

## **ACTS 8:4-25, PHILIP EVANGELIZES SAMARIA; THE PROBLEM OF SIMON**

The narrative now concentrates on the ministry of Philip: remember, he was one of the believing Hellenists (a Jew with a Greek cultural background) chosen to serve tables in Acts 6:1-7. Driven out of Jerusalem by the persecution that arose after Stephen's martyrdom, Philip goes north into Samaria.

### **Acts 8:4-8, Philip Evangelizes the City of Samaria**

**v. 5 The Place: "the city of Samaria"** = then called "Sebaste," the Greek equivalent of the Lt. "Augustus," named in honor of the Roman Emperor.

**The People: "the Samaritans"** = Jewish racial half-breeds transplanted by the Assyrians.

- Date from 721 B.C. fall of the northern kingdom (Israel).
- See 2 Kings 17:24. Assyrians King Sargon II (721-705 B.C.) claims to have deported 27,280 people from the capital city of Samaria.
- The Samaritan transplants set-up a rival temple / priesthood at Mt. Genizim and modify the Pentateuch to suit their needs: their temple was destroyed ab. 120 B.C.
- Hated by Jews of Galilee and Judea because of their mixed Gentile blood and their rival temple worship.
- Contrary to Jewish custom, Jesus went through Samaria several times (John 4; Luke 9:5ff; 10:23ff; 17:11ff).

**The Message: "and he kept preaching (Imp. Act. Indic.) Christ to them."** He kept telling them who Christ was, what He accomplished, that He was resurrected.

**v. 6 The Response: "and the multitudes with one accord kept giving attention (Imperf. Act. Indic.) to the things being spoken by Philip"**

- v. 7** Some miraculous signs done through Philip:
- 1) exorcising of demon spirits,
  - 2) healing of paralytic people ("palsied," KJV)
  - 3) healing of lamed ones.

External signs (miracles) confirmed the messages of Jesus, of the Twelve, of Philip, of Paul & Barnabas. Once the New Testament message is complete, faith comes not with the assisted aid of sign-miracles, but by "the thing or the message heard."

**v. 8 THE NET AFFECT OF PHILIP'S EVANGELISM:** great rejoicing in the city (think of the joy of the Mouk people in the film "*Ee-taouw*").

## **Acts 8:9-13 The Problem of Simon (sometimes called "Simon Magus")**

Before Philip came to Samaria, a wonder-working man there named Simon was honored for his magic and sorcery. Later in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, both Bishops, write of a Simon from Samaria as founder of an heretical sect in Rome that promulgate gnostic ideas. Hippolytus of Rome about 220 A.D. adds to the story and from then on, the Church Fathers regarded this Simon to be the same Simon that Peter denounced in Acts 8. Moreover, Simon is thereafter perceived as the founder of all heresy. Later, the purchases of ecclesiastical offices and benefices becomes known as *Simony*.

It is my contention that the Simon of Acts 8 gets a bum-rap both from the Church Fathers and from most evangelical commentators. Let the Scripture-text speak for itself.

### **v. 9-11 Note the contrast between Philip and Simon**

1. Simon formerly ("beforetime," KJV) practiced sorcery or magical acts in Samaria.
2. The general populace "gave Simon heed" (v. 10, 11), but now gave Philip "heed" (v. 6): same verbs.
3. The general populace were formerly astonished (KJV "bewitched") by Simon: he kept on amazing them (v. 11).
4. Simon claimed greatness (v. 10) and they in response said "Thus one is the power of God, which is called 'the Great Power.'"

### **v. 12, 13 Simon's followers get saved and so does Simon. Note the order:**

1. They believed (Aor. Act. Indic.).
2. What did they believe? Philip's message concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.
3. They were baptized (water); Philip was the baptizer.
4. Simon himself believed (Aor. Act. Indic.). What did he believe?
5. Simon got baptized (water).
6. Simon greatly impressed by the miracles continued with Philip.

DID SIMON GET SAVED? All of my commentaries but one say "No." Even my friend Charles Ryrie says "No." I do not concur (reasons later).

## **Acts 8:14-25 Peter & John Check Out the Samaritan Revival**

**v. 14-17** It was the responsibility of the Twelve to exercise general supervision of the progress of the Gospel in the early years of this dispensation. Hearing of the Samaritan response to the Gospel, they send Peter and John to check it out. The historical rivalry and bitter religious relations between Jerusalem and Samaria (false temple, priesthood & Penteteuch) intensified the issues. But Peter and John find nothing amiss; after praying, they lay hands on these relatively new believers who in turn receive the Holy Spirit (unique to this case in all of the New Testament: Acts 19:1-7 is totally different).

Afterward the H.S. is the possession of all who believe at the moment of regeneration: see 2 Cor. 1:21-23; Eph. 1:13; 1 Cor 6:19.

v. 18-24 Simon tries to purchase the power to "give the Holy Spirit via his hands"

\* Note Peter's reply:

v. 20 **"thy money perish with you because..."** Some make this to mean eternal perishing, but how could that apply to money? This is temporal (as in 1 Cor. 8:11). Temporal loss and even temporal death are at times the consequence of a believer's sin, 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16, 17.

v. 21a **"Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter":** what matter? In the matter of imparting the Holy Spirit which was purely and solely Apostolic (strict sense).

Those who believe in Apostolic Succession lean hard on this text! They have absolutely no support here or elsewhere in the N. T.

v. 21b **"Your heart is not right before God."** Exactly: Simon was acting out of his old frame of reference.

v. 22, 23 **"Repent of this":** "change your mind about this" ONE DOES NOT TELL THIS TO AN UNBELIEVER!

"Pray, if (1<sup>st</sup> class, condit. sentence) perhaps it shall be forgiven your" (Peter assumes it will).

"For you might become in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity;" that is, you might sin unto death.

v. 24 Simon asks them to pray for him that none of this happens.

## WAS SIMON SAVED?

1. Yes, because Philip communicated enough about Christ for him and the Samaritans to be saved, 8:12, 13. If Philip was not saved, neither were the Samaritans.

2. Are we saved simply by believing the Gospel involved in "the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ?"

Yes, according to John 1:12, 13. "faith," "believed," "belief" in the Gospel of John is saving faith as it is in Acts.

3. Were the disciples saved in John 2:23, even though they were not trustworthy in Jesus' eyes?

Yes if "believed in (eis) his name" means what it says as we are assured in John 1:12, 13. Question that and you question the integrity of Scripture.

4. Did the "signs" in John 2:23 and Acts 8:6 help or aid the viewers in their belief / trust in Christ?

Yes: that was a purpose of signs according to John 20:30-31.

5. Is it possible to believe the Gospel and still resist intimacy with the Saviour?

Yes, because intimacy with anyone demands fellowship. Fellowship admits to degrees; so does intimacy. Not all believers fellowship with Christ day-by-day, hour-by-hour.

6. The Simon of Acts 8 is simply not the Simon Magus of the Church Fathers.