

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Acts 8:9-25

New American Standard Bible

International Bible Lessons

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, October 4, 2015**, is from **Acts 8:9-25**. Please Note: Some churches will only study **Acts 8:9-24**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the **International Bible Lesson Forum**.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Acts 8:9-25

(Acts 8:9) Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great;

The Bible does not tell us the source of Simon's magic. Some magic is nothing more than a mere "trick" or the specialized skill of a well-trained magician. The Bible teaches that evil spirits can also be the source of magic, which is sorcery. Jesus warned, "For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24). The Apostle Paul warned, "The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders, and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). Since many of those who believed in Simon were demon possessed and only freed from demonic possession by Philip, Simon too was probably demon possessed and received his magical powers from demons that made him think he was great and who made him appear great to others. Philip demonstrated a greater power than Simon, and Luke wrote that in response to Philip unclean spirits came out of people: "with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many," which brought "great joy" (Acts 8:7-8).

(Acts 8:10) and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God."

Simon impressed everyone: rich and poor, master and

servant, educated and uneducated. They paid attention to him and believed whatever he said. Before Philip arrived, Simon's powers led everyone to agree with Simon that he was "Great." They thought he was a god, or a god come to earth, or the son of a god, who would also teach them the mysteries of god. He was the most impressive person they had ever seen, until Philip came and used his power to do good by healing the paralyzed and the lame and by casting out demons. Philip's power came from the Holy Spirit who indwelt him, and Philip used his powers to point people to Jesus, the Messiah and true Son of God.

(Acts 8:11) And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.

Magic tricks and demonic powers can be amazing, especially when not understood by an audience. Luke emphasized in Acts 8:10 and Acts 8:11 that Simon's magic powers led people to also believe what he taught. The people only turned to Philip and listened more eagerly to Philip than to Simon because the power he exercised was greater than Simon's. Philip healed people, freed people from demonic oppression and possession, and Philip brought them joy. The Bible does not tell us what Simon taught.

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

Philip's good powers influenced the people to believe what he taught. He proclaimed that the true God was King over all, and he demonstrated that the true God was the "Great" King over all. He proved that the true God would meet everyone's real needs and not just entertain people with magic tricks. Philip proved God's government or kingdom was ruled by Jesus the Messiah, in whose name they were healed and freed from slavery. Jesus Christ and His kingdom were greater than any other king or government that they had ever seen. After they believed the good news about Jesus, they did what Philip said and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Luke emphasized that both men and women could be baptized and become members of the Body of Christ.

(Acts 8:13) Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

Simon knew that Philip's powers were greater than his. He did what Philip told the crowds to do, and he appeared to be a true believer. Philip's signs and miracles so astonished Simon that he followed Philip everywhere – probably to learn the secret of Philip's powers more than to learn more about the good news of Jesus Christ. Philip taught about Jesus wherever he went, but Simon did not give his heart to Jesus to obey Jesus as his King when he said he believed. James warned: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder" (James 2:19).

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

In the Book of Acts, one or more of the twelve apostles always verified a new beginning, a new work of God, or the fulfillment of Jesus' commands and prophecies. Jesus declared the gospel would spread from Judea to Samaria, which it did after the Christians in Jerusalem were persecuted and scattered. The official leaders of the Church (the apostles) sent two of the apostles (Peter and John) to verify whether or not what they had heard was true, and if the good news of Jesus Christ had truly spread to the Samaritans in Samaria. If real, they would endorse the work. According to the Scriptures, "A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (Deuteronomy 19:15).

(Acts 8:15) who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

Philip shared what he knew as the Holy Spirit led him. He led people to believe and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Perhaps the Holy Spirit did not lead him to do more than he did because God wanted the apostles to complete what Philip had begun so well; which would prove to the apostles that Philip's work was the beginning of a true extension of the Church as Jesus had commanded. God wanted the apostles to see for themselves how the Samaritans had received the good news from Philip and how the Holy Spirit endorsed Philip's work; then they could report back to the whole

church that God's will was done when the Samaritans became true Christians.

(Acts 8:16) For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Luke did not explain why Philip baptized as he did, baptizing only in the name of the Lord Jesus. Philip did what he knew to do, and God honored what he did because he did all he knew to do. Philip kept his focus on leading people to believe in Jesus, and he did many good deeds in Jesus' name to help people believe in Jesus. The Holy Spirit helped Philip in all he did, but for reasons unexplained by Luke, Philip only baptized in Jesus' name. When we think about the situation, we can get some idea of why Jesus would follow this plan and involve both Philip and the two apostles in leading the Samaritans to a true and living faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

(Acts 8:17) Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

As far as we know, the people were not baptized again in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 28:19). Luke did not tell his readers. Baptism in the name of Jesus was accepted (Acts 2:38). After the apostles prayed and laid their hands on the believers, they received the Holy Spirit. Philip learned how to baptize according to Jesus' command and that is no doubt the way he baptized the Ethiopian when he led him to faith in Jesus Christ (see Acts 8:26-40).

