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Simon the Sorcerer

The Samaritans are Saved

Through the Preaching of Peter

8: 9-25

34 AD

The events of Acts 3-8 transpire with mounting concern on the part of the Jews, and especially the Jewish authorities in Yerushalayim. The rising tension resulted in vigilante action taken against Stephen, and then an authorized effort under Rabbi Sha'ul to disrupt and destroy that new Messianic movement, involving persecution and even death of the believers. The persecution led various believers such as Philip to go to Samaria and bear witness of Yeshua.

Simon the Sorcerer DIG: What do Simon and Philip have in common in verses 5-11? How are they different? How has the crowd responded to both men in the past? Why would Peter and John come to them? Why might the Father delay pouring out His Spirit until Peter and John were on the scene? Do you think this was more of a lesson for the Samaritans or for the apostles? Why? In what ways does Simon's reaction to the apostles in verses 18 and 19 show his deep understanding about the gospel? Do you think that Simon's words in verse 24 reveal a change in his heart? Why or why not?

REFLECT: What cultural or ethnic prejudices were you brought up with? How is the gospel breaking through those prejudices in your life? What was your primary motivation in receiving Yeshua Messiah as Savior? What's your primary motivation for continuing in the faith? Has your personal influence declined or increased since you became a believer? How? Why? Has jealousy of other believers hindered you in any way?

Having introduced **Philip**, the protagonist, into the story, **Luke** now turns to **Simon**, the antagonist. Although **Simon** had a Hebrew name, **he** was a **Samaritan**. At first

he appeared to be a genuine believer. Even one as discerning as **Philip** accepted **him** as such and **immersed him**. **Simon** even continued on **with Philip (8:13)**. Thus, **he** manifested the three marks of a genuine believer: **he** believed, **he** was obedient in **immersion**, and **he continued with Philip**. So **Simon** illustrates how hard it is to tell **the wheat** from **the weeds** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ**, to see link click [Ev - The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds](#)).

Where did **Simon** go wrong? How did one who came so close miss out on true salvation? Faith must be grounded in truth, and **his** was not. This passage reveals four glaring faults in **Simon's** theology. First, **he** had a wrong view of self. **Now a man named Simon had** an egotistical view of **himself**. **Practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria** led **him** to claim that **he was someone great**. **Simon** may have merely been a magician who liked having powers and controlling people. Or **he** may have been the leader of a heretical **Jewish** Gnostic sect. Gnostics usually claimed various spiritual beings in a chain of command leading to **God** and proposed set of practices as the means for attaining higher spiritual levels in their religious cult. **He** may well have been in touch with the supernatural; but it would have been with demons, not **the power of God**. **Simon's sin** in **verses 18-23** below confirms **his** ungodliness.¹⁷¹ **Simon's** hold on **the people of Samaria** was complete. **They all were paying special attention to him**. Impressed by **his** powers of the occult, they mistakenly declared: **This man is the power of God that is called "Great."** That title showed that **Simon** claimed deity for **himself**. **And they kept paying attention to him, because for a long time he had astonished them with his magical arts (8:9-11)**. As long as **Simon** believed **he** was deity, **he** could not come to a proper sense of **himself**. Only the humble, aware of their inadequacies and shortcomings, have that sense of being lost that drives them to **ADONAI**. **Simon**, firmly locked in pride's grip, did not.

Second, **Simon** had a wrong view of salvation. Through **Philip's** preaching, revival broke out in the city: **When they believed Philip proclaiming the Good News about the kingdom of God and the name of Messiah Yeshua, both men and women were immersed. The Samaritans** needed to come to the realization that **the kingdom of God** would be a **Jewish Kingdom** and not a **Samaritan Kingdom** as **they** had thought (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ca - Jesus Talks With a Samaritan Woman**). So as more and more **people believed in Messiah** for **their** salvation, **Simon** saw **his** following dwindle. **His** declining popularity, **his** wish to be associated with **God** in some way, and **his** desire to learn more about

what **he** perceived to be **Philip's power**, motivated **Simon** to **believe**. **And after being immersed, he continued with Philip** as an opportunity to get that **power** and have more influence over **people**. **And when he saw signs and great miracles happening, he was continually amazed (8:12-13)**. **He** had, so to speak, a professional interest in finding out the source of **Philip's amazing power**. But **his** "faith" was grounded in **the power miracles**, not in the saving power of **the Messiah**. What **he** saw resulted in **amazement**, not holiness.

