

I. Introduction

Good morning! Last week, in **Acts 8:5**, we read that, **“Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.”** In Samaria, Philip boldly preached the Good News of Jesus and large numbers of Samaritans believed and were baptized, including a man known as Simon the Sorcerer.

This morning we will continue our study of Philip's mission to Samaria and we will also take a closer look at what happened with this man named Simon. Let's read Acts 8:14-25.



II. Scripture Reading Acts 8:14-25, (NIV, 1984)

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

18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19 and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. 23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

24 Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." 25 When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

III. Teaching

No number is mentioned, but it is clear that many Samaritans believed in Jesus and were baptized within a short period of time. We might imagine a scene something like this photo from Honduras which shows the people lining up to be baptized. The Lord was using Philip to reach thousands of people in the region of Samaria and we remember also how Jesus showed His love for the Samaritan people in John 4, when He visited their region and met the Samaritan woman at the well.



God was doing a great work in Samaria and the news soon spread to Jerusalem. **Acts 8:14**, **“When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.”** (Painting by Eugène Burnand) This visit by Peter and John shows their joy in what God was doing among the people of Samaria and it also shows that Philip was accountable to the apostles for his ministry.



Acts 8:15-16, **“When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.”** The Samaritan believers had trusted in Jesus and they had been baptized, but it says that the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon them. In the full context of Scripture, I think it is best to

understand this as meaning that they had not yet been filled with the Holy Spirit, because a number of Scriptures teach us that everyone who has believed in Jesus has the Holy Spirit living within them from the time they first believe.

For example, in **Ephesians 1:13-14**, we read, **“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.”** These verses make it clear that as soon as we believe in Jesus, we are marked, or sealed with the Holy Spirit. This deposit of the Spirit guarantees our inheritance of salvation as adopted children of God.

Therefore, the Samaritans would have received the Holy Spirit as soon as they believed in Jesus. However, they had not yet been filled with the Holy Spirit, a blessing which empowers the believer for service and which is often accompanied by spiritual gifts, such as are described in 1 Corinthians 12. So, before Peter and John came, the situation of the Samaritans was similar to the situation of the apostles before the Holy Spirit came on them in Acts 2. In **John 20:21-22**, the Scripture tells us that Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to His disciples, **“Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”**

From this time on, the disciples had the Holy Spirit. But, many days later, in Acts 2, they had a new experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit and with power. **Acts 2:4**, **“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”** As this painting, which is from the Jesus Mafa project shows, the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 was a dramatic and unmistakable event. Through this event, the disciples were empowered for ministry.



In **Acts 8:17**, the apostles prayed for the Samaritan believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit. **“Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”** We are not told exactly what happened, but from the context it is obvious that the Samaritan believers received a dramatic filling of the Holy Spirit when Peter and John prayed for them.



By the way, the filling of the Spirit is given with the laying on of hands here, but that does not mean that the laying on of hands is required. For example, as we will see in Acts 10, Cornelius and his household were filled with the Holy Spirit while Peter was still preaching. No one laid hands on Cornelius before he received the Spirit; the Holy Spirit came on Cornelius directly, without any intermediary. And, in my own experience, when I was first filled with the Holy Spirit, I was praying while driving down the road, alone in the car. So laying on of hands is not required for receiving the filling of the Holy Spirit. If your heart is open to receive from the Lord and you are prayerfully seeking this experience and empowering, then I believe that God will give it to you at the right time.

However, motives are very important. When people seek the power of the Spirit for personal gain or because they are jealous of others, that is a very serious problem. In today's passage, there is an example of this problem. From last week, you may remember that one of the people Philip baptized was a man named Simon. Let's read **Acts 8:9-11** to refresh our memories about this man. **“Now 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, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, ‘This man is the divine power known as the Great Power.’ They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.”**

The people were all amazed by Simon's magic, but when Philip came it was clear that the miracles the Lord was doing through him were far greater and completely different than anything Simon could do. Simon also recognized the power of God in Philip and he believed in Jesus and was baptized. Simon was amazed by the power in Philip's ministry, but Simon's amazement increased even more when Peter and John came and prayed for people to receive the Holy Spirit. The details are not recorded, but Simon was clearly

impressed and wanted to have this power for himself.

Most of us, I think would be delighted to receive a powerful filling of the Holy Spirit. But Simon wanted something more. Simon had lost all of his followers when Philip came, and now Simon wanted something that would restore his position as a leader of the people. Simon not only wanted to be filled with the Holy Spirit, he also wanted the power to decide who else would receive the Holy Spirit. I think in Simon's mind, Peter and John must have seemed to control the Holy Spirit and Simon wanted to be able to do this as well. But the Holy Spirit cannot be controlled. And the motives in Simon's heart were wrong; Simon was seeking his own glory, not the glory of God.

