

The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it – but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”

Vance Havner

Text
Acts 8:4-25

Topic
Simon the Samaritan Sorcerer attempts to purchase the ability to impart the Holy Spirit and is strongly rebuked by Peter

Title
The Sorcerer & the Stone
(Peter – a rock or a stone)

Acts 8:4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

Acts 8:5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.

Acts 8:6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

Acts 8:7 For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.

Acts 8:8 And there was great joy in that city.

Acts 8:9 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great,

Acts 8:10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God."

Acts 8:11 And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

Acts 8:13 Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

Acts 8:14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,
Acts 8:15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.
Acts 8:16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
Acts 8:17 Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.
Acts 8:18 And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money,
Acts 8:19 saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."
Acts 8:20 But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!
Acts 8:21 You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.
Acts 8:22 Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.
Acts 8:23 For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."
Acts 8:24 Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."
Acts 8:25 So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

Introduction

A magician can usually figure out how a fellow magician is performing his tricks and illusions. It must have blown Simon away to watch what happened in the aftermath of Philip's preaching to the Samaritans. Demons and diseases were eradicated and the people who had suffered from them were set free.

In all his sorceries Simon was not able to tap into that kind of power. He decided to follow Philip around. Perhaps he could discover the source of this power.

When Peter and John came down to Samaria and laid hands on the new believers Simon made his move. He offered to buy the ability to confer power upon people.

Simon says, "Give me this power." Peter says, "Your money perish with you."

Many issues are raised in this passage. At its core an average, ordinary, everyday believer shared Jesus Christ and a surge of power followed his witness.

We are average, ordinary, everyday believers. *We could sure use a surge of power to follow our witness!*

I'll therefore organize my thoughts around two points: #1 A Surge Of Holy Spirit Power Can Follow You, and #2 The Source Of Holy Spirit Power Can Fall Upon You.

#1 A Surge of Holy Spirit Power Can Follow You (v4-13)

Persecution on a large and public scale had broken out upon the Church in Jerusalem. Believers were scattered out from Jerusalem to the outlying areas of Judea and Samaria. Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, focuses our attention on the travels of Philip.

Philip had earlier been chosen as one of seven men who would oversee the distribution of monies and food to the widows. These seven men became the pattern for the office of the Deacon in the Church. At the time they were chosen they were not officials but ordinary believers who met a few basic spiritual qualifications. As we follow Philip down to Samaria we are seeing what God did through a believer who had simple faith in the Lord.

Acts 8:4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

Acts 8:5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.

Acts 8:6 And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

Acts 8:7 For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.

Acts 8:8 And there was great joy in that city.

We commented on these verses in our last study in Acts. Let's focus on Philip. His trip to Samaria was not a planned missionary outreach. He simply talked about Jesus wherever he found himself. God

accompanied Philip's witness with a surge of power. **Miracles**, exorcisms, and healings followed the preaching of Jesus Christ.

Much contemporary conservative theology is dedicated to proving God will definitely not do these things anymore today. We have adopted the position that whatever God did in Acts He can still do today. He doesn't have to do it; He doesn't always do it. But He can do it. For our part we are to share Jesus Christ wherever we find ourselves.

Acts 8:9 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great,

Acts 8:10 to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God."

Acts 8:11 And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.

This guy has several aliases in Christian history. He's known as Simon the Sorcerer, Simon the Magician, Simon of Gitta, or Simon Magus. The particular word for **sorcery** is where we get our word *magic*. He may simply have been a magician, practicing illusions and tricks; or he may have been a conduit for demonic activity. Probably it was a little of both.

When it says that the people **heeded him** it indicates they sought him out for spiritual help and for spiritual counsel. He had just enough of what seemed like supernatural power to keep them coming to him but not enough to offer any genuine assistance. People left still possessed and oppressed by demons and still suffering from their diseases.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

The content of Philip's message was the person and work of Jesus and His coming **kingdom**. The people **believed** on Jesus and were water **baptized** to publicly identify themselves as Christians.

Acts 8:13 Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

We read the word **believed** and immediately interpret it to mean *saved*. People in the Bible, however, are sometimes described as having believed who are not saved. Some of the people who followed Jesus are described as believing but not saved:

John 2:23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.

John 2:24 But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all *men*,

Then there is this statement in James 2:19,

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble!

When someone is said to have **believed**, whether or not they are saved is determined by the context. In our context the Samaritans believed and were saved. Simon **believed** but we will see in a moment that he was not saved.

Why did Simon believe and get baptized? Simon could not do any of the genuine miracles that followed Philip's preaching. No one was seeking out his services anymore and he could not compete with Philip. It seemed that he hoped to learn Philip's secret. The best way to do that was to join the new movement and observe it from within.

A surge of power followed Philip and his preaching of Jesus. **You and I need power surges to follow our witness.** It doesn't have to exorcisms and healings... **Although it might be if we weren't preaching a Christ Who no longer wants to do such things!**

More common to us are everyday power surges to simply act and react as Christians ought to. It is to walk in the beatitudes and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. It is to walk in victory over sin. It is to die to self. It is to live the normal Christian life of depending upon God and walking in His will according to His Word.

