

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:9–13

Simon Says, Simon Sees, and Peter Calls It

Passage: Acts 8:9-25

Simon Says (Acts 8:9-12) — The conjunction of 8:9 has is usually translated **but** (δέ - ESV, KJV, NKJV, ESV); that word is used to introduce this part of the Samaria story as contrast with what was previously said. (In the wider scope this part of the story is still about Peter and the Lord's work through him. The segue to the importance of Peter's role in ministry to the Samaritans is through the account of what happened with Philip when he left Jerusalem.) Immediately prior Luke says that there was **great joy in that city** (Acts 8:8). Now Luke says there were some bad things happening as well; or "**but concerning a certain man called Simon** what is about to be related is not part of that great joy." The Simon of this part of the narrative, is described thus:

- **practiced sorcery in the city** — Simon Magus was a sorcerer. He used unauthorized means or witchcraft to interact with the spiritual realm for his own purposes. God had forbidden this among the people of Israel (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:26, 31; Leviticus 20:6,7) and cited witchcraft as a reason why he was deposing rulers (2 Kings 21:6) and removing nations (Deuteronomy 18:9-14).

Ungodly spiritual leaders operate in illegitimate spiritual activity. They do not work *with* witchcraft their work *is* witchcraft — an ungodly means of using the spiritual to obtain and keep control of things and people.

- **astonished the people of Samaria** — Through witchcraft Simon did things that were astonishing. How? First, the evil spirits he was working with could give him insights about other people and things that no human could know. (He was receiving information from evil spirits that was mixed with lies in order to become credible. These spirit that provide him information are demons that want to deceive people and want worship and sacrifices that belong only to God [John 10:10]. See Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalm 106:37; Isaiah 13:21; 1 Samuel 16:14-16. The teachings that are inspired by these spirits are doctrines of demons; See 1 Timothy 4:1.) Second, the evil spirits he worked with could interact with our world in ways that would have made Simon look more powerful than any human could be. Through cooperation with unseen evil spirits Simon could be made to look like he had influence over the spiritual

and material world. But the cost was high. His collaboration had facilitated the demon possession of many Samaritans (Acts 8:7). Today sorcery is still taking place. In what ways?

1. **Divination:** This is seeking knowledge of the future or the unknown by supernatural means (e.g., tarot cards, crystal balls, astrology, and Ouija boards). Even in Christian circles there are people who constantly seek a word about what lies ahead without clearly indicating that they are seeking it from God. Something, then, is dropped in their spirit. References: Deuteronomy 18:10, Ezekiel 21:21
2. **Sorcery and Magic:** Practitioners of witchcraft perform rituals and cast spells (runes and incantations) believed to invoke supernatural forces. References: Galatians 5:19-21, Revelation 21:8; Isaiah 47:9, 47:12
3. **Necromancy, Consulting Mediums or Spiritists:** Communicating with the dead or attempting to summon spirits of the dead. Seeking guidance or knowledge from those who claim to have contact with spirits or the dead. References: Deuteronomy 18:11, 1 Samuel 28 (The Witch of Endor) References: Leviticus 19:31, Isaiah 8:19
4. **Witchcraft or Casting Spells:** Performing rituals or spells to influence people or situations through supernatural means. References: Exodus 22:18, Deuteronomy 18:10
5. **Astrology:** Believing that the stars and planets have an influence on human affairs and natural phenomena, often used for guidance. References: Isaiah 47:13-14
6. **Fortune-Telling:** Predicting or foreseeing future events, often through palm reading, crystal balls, or other occult practices. References: Acts 16:16
7. **Potion-Making and Use of Charms:** Creating and using potions, amulets, or charms believed to have magical properties for healing, harm, or protection. References: Ezekiel 13:18-20
8. **Idolatry and Sacrifices to False Gods:** Worshiping idols or making sacrifices to gods other than the God of the Bible, often involving occult rituals. References: 1 Corinthians 10:20-21, Leviticus 20:2-6

- **self proclaimed greatness** — As with all false leaders, Simon claimed to be someone great. People taken with his lies believed that he was someone important with God. The belief was broad; the least in the city and people of great influence or importance were all deceived into believing that Simon was from God.
- **they heeded him** (obeyed him) **saying “This man is the great power of God”** — Simon presented himself as an emanation from God; that emanation was called *The Great Power of God*. This is a gnostic idea. (He is often said to be the father of Gnosticism. Justin Martyr, a church father from Samaria, says that this same Simon was the source of gnostic heresies.) The astonishing things done by Simon were aimed at controlling others. The goal was always to be in power and to have people under his control. Evil spiritual leaders enslave people. Godly spiritual leaders set them free.