The Samaritans are saved: Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that **Samaria had accepted the message of God, they sent Peter and John** to check it out (This is the last mention of **John** in **Acts**, as **Peter**, then **Paul**, take center stage). **The Samaritans** despised **Jerusalem**, would **they** reject **the apostles** because they were from **the Holy City**? Would **the Jews** reject **the Samaritans**? It was shocking to them that **the Samaritans** could be included in **the Kingdom** because **they** practiced a hybrid religion (**Luke 9:54**). So **apostles** were sent for three reasons. First, to authenticate **Samaritan** salvation. Secondly, because **Peter** had **the keys to the Kingdom**. And thirdly, **they came down and prayed for them to receive the Ruach ha-Kodesh**. Although **the Samaritans** had believed and been **immersed, the Ruach had not yet come upon them, they had only been immersed in the name of the Lord Yeshua (8:14-16)**.

Those who teach that believers receive **the Spirit** subsequent to salvation appeal to this and similar passages for support. Here is a clear example, they argue, of people who were saved, yet did not have **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**. Such teaching ignores the transitional nature of **Acts** (see below). It also fails in the face of the plain teaching of Scripture **that if anyone does not have the Ruach of Messiah, he does not belong to Him (Romans 8:9)**. There is no such thing as a believer who does not yet have **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**, since **by one Spirit we were all immersed into one body** at conversion (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Bw - What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith**).

Why did **the Samaritans** (and later the Gentiles) have to wait for **the apostles** before receiving **the Ruach**? If **the Samaritans** had received **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** independent of the Messianic Community, the rift between them would have been perpetuated. There could well have been two separate entities, a Messianic Congregation and **Samaritan Church**. But **God** designed one Messianic Congregation/Church: **For He Himself is our peace, who had made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility (Ephesians 2:14)**.

God is never late. By delaying **the Spirit's** coming until **Peter** and **John** arrived, **ADONAI** preserved the unity of the Messianic Congregation/Church. **The apostles** needed to see for **themselves**, and give first hand testimony to the Messianic Community in **Jerusalem**, that **the Ruach** had come upon **the Samaritans**. In addition, **the Samaritans** needed to learn that **they** were subject to the authority of **the apostles**. **The Jewish** believers and **the Samaritan** believers were linked together into one **Body**. When **Peter and John** arrived, **they began laying their hands on the Samaritan** believers and it became obvious that **they were receiving the Ruach ha-Kodesh** as evidenced by **the speaking in languages (8:17)**.¹⁷² Nowhere does the Bible teach that the gift of **tongues** is anything other than human **languages**.¹⁷³

A closer look at the keys to the Kingdom: At **Caesarea Philippi** **Peter** declared that **Yeshua** was **the Messiah, the Son of the living God**. In response, **Jesus** said: **I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Fx - On This Rock I Will Build My Church**). Whenever the words **key** or **keys** is used symbolically in the Bible, it always symbolizes the authority to open or close doors (**Judges 3:25; First Chronicles 9:27; Isaiah 22:20-24; Matthew 16:19a; Revelation 1:18, 3:7, 9:1 and 20:1**). **Peter** will be responsible to open the doors of **the Church**. **He** has a special role in the book of **Acts**. In the Dispensation of the Torah, humanity was divided into two groups, **Jews** and Gentiles. But in the Dispensation of Grace, because of what went on in the intertestamental period, there were three groups of people, **Jews**, Gentiles and **Samaritans (Matthew 10:5-6)**. **Peter** would be the **key** person (pun intended) in bringing in **the Jews (Acts 2)**, **the Samaritans (Acts 8)**, and **the Gentiles (Acts 10)** into **the Church** by receiving **the Holy Spirit**. Once **he** opened the door it stayed open.

As we proceed through the book of **Acts** we will be comparing the way salvation comes to **the Jews, the Samaritans** and **the Gentiles**, showing, as was the case with the way **Yeshua** healed, there is no set order. **Acts is a transitional book and a historical book, and you cannot establish doctrine based upon history. You base doctrine on clear theological statements. The historical facts can illustrate the doctrine, but they cannot develop doctrine on their own.**

The gift of **languages (tongues)** can be seen four times in the book, **Acts 2, Acts 8, Acts 10** and **Acts 19**. There is no set order leading up to immersion by **the Spirit** and subsequent **speaking in languages**. In **Acts 2** with salvation coming to

the Jews, the order was first repentance, then water immersion, and then receiving **Spirit** immersion by **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** as evidenced by **speaking in languages**. Here in **Acts 8** with salvation coming to **the Samaritans**, the order was this, first **they** believed, then came water immersion, then **the apostles** arrived, next **they** laid **their** hands on **the Samaritans**, and then **they** received **Spirit** immersion by **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** as evidenced by **the speaking languages**. Again, you don't build doctrine on history. Keep this order in mind and we will see how it was different with **the Samaritans, the Gentiles and John's disciples**.

