International Bible Lessons Commentary
Acts 8:9-24 (25)
International Bible Lessons
Sunday, October 21, 2012
L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, October 21, 2012**, is from **Acts 8:9-24 (25)**. You might like to study (or mention in your class) all of the **"Let us"** verses in the *Letter to the Hebrews* that are listed below. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lessons Commentary* (formerly, *Bible Lesson Forum*) below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further** discuss the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the International Bible Lessons Commentary website. For additional **International Bible Lesson Commentaries**, see the complete and comprehensive International Bible Lessons Commentary Index. The weekly International Bible Lesson is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught at http://InternationalBibleLessons.org and in *The Oklahoman* newspaper.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Acts 8:9-24 (25)

(Acts 8:9) Now a certain man named Simon had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he was someone great.

After some of the followers of Jesus scattered to Samaria because of persecution in Judea, many Samaritans received the good news about Jesus the Messiah. Jesus had already prepared the way for these disciples when He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well and led many in her town to believe in Him as the Messiah (see John 4). The magician Simon used tricks or demonic powers to perform magic or signs that directed the people's attention to him as someone great, as someone who was a god.

(Acts 8:10) All of them, from the least to the greatest, listened to him eagerly, saying, "This man is the power of God that is called Great."

Simon encouraged people to identify him with God, as one who had the power of God. In this verse and the next verse, we learn that people "listened to him" or "listened eagerly to him." What Simon taught we do not learn here, but the Apostle Paul talked about "doctrines of demons;" so, possibly using demonic power Simon misled people away from the true God (see 1 Timothy 4:1).

(Acts 8:11) And they listened eagerly to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.

Simon was able to draw large crowds to himself because of his magic. He was able to do amazing feats that the people could not easily explain; so, they associated his abilities with being a god or someone especially close to a god. They wrongly assumed that these amazing powers were a sign that Simon and his teachings were special and Simon deserved their glorifying him as someone divine.

(Acts 8:12) But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Philip was one of the first seven deacons (see Acts 6:5). As far as we know from the Bible, he did not directly confront or challenge Simon and his false teachings about himself. Philip focused on proclaiming, "the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ." He pointed people to God and to Jesus, to the rule or kingdom of God (which meant people needed to change their behavior and obey God). Philip proclaimed that people needed to be in a right relationship with the true God through faith in Jesus Christ, and this would have excluded trusting in Simon as "Great." In response to Philip's

preaching, men and women believed and chose to be baptized.

(Acts 8:13) Even Simon himself believed. After being baptized, he stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place.

Simon believed what Philip preached; or, perhaps he just believed the signs were real and he could not duplicate them. He probably saw signs and wonders that were beyond his abilities and comprehension. Philip worked signs as Simon had, but Philip's signs were to point people away from himself and to Jesus; therefore, the Holy Spirit empowered the signs. Simon believed the signs, and he wanted to know how they were done, so he followed Philip closely. Simon believed, but he may have believed without turning from self-centeredness to Christ centeredness.

(Acts 8:14) Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.

When the apostles heard about the Samaritans accepting the gospel of Jesus Christ, "the word of God," they wanted to verify what they had heard. Was it true? Was it the true word of God that they had heard and accepted? Two Apostles to serve as two witnesses were sent from the group of apostles in

order to evaluate what they had heard. Peter and John had been with Jesus in Samaria, and they had seen Samaritans trust in Jesus after Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well; so, these two apostles were ideal to send as two witnesses (both to preach to the Samaritans and to report back to the church in Jerusalem).

(Acts 8:15) The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit

The growth of the New Testament church resulted partially from persecution or in spite of persecution. The apostles, the two apostolic witnesses, confirmed that Philip had taught the truth about Jesus (the true word of God). They confirmed that the believers had believed truly and were baptized. They endorsed what Philip had preached, but corrected his method of baptizing in Jesus' name only, and they prayed for the believers to receive the Holy Spirit.

(Acts 8:16) (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus).

We do not know why Philip baptized only in the name of the Lord Jesus. He preached, "the name of Jesus" (Acts 8:12). He baptized in "the name of the Lord Jesus." Perhaps the persecution came before he had been fully taught or before he had been authorized by the church to baptize people (Philip had been set

apart as a deacon); still, Philip needed to do what was needed at the time and he did everything in the name of Jesus, which was appropriate. The apostles approved what Philip had done; they endorsed what the people did as a result of Philip's preaching when they prayed for the believers to receive the Holy Spirit.

(Acts 8:17) Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Peter and John did not invalidate the baptism that Philip had administered to the believers by requiring them to be baptized again. Unknowingly, Philip had not baptized as Jesus had taught (see Jesus' command in Matthew 28: 19-20 — "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age"). Peter and John only needed to pray and lay their hands on the believers for them to receive the Holy Spirit. Their actions and the actions of the Holy Spirit confirmed for the believers that they had heard and accepted the truth after Philip preached to them.

