

## 6. Conversion of the Samaritans—Acts 8

Acts 8:4-25 follows the sermon of Stephen and his stoning in Acts 7. This narrative describes the details attendant to the conversion of the Samaritans. The Samaritans were a mixed race of people in the Northern Kingdom who had intermarried after the priests, the wealthy, and the noble were carried away into captivity. Great animosity existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. However, Christ forecast his acceptance of Samaritans in John 4 when he promised the Samaritan woman living water. The Samaritans in her village called him the “Savior of the world” in John 4:42. Jesus confirmed his acceptance of Samaritans in his parable called the *Good Samaritan* in Luke 10:33. The Samaritans claim to have the oldest manuscript of the Pentateuch (*The Nablus Roll*), which uses a script and language much older than the oldest Jewish manuscripts. The Samaritans claim that the Pentateuch was the only inspired scripture.

### The Gospel Is Preached to the Samaritans

*4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. 5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.*

The scattered Christians fulfilled the Great Commission by preaching the word and proclaiming Christ. Philip’s preaching to the Samaritans further defines the all-inclusive nature of the term *all nations*. The gospel has gone to Jews from all over the world (Acts 2) and to the poor and lame (Acts 3) and now to the Samaritans, a racial group despised by the Jews.

### Signs and Miracles Accompanied Them

*6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7 With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city.*

Mark’s account of the Great Commission told of signs that would accompany those who believe. Lesson 5 illustrated how these signs were to confirm the word (Hebrews 2:1-4). Like the healing of the crippled beggar in Acts 3, these miracles are obvious, apparent, and without doubt in their manifestation.

*9 Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, 10 and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." 11 They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.*

Simon, who practiced sorcery, becomes central to this conversion. The Samaritans held him in awe and esteem, saying that he was the divine power known as the Great Power. Simon, like teachers of today, could amaze them with his magic. All people must be aware of the possibilities of danger in allowing their amazement to lead them to follow a false teacher. Paul taught in 2 Thess 2:9-12:

9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

Simon is an excellent representation of this work of evil and the power that it had over the Samaritans.

### The Samaritans Believed the Gospel and Were Baptized

*12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.*

In Mark’s account, the Lord has said, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. Here the Samaritans, including Simon, believed and were baptized. Philip preached the gospel, which here includes the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. Millennialists claim that Jesus failed to establish his kingdom. They cannot explain why, if Jesus failed in establishing his kingdom, Philip preached the good news of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is good news because God brought converts into the kingdom according to Colossians 1:12-14, “Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the

forgiveness of sins." John, among others, confirmed this teaching in Rev 1:5b-6a: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever!" God made us this kingdom, and it is a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Speaking in the present tense, the Hebrew writer said in Heb 12:28-29: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our 'God is a consuming fire.'" The gospel Philip preached included a kingdom, present and continuing, that cannot be shaken. God brings those who believe and are baptized into this kingdom of the Son he loves. This agrees perfectly with what happened to the converts on the Day of Pentecost: "The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." Acts 2:47.

## **The Manner in Which the Signs Follow the Believers Is Illustrated**

*14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

The phrase *accepted the word of God* illuminates the all-inclusive nature of obedience from faith to repentance, confession, and baptism. Salvation results from this process, but the ability to perform signs does not (see notes on *gift of the Holy Spirit* in Lesson 3). To enable the Samaritans to receive that measure of the Holy Spirit that permitted the doing of signs and miracles, the apostles had to place hands on them. Simon was absolutely certain that the laying on of the hands of apostle imparted the spiritual gifts.

*18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19 and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."*

Simon was so certain of where this power existed, he tried to buy the ability. This apostolic example should forever put to rest the idea that people today can perform signs and miracles. Where are the apostles – men who had been with the Lord from the beginning (Acts 1:22-23)? If no apostles, no laying on of the apostles' hands, no spiritual gifts. Paul also prophesied that these gifts would cease in 1 Cor 13.

## **Peter's Remedy for Simon's Great Sin Holds True Today**

*20 Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. 23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."*

Peter's remedy for Simon's great sin—thinking to buy the gift of God with money—holds true today. Simon's sin was so bad that Peter said that his heart was not right, and his act was described as wickedness. Peter said that Simon was full of bitterness and captive to sin. However, no matter how great the sin, there is still hope for the Christian. The inner act is repentance; and the outer act is to pray for forgiveness. John writes the very same in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

## **Conclusion**

This example is a perfect mirror of the Great Commission as recorded by Mark. They preached the gospel and extended its influence to yet another nation of people. The people, when they heard, believed and were baptized. Philip defined the nature of the kingdom and the influence of the Holy Spirit. Simon illustrated the remedy for sin among those who are already Christians. The example concludes: "24 Then Simon answered, 'Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.'"

## **Study Questions**

1. In what way is the Kingdom of God good news? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What did the Samaritans do when they heard the gospel? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the purpose of signs and miracles? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What prompted Simon to sin? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What could the apostles do that Philip could not do? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What was the remedy for Simon's sin? \_\_\_\_\_