Acts 8:18-19, "When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, 'Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'" Simon wanted to buy the gift of God. From this we see that his heart was not right. Simon had believed in Jesus and gotten baptized, but he was still deep in sin. Instead of seeking God's glory, Simon was seeking personal power.

Simon's attempt to buy the power of the Holy Spirit is so infamous that we have a special word in the English language for sins like Simon's. The word is, "simony," and it can be used to describe any sin of attempting to buy spiritual power, authority or influence in the church. For example, if someone offered to give a \$10,000 offering in exchange for being made the Chair of the OIC Church Council, that would be the sin of simony. So far we do not have this particular problem at OIC.

Here is Peter's response to Simon's attempt to buy the Holy Spirit. **Acts 8:20-23, "Peter answered: 'May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.'"**



In this painting by Avanzino Nucci, you can see Simon dressed in black standing behind Peter. Peter and John have been laying hands on the people and praying, but Simon, with money in his hand, comes and interrupts the ministry. Peter was rightly outraged and he gives a strong rebuke to try to bring Simon to repentance. Simon responded by asking for prayer, but it is not clear whether Simon really repented of his sin or not.

Acts 8 is the only place in the Bible where Simon the Sorcerer, also called Simon the Magician, or Simon Magus is mentioned. However, writings outside of the Bible also speak of Simon and church history has usually regarded Simon as one of the first heretics. Simon Magus has also captured a place in popular culture, including books, movies, and music.



The encounter between Peter and Simon has also been cited as the beginning of conflict between the Christian church and the long tradition of magical practice. The tradition of magic continues in our time and most of us can think of the name of a famous magician or two. One of the most famous magicians of the last 100 years is Harry Houdini. Houdini did tricks of all kinds, but he was especially famous for his escape tricks. He often challenged police to lock him up with handcuffs and he demonstrated that he was easily able to escape. One of his most famous tricks was to escape from being underwater and upside down in a box.



I recently read a book called, "*Fooling Houdini: Magicians, Mentalists, Math Geeks, and the Hidden Powers of the Mind.*" The book tells the story of how the author trained to become a magician by attending magic schools and practicing for thousands of hours. The name of the book came from an incident in which a magician fooled Houdini with a card trick that Houdini could not understand. According to the story, this was the only magic trick Houdini had ever seen that he could not figure out how to do.

One of the most interesting things in the book is how the author explains that Houdini was both a master magician and a debunker of magic. Specifically, Houdini was always eager to expose the fraud of magicians who claimed to have supernatural powers, especially the so-called fortune tellers and mediums who have no real power, but who are skilled at manipulating human emotions and taking people's money.

The author of the book calls magicians who admit that all of their magic tricks are just sleight of hand and illusion, "honest magicians." Honest magicians are simply entertainers. They may not mention it during their show, but when questioned they will admit that there is nothing supernatural going on; it is simply a very clever show. As far as I can discern, there is no problem with Christians enjoying or participating in this kind of honest entertainment magic.



On the other hand, dishonest magicians often make spiritual claims, such as claiming the ability to talk to the dead or to tell the future. These dishonest magicians want to deceive you so that you rely on them instead of praying and trusting God. As Christians, we want to rely only on our Lord Jesus for all things, so we should have nothing to do with dishonest magicians and so-called fortune tellers. If we seek answers from a spiritual medium or a fortune teller, we are not trusting in Jesus fully and it is sin.

The Bible teaches us that there are evil spirits in the world, and involvement with dishonest magicians might possibly lead to an even worse encounter with real evil spirits. But evil spirits generally don't need to work through storefront fakers, so, as Harry Houdini proved on dozens of occasions, so-called mediums and fortune tellers generally are just dishonest magicians who combine sleight of hand trickery with psychological techniques and emotional manipulation to steal money from their victims. It is a dangerous world out there, so we should be careful.

IV. Conclusion

Let's close for today with two more Scriptures, one from the Old Testament and one from the New. First, from the Old Testament, **Deuteronomy 18:10-11**, "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead."

And then, from the New Testament, **Ephesians 5:15-18**, "Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."

As the Scripture admonishes us, let us separate from the evils of the world and seek the Lord and the filling of the Holy Spirit so we might live lives pleasing in His sight and serve His Kingdom. Let's pray.

V. Prayer