to show that all types of people are to be included in God's church rather than by any other theological consideration. It is worth noting that once the Jerusalem church finally truly accepted that Gentiles could be full members of the church (Acts 15:1-11), Luke no longer mentions the visible demonstration of the coming of the Spirit upon later converts. (The one exception in Acts 19:1-6 is a clear case where the people's faith was deficient in that they had neither heard of Jesus nor the Spirit.)

8:16 *baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.* Their baptism affirmed a commitment to live in loyalty to Jesus as the Messiah.

8:18-24 The motivation of Simon's attraction to Philip is clearly revealed. The word "simony," which is the selling of a religious office to the highest bidder, comes from Simon's proposal here. Peter's rebuke literally reads, "To hell with you and your money!" While the story ends with Simon's appeal to Peter for prayer, church tradition teaches that he became Peter's opponent, spreading his powerful occult practices from Palestine to Rome. It was also believed that he was the founder of the Gnostics, a heretical group whose teaching plagued the church from the late first century.

Caring Time

1. What prejudices were you brought up with? How is the Gospel breaking through those prejudices in your life?
2. What was your primary motivation in first receiving Jesus Christ as Savior? What is your primary motivation for continuing in the faith?
3. How has jealousy of other Christians affected your faith?