#2 The Source of Holy Spirit Power Can Fall Upon You (v14-25)

Simon was hanging around trying to discover the secret of Philip's power. He thought he found it when Peter and John came on the scene.

Acts 8:14 Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them,

In passing we note that Peter was **sent** by the whole group of apostles. He wasn't their leader. They didn't recognize him as Pope.

The reason they were **sent** is fascinating:

Acts 8:15 who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:16 For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Whoa! Can you be a genuine believer, indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, but not have received the baptism with the Holy Spirit Jesus promised all believers?

The answer to that is "Yes!" and we will return to it momentarily. First let's finish with Simon.

Acts 8:17 Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

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

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

After perhaps weeks of trying to determine the secret – *there it was!* You had to be an apostle, Simon reasoned, in order to have and be able to impart **this power**.

Notice he didn't just want the power. He wanted the ability to impart it. To him this was just a superior sorcery that he might profit from.

Acts 8:20 But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!

Acts 8:21 You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God.

Acts 8:22 Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.

Acts 8:23 For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

Peter's rebuke establishes that Simon was definitely not saved. All of the descriptive words are very strong indicators Simon was not saved.

Peter's rebuke was harsh but still held out hope of repentance. How would Simon respond?

Acts 8:24 Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

His statement indicates a failure to personally repent of his sins. It is the long tradition of the Church that Simon not only failed to repent but that he went on to establish a rival false religion.

Acts 8:25 So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

Why did the big guns from Jerusalem come down to Samaria? The text suggest that they came specifically to lay hands on the believers so that they would receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

OK, so why was the baptism with the Holy Spirit delayed among the Samaritans?

Theologians give reasons why they think the baptism with the Holy Spirit was delayed. Their reasons are not really reasons but are results. What I mean is that the text itself provides no reason or reasons.

One overwhelmingly popular conservative evangelical reason is given for the delay. It says that because of the long-standing hatred between Jews and Samaritans it was necessary for the heavy-hitters among the Jews to come and impart the baptism of the Holy Spirit to

the Samaritans. That way everyone would understand there was no division between them.

Do you see that anywhere in the text? No, you don't see it **because it isn't there**. It might be a result of what God did in sending Peter and John, but it cannot be proven from Scripture to be the reason. In fact the real reason conservative scholars use it as the reason is because they deny the possibility of the baptism with the Holy Spirit being an experience a saved person can have subsequent to salvation.

The theme of the Book of Acts was given by Jesus in Acts 1:8 where we read,

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The initial group of believers who waited for this promise in the upper room were definitely saved. More than that, they were already indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. He was in them – but had not yet fallen upon them. He fell upon them on the Day of Pentecost.

The next significant mention of the baptism with the Holy Spirit is in Samaria. There we just saw another group of saved believers, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who waited for the baptism with the Holy Spirit. He fell upon them as the apostles laid their hands on them.

The next significant mention of the baptism with the Holy Spirit is at the conversion of Paul (Acts 9). He gets saved on the road to Damascus but is left blinded. A believer named Ananias is sent to pray for him and, as Paul is healed, he is also said to be filled with the Holy Spirit. In other words, he was saved, but now the Holy Spirit falls upon him.

The next significant mention of the baptism with the Holy Spirit is in Acts chapter ten. Peter gets sent by God to the house of a Gentile named Cornelius. While Peter is still speaking to the household of Cornelius they are saved and simultaneously baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Do you see a pattern in how and when believers receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit?

No! You don't see any pattern!

It bothers theologians and anyone with systematic thinking that we cannot nail down a systematic teaching on receiving the baptism with the Holy Spirit:

1. Some received it subsequent to their salvation and water baptism after a time of waiting for the Holy Spirit to fall upon them.
2. Some received it subsequent to their salvation and water baptism by the laying on of the hands of the apostles.
3. At least one person, Paul, received it subsequent to his salvation but before his water baptism by the laying on of hands of an average believer.
4. Some received it simultaneously with their salvation and before they were water baptized.
5. I would add to all the Bible says the testimony of many godly men in Church history who describe receiving the baptism with the Holy Spirit much later in their ministries. Men like D. L. Moody and R. A. Torrey; men we trust as excellent expositors of God's Word who nevertheless understood that you could be saved and indwelt by the Holy Spirit but lack His baptism.

That brings us to our application. We could say that there are three types of people here today:

1. There are nonbelievers. You may believe certain things but not yet be saved. You've never been born again. The Holy Spirit does not indwell you. **You need to be saved!**
2. There are believers who, either simultaneously or subsequently, have by faith received the baptism with the Holy Spirit. He fell upon you and you understand your dependence upon Him to give power to your witness.
3. There are believers who have not yet received the baptism with the Holy Spirit. You are saved and indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. But you lack power in your witness. Maybe you've never

heard it was possible. Or maybe you've become convinced there is no such experience subsequent to salvation.

Folks who were saved but lacked the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit were prayed for by the laying on of hands. It didn't have to be an apostle's hands.

I want to do that today. If you want the baptism with the Holy Spirit – the power to witness – to fall upon you, come forward and we will pray for you.