(Acts 8:18) Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,

Why Simon the magician did not receive the Holy Spirit as others had the Bible does not say, but we do know his heart was not right with God. God would not put His Holy Spirit into an unclean person. Perhaps Simon had believed the basic "facts" of the gospel and had gone through the formality of being baptized, but had not truly turned from his self-centeredness to Christ-centeredness. Perhaps he was used to making money with his magic and assumed the apostles used their powers to make money too. Perhaps he wanted to use the same powers they used to make more money and to return to popularity among the people. Perhaps he had followed Philip only in the hope of learning his "secrets," and after learning about the Holy Spirit he wanted to buy the "secret."

(Acts 8:19) saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

It seems Simon did not receive the Holy Spirit with the laying on of hands. What he wanted was the power to give the Holy Spirit to others. Perhaps he thought Peter and John made money using the Holy Spirit; perhaps as Simon used demons to work magic for money. Since the Holy Spirit's power was greater than Simon's power, he thought he could make money by giving the Holy Spirit to people when he laid hands on them. He did not understand that the Holy Spirit was received and given only to those who believed truly in Jesus the Messiah as their Lord and Savior.

(Acts 8:20) But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money!

The gift of the Holy Spirit is truly a gift of God, a gift that people cannot buy and should never try to sell. Some may think they can buy God gifts and favor with their money, but Peter said this was not possible. Peter may also have felt this was a temptation to make money using God free gifts inappropriately, so he wanted the silver to perish along with Simon for tempting him to sin. Peter felt strongly against using God's gifts in order to promote one's business and we can understand his strong response to awaken Simon to moral accountability.

(Acts 8:21) You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God.

This verse gives us reason to believe that Simon had not received the Holy Spirit when the apostles prayed and laid hands on the true believers, because Simon's heart was not right before God. A person whose heart is right before God is a person whose heart wills for the will of God to be done by them and through them in the power of the Holy Spirit. A person with a heart right before God will choose to obey God and seek to do God's will in all things, because doing God's will is the most important thing to do. To receive every gift that God wants to give us our hearts need to be

committed to God and to fulfilling His will in our lives through Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

(Acts 8:22) Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.

Peter told Simon what he needed to do so he would not perish. Peter told him how to avoid the curse upon him and his silver. He needed to recognize his wickedness, that his heart or his intention (his selfishness and self-seeking) was evil and showed the state or condition of his heart. He needed to change his heart or intention to Christ-centeredness, and he needed to pray for the Lord to forgive him if it was possible for him to pray.

(Acts 8:23) For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness."

Simon was in "the gall of bitterness," because he was envious or jealous of what Peter and John could do through the Holy Spirit. Philip's preaching and the ability of Peter and John had turned the people away from Simon and from calling him "Great." Simon had allowed himself to be chained to wickedness when he used demonic powers to perform magic in order to deceive people. He needed to ask Jesus to break these chains of slavery to Satan and sin.

(Acts 8:24) Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me."

We do not have any evidence that Simon actually repented or asked Jesus to forgive him or break the chains of wickedness. What the Bible teaches is true, but the Bible does not always answer all of our questions. Perhaps Simon wanted to avoid the consequences of his sins, naturally. Perhaps he did not want to turn from his sin and self-centeredness and his way of making money. In some sense, he may have recognized his sins and the fact that he was chained to the demons who had helped him work magic, so he wanted Peter's prayers to help free him from slavery to sin and Satan, and to help him make needed changes in his life.

(Acts 8:25) Now after Peter and John had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, proclaiming the good news to many villages of the Samaritans.

Though not in the original Uniform Bible Lesson for this Sunday, we learn from this verse that those who had accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ (that Philip had preached to them) also had the opportunity to hear two of the original twelve disciples (who had actually followed Jesus throughout His entire ministry). These two disciples (now Apostles) testified regarding what they heard Jesus say and do. Hearing

them preach would have meant a great deal to the first believers in Samaria who had heard Philip preach. These two disciples, Peter and John, also preached the word of God in many Samaritan villages as they traveled back to Jerusalem. Thus, the command and prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled; that the gospel would be preached in Samaria (Acts 1:8— "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth").

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. In what ways did the people honor Simon?

2. In what ways did Philip get the attention of the crowd and how did the crowd respond to Philip?

3. What does it seem Simon intended to achieve with his magic and teaching?

4. Simon believed the preaching of Philip and was baptized. What did Simon fail to do?

5. If someone in your congregation said he believed in Jesus and was baptized and was saved, but it was obvious that his heart was not right with God and others, and he was bound in the chains of wickedness,

how might you use the teaching about Simon as an example to help this person?

Write your comments, suggestions, and thoughts on the Bible Lesson Forum at http://biblelessonforum.com/. Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson* at **International Bible Lessons** at http://internationalbiblelessons.org.

— © *Copyright 2012 by L.G. Parkhurst, Jr. Permission Granted for Not for Profit Use.*