Sorcerers bear an uncanny resemblance to their father *the devil*. In what way? They cannot resist the temptation to self promote (Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-17; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; Revelation 12:7-9; Matthew 4:8-10); they are unable to stop using the spiritual realm to (1) draw attention to themselves, (2) promote their own agenda, and (3) lead people

into bondage. Their messages, although mixed with truth, are poison. The antidote for the venom of these asps is the work of God in the hearts of the deceived. That work accompanies preaching powered by the Holy Spirit.

Simon Sees Part 1: Figuring Out Philip (Acts 8:13) — The believing of Simon would seem to be a good thing. Not so fast. We are hasty and naive when we jump to the conclusion that the mention of faith means salvation. No New Testament writer hits harder than James when he says this:

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! (James 2:19)

But you will answer, “**When [Simon] was baptized he continued with Philip.**” With the mention of his faith and baptism was the participle: **seeing the miracles and signs which were done.** Luke is trying to say something about this magic man’s faith and conversion. A similar thing was said in John’s gospel (John 2:23-3:4).

Judas was with Jesus. And Simon Magus is with Philip. Don’t get too excited by attendance or early participation. People will be present in your ministry for motives outside the mission. And they will ride with you for reasons that are not right.

With the introduction of the gospel, Simon has lost his influence and the means to his affluence. From Simon’s perspective, Philip is a more powerful magician. Simon’s goal is simple: *figure out Philip.*

Apostolic Approval and Learning (Acts 8:14-17; Luke 9:51-54) — Why was the Spirit not given when the people of Samaria believed and were baptized (Acts 8:12)? Was the preaching of Philip somehow deficient in its description of what is required for salvation (Acts 8:4)? No. Deacon Philip has been trained by the apostles for three years, selected for leadership by the congregation in Jerusalem, and given apostolic approval for ministry. There is no mention made of the need to correct the message that had been delivered by Philip. Peter and John had been sent from Jerusalem when it was heard that the Samaritans **had receive the word of God** (Acts 8:14); there is no indication that they went with doubts about the quality of teaching. The apostles were sent by the church to provide what was lacking — approval.

Figure 1: The population of the world broken into the categories of Short and Tall.

Figure 2: The population of the world broken into the categories of Jew, Part Jew, and Non-Jew or Jew, Samaritan, and Gentile. The numbers shown here are examples and not to be regarded as representative of the world in 36 AD.

Ministry Validation

The ministry, prior to this point, has been to the Jews. By taking the gospel to the Samaritans the almoner Philip has started a new type of ministry. (It was prefigured by Jesus Himself in the gospel of John. See John 4:1-42. However, it had not been revisited since then.) Philip's work cannot be given Heaven's endorsement until the appointed authorities have indicated their approval. In particular, Peter must sanction the work. This was indicated earlier in the ministry of Jesus:

- Peter Looses (Matthew 16:17-19) - The **you** (δώσω σοι τὰς κλεῖδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν) of verse 19 is singular; Jesus was not talking to all of the disciples. In context, it is plain that the Lord was talking to Simon (Matthew 16:17-18). The big fisherman was given a new name and then declared to be a large part of the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:19-20; Revelation 21:14). (Jesus, though, is the chief cornerstone.) Peter, in particular, had a role of spiritual binding and releasing. He did not take this to himself and was not able to confer the ability on anyone else. If Peter has been able to pass the position or authority to approve new ministries to others, the laying on of hands for the seven deacons would have made requesting the Holy Spirit for the Samaritans unnecessary; Philip would have done it. The ministry, with regard to the receiving of the Holy Spirit, is still locked. Simon Peter has the keys (Matthew 16:19). (Some will use these comments to say that I am with a particular denomination or promoting the papacy. I am doing no such thing; these are merely my meager efforts to explain the text to my brothers and sisters.)
- Peter Leads (Luke 22:31-32; John 21:15-17) - His fall is foretold by Jesus (Luke 22:33-34); so is his restoration (Luke 22:32). Peter is called upon to lead the leaders. When they have all been weakened by the trials of Jesus execution and the betrayal by Judas, Peter will strengthen them (Acts 1:15-26). He feeds his fellow disciples the word of God (Acts 1:16, 20).

