

### Simon the Sorcerer

Acts 8:5—8:24

Simon the sorcerer is an interesting study because it helps to highlight the difference between the preaching of the Kingdom from the Gospel of Grace. This story of Simon the sorcerer showed up just after the offer of the earthly Kingdom was withdrawn from the nation of Israel. Saul/Paul had not yet been raised up and given the doctrine of the Mystery, so the only gospel that could be preached at this point was the Gospel of the Kingdom. Individuals were being saved, but the promised Kingdom would not be set up until much later. Those who were saved before Saul/Paul were converted under Israel's prophetic program. They will not be raptured, but will be brought back to life along with the Old Testament saints to live and rule in the Millennial Kingdom (Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:28; Revelation 20:4—6; Daniel 12:1—2).

Knowing this should help in understanding some of the events in the mid part of the book of Acts. We'll start out with the story of Simon the sorcerer.

#### **Sorcerer**

A sorcerer is a person who uses magic to deceive people. The Greek word used is *magos* (G3097) and refers to those who studied the stars (astrology), interpreted dreams, used divination or used other occultic practices to see into the future or manipulate events. The Magi, or wise men, who came to Jesus from the East were *magos* from Babylon. These were false prophets who (possibly unknowingly) relied upon Satan for their power.

Simeon was one such person. Satan was quite active at this time as evidenced by the many who were possessed by unclean spirits. These demonic spirits may also have been responsible for the physical ailments mentioned, the paralyzed and lame.

#### **Simon the Sorcerer**

Simon was using sorcery to amaze the people and build himself up in their eyes. The people thought he was someone great who had come from God. When Philip came into the city of Samaria, he did many miracles including casting out unclean spirits and healing the sick. Many of these people believed in Philip as he preached the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Among the believers was Simon the sorcerer, who was also baptized. He followed Philip and watched him closely as he performed miracles. He was likely trying to see how Philip was able to do such amazing miracles.

Once the Apostles in Jerusalem heard about what was going on in Samaria, the Hebrew church sent Peter and John so that they could be given the Holy Spirit. Those who believed and were baptized were given the Holy Spirit at the hands of these Apostles. Upon seeing this, Simon the sorcerer wanted this same power and offered them money to get it.

Peter condemned him for thinking he could purchase this gift of God. Peter said his heart was not right and that he needed to repent of his sin and pray that God would forgive him.

#### **Was Simon saved?**

It is interesting to see how Simon had heard Philip, had believed and then was baptized, but then was condemned by the Apostle Peter a few sentences later because his heart was not right, and he was bound up by his iniquity. It would appear that Simon was not a true believer.

There are a number of examples of people who are said to have believed, but yet are shown to turn their back on what they once believed. For instance, the seed that falls on the stony ground springs up but quickly dies off (Luke 8:13). Many believed in Jesus' name when they saw the miracles He did (John 2:23—25), yet many stopped believing once the teaching got too hard (John 6:66). Finally, those who continue in Jesus' word are His true disciples (John 8:31).

It does appear that he was not a true believer, but was one who temporarily took a hold of the teaching, then walked away from it. He was more interested in gaining greater power. It does not say whether or not the Holy Spirit came upon him. I am inclined to believe that he did not receive the Holy Spirit since that seems to be reserved for true believers.

However, perhaps Simon feared for his eternal life and ended up truly repenting after being reprimanded by Peter. If so, Simon could have joined the Little Flock of believers.

### **Purpose of this story**

Although Scripture does not specifically say why this story of Simon the sorcerer was included, it seems to be a picture of the condition of the spiritual leaders of Israel. They were involved in false religious activity, even appearing to others as believers, but their hearts were not right with God. This story does give them hope that they could still turn to God in repentance. There is a parallel story found in Acts 13 with the false prophet representing Israel's leadership. This is actually Israel's history going back hundreds of years (Psalm 78:37).

### **Gospel of the Kingdom**

Through all of this, the Gospel of the Kingdom is still being preached. Jerusalem had rejected the call to come into the Kingdom and now, because of the persecution, believers are spreading the word (Romans 8:4). This word was the preaching of Christ, as Philip is seen doing in verse 5. The Gospel of Grace had not yet been revealed, and everything conforms to what has already been preached, including miracles, signs and wonders. This preaching of salvation to Israelites does not include the promise of the Kingdom being at hand. The Gospel is now spreading out of Jerusalem and into Judea and Samaria (Acts 1:8), giving all Israelites the opportunity to believe. Samaria gladly accepted the testimony of the disciples and believed. Preaching to the Jew first (Romans 1:16) continues with Paul offering salvation to individual Israelites with the preaching of the Gospel of Grace.

Notice that they did not receive the Holy Spirit until it was given to them by Peter and John. This was an official putting aside of Jerusalem and the declaration that God was now doing a work in areas beyond Jerusalem. This is why one of the official leaders of the Millennial Kingdom (Peter) needed to travel into Samaria. This was also the beginning of the fulfillment of the two sticks being brought together as one (Ezekiel 37:15—17).

There is an important distinction between us being baptized into Christ by the Holy Spirit and Israel having the Holy Spirit fall upon them. This difference is made quite clear in this passage. Here we see that the Apostles prayed for the Samaritans to have the Holy Spirit fall upon them, and there was visible manifestations of having the Holy Spirit (such as speaking in tongues and prophesying). If there were no signs of the Holy Spirit, Simon the sorcerer would not try to buy this power. The Holy Spirit does not work in this manner today. He seals us, regenerates us, circumcises us, indwells us and baptizes us, but all these things are internal and not directly observable. Also, the Holy Spirit is given to us immediately upon belief. Here, they had to wait for Peter and John to give them the Holy Spirit.

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