To understand the differences in the four appearances of **languages** in **Acts**, we will ask six questions as we come to each passage. **However, the one key common element in all four cases is that languages (ie tongues) are for the purpose of authentication.**

1. Who received it? The believers of **Samaria**.

2. What were they? They were **Samaritans**, who historically did not like **Jews** and were antagonistic toward **Jerusalem**. In fact, **they** often attacked and even killed **Jews** who were headed from Galilee to **Yerushalayim** through **Samaria (Luke 9:51-53)**.

3. What were the circumstances? **Philip** preached to **the Samaritans** who believed and were saved. But this raised some questions from **the apostles** in **Tziyon** who had the old **Samaritan** antagonism in mind. So **Peter** and **John** were sent to authenticate these reports.

4. What was the means? The laying on of hands by **Peter** and **John, apostles**, who came from **Jerusalem**.

5. What was the purpose in this context? As is in every case in the book of **Acts**, speaking in tongues is used for the purpose of authentication. That was true in **Acts 2**, is true here in **Acts 8**, and it will be true in **Acts 10** and **Acts 19**, the four places it is found. For **the Jewish apostles** it proved that **the Samaritans** were able to be saved. It was hard for them to believe, but that's what it would authenticate for **the apostles** in **Tziyon**. And for **the Samaritans** it authenticated the authority of **the Jewish apostles**. This was to teach **the Samaritans** that **they** were not to create a separate **Samaritan** Church because that's exactly what **they** had done when **the Jews** rejected them when **Ezra** returned to Palestine from

the Babylonian Captivity to rebuild the Temple (see the commentary on **Ezra-Nehemiah As - Opposition to Rebuilding the Temple**). **They** built their own rival Temple on Mount Gerizim with a holy place and a most holy place. So **they** were not to build a **Samaritan** Church in opposition to the Messianic Community/Church.

6. What were the results? The **Samaritans** did receive the immersion of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** and became members of the Body of **Messiah**, and no rival **Samaritan** Church was ever set up.¹⁷⁴

Now back to **Simon the sorcerer**. This passage reveals the third of four glaring faults in **Simon's** theology. Third, **he** had a wrong view of **the Spirit**. **Now when Simon saw that the Ruach ha-Kodesh was given through the laying on of hands by the apostles** as evidenced by **the speaking in other languages** it was way too much for **him**. **Philip** had impressed **him**, but **Peter and John** had overwhelmed **him**. It was obvious that something supernatural must have occurred. **Simon offered them money**, saying: **Give this power to me, too - so that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Ruach ha-Kodesh**. **He** treated the two **apostles** as though **they** were fellow practitioners of magic and was ready to negotiate the price to buy the secret of **their** power. Nothing **God** has, however, is for sale. Certainly not **the Ruach ha-Kodesh**. Therefore, **Peter** was irate and **said to him**, **"May your silver go to ruin, and you with it** (J. B. Phillips' rendering, "To hell with you and your money!" conveys the actual sense of **Peter's** words) - **because you thought you could buy God's gift with money. You have no part or share in this matter, because your heart is not right before God (8:18-21)**. **Simon's** view of **the Ruach** as a commodity to be bought and added to **his** repertoire of spiritual tricks was utterly detestable and betrayed **his** lost condition.



Fourth, **Simon** had a wrong view of **sin**. **Peter** followed **his** condemnation of

Simon with a call for salvation. **Therefore, repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible (if you repent), the intent of your heart may be pardoned.** **Peter**, using the expression for the most serious offenses against **God** in the TaNaKh (**Deuteronomy 18:18-20**), warns **Simon** of the seriousness of **his** situation: **For I see in you the poison of bitterness and the bondage of unrighteousness! Simon**, however, was not persuaded. Although probably shaken and afraid, **he** refused to ask **the Lord** for forgiveness. Instead, **he** said to **the apostles**, **“Pray for me, so that none of what you have said may come upon me” (8:22-24)** **His** only concern to escape the consequences of **his sin**. True repentance, however, consists of more than mere sorrow for **sin (Second Corinthians 7:9-10)**.¹⁷⁵

So when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, continually **proclaiming the Good News to many Samaritan villages (8:25)**. In sum, this file shows the gospel as it begins to move away from an exclusive concern of Isra’el. The gospel is for every person, for each one to consider, it is hoped, with ears and a heart that responds. This is as true today as it was then. Here we see **Jews** crossing racial and ethnic lines with the gospel, the message of hope to **the Samaritans**, and taking that initiative is at the heart of the Messianic Community’s/Church’s mission in the world: **Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Ruach ha-Kodesh, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:18b-20)**.¹⁷⁶