In summary, the sending of the apostles was manifold in what it accomplished. The apostles are now seen as being over the Samaritan church as well as the church in Jerusalem. In this way the church is protected from division that was so prominent in the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans (John 4:9; Luke 9:51-53). Another good outcome of sending the apostles to Samaria to verify the claims was that John's perspective on Samaritans is further adjusted. Fruchtenbaum says it succinctly:

First, so that Samaritan salvation could be authenticated by apostolic authority; and second, because Peter had the keys of the kingdom. John was sent so that the matter could be established by the mouth of two witnesses. Furthermore, this was to be a personal lesson for him, because he and his brother James had wanted the Samaritans destroyed (Lk. 9: 54). (Fruchtenbaum, 2020, Kindle Locations 3454-3456)

Upon arriving they found that the new believers had yet to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15). Why? That is, again, why was the Spirit not given when the people of Samaria **received the word of God**. The Lord wanted everyone to know that this ministry to Samaritans cannot be deemed valid until His man Peter had used his keys to unlock the door or loose the spiritual blessing of the Holy Spirit to them. The apostles do that by praying for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit. And when their hands were laid on these new believers **they received the Holy Spirit** (Acts 8:16).

Simon Sees Part 2: Getting Control (Acts 8:18-19) — It is the “aha” moment that the magician was waiting for. Philip had received the Spirit by faith. But with the laying on of hands of the apostles he was granted special authority for signs. Now, although the people had already believed in Jesus, with the apostles approval they receive the Holy Spirit. Simon wants power. That is what he says: **Give me this power also**. He is not interested in people or the kingdom of God; he wants to be someone great again. This power is the means.

Getting to God is not the goal for everyone going to church.

Peter Puts it in Perspective (Acts 8:20-23) — Simon’s heart is exposed in his offer to buy power. It is explained in Peter’s comments. Listen as Peter puts Simon’s issues in perspective:

- Simon’s Path - he is on the path to destruction. Peter says that the money can perish with him.
- Simon Perversion - he has turned the Holy Spirit, grace, and the gift of God into a thing things to be controlled for money. In the mind of the magician the gospel is merely means for manipulating people.
- Simon’s Problem - he is not a member of the church (**part**) and has no inheritance in Christ (**portion/lot**). *Why?* The reason is given: a heart condition (Jeremiah 17:9).
- Simon’s motives reveal him to be bitter (Hebrews 12:15) and bound (John 8:36) by iniquity.

Simon Says Part 2: You Do It (Acts 8:24) — Notice that Simon does not obey. His response seems like humility. “I do not have a right standing with God and therefore cannot pray. Pray for me.” Rather, it reveals that (1) he was not submitted to leadership, (2) he did not respect God’s right to reign in his life, and (3) was not wanting to be in God’s will. Consider what he wanted Peter to pray for: **that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me**. What about forgiveness? He was not after forgiveness. Why? Forgiveness is of no value when there is no desire for fellowship. Simon’s primary concern was avoiding the penalty of sin.

The Grace of God

Even after being exposed as having evil intent the opportunity to get right was offered to Simon. That is grace and mercy. Have you fallen? Are you having a hard time believing that there is hope for you. Call on the Lord who is rich in grace and mercy. Admit wrong motives and confess any attempts to use spiritual things for selfish purposes. If you will draw near to God he will draw near to you.

References

Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum. (2020). *Commentary Series: The Book of Acts*. Ariel Ministries. Kindle Edition.

End Notes

They had not yet been baptized by the Holy Spirit. He had come upon the Jews, but not yet upon the Samaritans. The reason was that the Messiah had given the keys of the kingdom to Peter, and it was up to Peter to allow any new group into the body. As previously mentioned, in New Testament times, the three main people groups were the Jews, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles. (Fruchtenbaum, 2020, Kindle Locations 3465-3467)

The purpose was authentication. For the Jerusalem apostles, it authenticated Samaritan salvation, proving that Samaritans were savable. For the Samaritans, it authenticated apostolic authority, because they received Spirit baptism by the laying on of hands by Jewish apostles from Jerusalem. That meant they were not to set up a separate, rival Samaritan church, as they had set up a separate, rival Samaritan temple. (Fruchtenbaum, 2020, Kindle Locations 3510-3513)