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

Simon, the crowd of believers, Philip, and the apostles saw visible evidence that the Holy Spirit had come upon the believers after the apostles laid hands on them. This revelation may have been similar to the Day of Pentecost and would confirm that Jesus wanted the gospel spread in Samaria as He had commanded. Simon did not receive the Holy Spirit; perhaps the Holy Spirit would not come upon him because the Holy Spirit knew his heart was not right. Because he did not receive the Holy Spirit, he wanted to buy “it” and the power to give the Holy Spirit to others. Simon did not understand that the Holy Spirit is a Person who cannot be bought or sold. He no doubt believed that having the Holy Spirit would enable him to be popular and powerful among the people once again, and if he had this “power” he could sell it to others for a profit.

(Acts 8:19) saying, “Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”

Simon wanted to buy the Holy Spirit as an ability or power, not as the Person who would indwell him, lead him, help him obey King Jesus, and enable him to lead people to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He offered money to buy the Holy Spirit so he could then sell the Holy Spirit to others, even as he had bought “it.” He loved money more than he loved God. We see no indication that he ever tried to obey Jesus as his Lord.

(Acts 8:20) But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!”

Peter emphasized that the Holy Spirit was a gift, a gift of God for those who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Peter’s strong words emphasized that he abhorred the temptation to sell the Holy Spirit. Peter’s words show how serious a crime it is in the kingdom of God to try to use or want to use the Holy Spirit and His power for self-advancement or selfish self-centered reasons.

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

Though Philip had a limited knowledge and understanding of the kingdom of God, because his heart was right the Holy Spirit guided him in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. The same is true for Peter and John. Because Simon’s heart was not right, because his heart was not pure, because he did not want the Holy Spirit’s power to promote the cause of Jesus Christ and lead people to saving faith, Peter refused Simon’s request. Peter told Simon his sin so he would know to repent of his sin.

(Acts 8:22) “Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.”

Peter declared that it is wicked to want to use the Holy Spirit for selfish purposes. Peter told Simon to repent, to turn from self-centeredness to Christ centeredness, from his purposes to God’s purposes for his life. Peter shows

how serious Simon's sin was by indicating that God's forgiveness should be something he "hoped" to receive, and he should pray and repent until he received God's forgiveness or the assurance of God's forgiveness—which could only happen after a complete change of Simon's heart.

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

Simon was full of bitterness because he had lost his popularity to Philip, Peter, and John. He was bitter because the crowds no longer listened to him as the great one. He was bitter because his powers were demonstrably less than the powers of the indwelling Holy Spirit in Philip, Peter, and John. Simon had followed Philip with a believing bitterness which increased when he saw the Holy Spirit working through Peter and John. He needed to go to Jesus as Lord and Savior and ask Jesus to free him from bitterness, from slavery to sin, from wickedness, and perhaps from demonic powers that possessed or influenced him. He needed to ask Jesus to change his heart or help him change his heart.

(Acts 8:24) But Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me yourselves, so that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

We do not learn of or see any indication that Simon repented. Later church historians saw him as the "first heretic," who taught false doctrine after Peter's refusal to sell him the Holy Spirit. Simon wanted Peter to pray that

he would not perish with his money. He did not ask for help to repent and get his heart right with God, but that he would not suffer the consequences of his unrepentant selfishness and sin.

(Acts 8:25) So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

Luke showed that after Peter and John confirmed that the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit were ready for the gospel to be spread into Samaria that they themselves preached the gospel in “many Samaritan villages.” They could also testify about Jesus and how He had led the Samaritan woman at the well to believe in him as the Messiah, how He healed Samaritans, and how He told a parable about the Good Samaritan. They could report in Jerusalem that Philip’s experience of leading Samaritans to believe was not an isolated unusual case, but an indication that Jesus wanted believers to preach in every Samaritan village and to expect similar results.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What do you think was the source of Simon’s magic or sorcery? Give a reason for your answer.
2. Why do you think people listened eagerly to Simon?

3. What did Philip proclaim and why do you think people listened to him?
4. Why do you think the Church in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to see Philip?
5. How might Simon's belief been different from the others who believed, and why do you think he did not receive the Holy Spirit along with those who received the Holy Spirit when the apostles laid their hands of them?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly

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