

Stage One Paper: Context and Analysis of Acts 8:4-25

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1. Text

⁴ So those who were scattered went on their way preaching the message of good news. ⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. ⁶ The crowds paid attention with one mind to what Philip said, as they heard and saw the signs he was performing. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed, and many who were paralyzed, and lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

⁹ A man named Simon had previously practiced sorcery in that city and astounded the Samaritan people, while claiming to be somebody great. ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least of them to the greatest, and they said, “This man is called the Great Power of God!” ¹¹ They were attentive to him because he had astounded them with his sorceries for a long time. ¹² But when they believed Philip, as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. ¹³ Then even Simon himself believed. And after he was baptized, he went around constantly with Philip and was astounded as he observed the signs and great miracles that were being performed.

¹⁴ When the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had welcomed God’s message, they sent Peter and John to them. ¹⁵ After they went down there, they prayed for them, so the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ For He had not yet come down on any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ When Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, “Give me this power too, so that anyone I lay hands on may receive the Holy Spirit.” ²⁰ But Peter told him, “May your silver be destroyed with you, because you thought the gift of God could be obtained with money! ²¹ You have no part or share in this matter, because your heart is not right before God. ²² Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord that the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.”

²⁴ “Please pray to the Lord for me,” Simon replied, “so that nothing you have said may happen to me.” ²⁵ Then, after they had testified and spoken the message of the Lord, they traveled back to Jerusalem, evangelizing many villages of the Samaritans.¹

¹ Acts 8:4-25. All Scripture references are in HSCB unless otherwise specified.

2. Historical Background

Canonical Context of the Book of Acts

Immediately following the four gospels, Acts tells the story of what occurred after Jesus' ascension into heaven. Originally, both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts circulated together as one complete work which historians label Luke-Acts, but this changed when the church established four canonical gospels. The gospel of Luke then joined the ranks of Matthew, Mark, and John and the book of Acts was left by itself.² However, Acts soon became the bridge holding the Gospels and the *Apostle* (Paul's and other apostles' writings), recording the progress of Christianity for about thirty years after Jesus' ascension into heaven.³

About the Author of the Book of Acts

The author of both Luke and Acts is technically anonymous. From the prologue of Luke, which is also the prologue to Acts because they were originally one work, it is obvious that the writer was well educated and not an original disciple of Christ. He was also fluent in the Old Testament and possessed an excellent knowledge for political and social conditions of his time.⁴

The most common theory states that the author is Luke, a physician who was a close friend and follower of Paul.⁵ Tradition holds that Luke was Greek, originally from Antioch, but that he adopted Philippi as his home so he could stay and support the young church there while Paul went to Corinth during his second missionary journey.⁶ In the case of his gospel, Luke wrote based on the stories from the original apostles and others around him who knew Jesus, and he reassures readers of his accuracy because of his thorough research techniques.⁷ On the other hand, it appears that he took part in many of the events recorded in Acts because he incorporates the first person "we" into parts of the narration.⁸

² F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 3

³ Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, "Acts of the Apostles", in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). 7.

⁴ D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 290.

⁵ George V. Shillington, *An Introduction to the Study of Luke-Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 8.

⁶ T.R. McNeal, "Luke," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1057.

⁷ Bruce, 7.

⁸ Ibid.

Luke addresses both of his books to a man named Theophilus, who was likely the person paying for the book's publication.⁹ However, we know almost nothing about Theophilus from Luke's works, and an argument can be made that Luke was also writing to a broader audience. The name Theophilus means "friend of God" or "lover of God", so it could be that Luke was using a generic term for all of his Christian audience.¹⁰

This idea of a broader audience can also be inferred from Luke's purpose in writing. In the prologue of Luke, Luke states that his purpose is for Theophilus to "have certainty concerning the things you have been taught".¹¹ Because Luke and Acts were originally combined into one work, this purpose statement can also be applied to Acts as well. However, scholars argue that this purpose applies also to others who may read his book, and he had others in mind while writing.¹²

Date and Location of Composition

Scholars argue the date of the book of Acts to be between the 1st and 2nd centuries AD.¹³ The last event to be recorded in the book is Paul's two-year house arrest in Rome which is dated around 60 AD, and the majority of the book deals with events taking place in the twenty years before that. It also reflects the cultural conditions of the 1st century AD, especially regarding the Roman Empire. On top of this, the date of Acts cannot be determined without also considering the date of the gospel of Luke, which was probably written after 70 AD.¹⁴ Therefore, the entire work of Luke-Acts was most likely composed during the 1st century AD.

Determining the location of the composition of Acts is more difficult than figuring out the date. Some suggestions include Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome, but scholars consider Rome to be the better possibility because Luke was with Paul in Rome during Paul's house arrest.¹⁵

Setting of Acts 8:4-25

This passage takes place in Samaria, the region located between Judea and Galilee. Samaritans claimed that they were the "true Israel" because they were descendants of the "lost tribes" taken to Assyria around 722 BC. Jews and Samaritans hated one another, even going so

⁹ Ibid, 301.

¹⁰ Merrill C. Tenney, "Theophilus" in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1975), 5: 721.

¹¹ Luke 1:4

¹² Carson and Moo, 305-306.

¹³ Shillington, 12.

¹⁴ Metzger and Coogan, 8

¹⁵ "The Book of Acts," Blue Letter Bible. Accessed September 18, 2019. https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/act/28/16/s_1046016

far as travel out of their way to bypass each other during their travels.¹⁶ However, during the time of the Roman Empire, the Romans refused to view them as two separate nations.¹⁷

Because there was so much tension between the Jews and Samaritans, seeing Philip, a Jew, purposefully go into Samaria to preach the gospel would have been extremely controversial much less many Samaritans believing what Philip was preaching. In fact, it would have been seen as a betrayal to Judaism.¹⁸

3. Literary Context

The book of Acts comes immediately after the four gospels and right before Paul's Epistles in the New Testament canon. It continues the story where the gospels end, following the generation of the church after the resurrection of Jesus.¹⁹ The narrative of Acts begins with Jesus' conversation with His disciples before he ascends into heaven.²⁰ In chapter two, the Holy Spirit descends onto the disciples and fulfills Jesus' promise, marking the true beginning of the apostles' ministry through Pentecost.²¹ From this point forward, the narrative roughly follows a chronological order, and the entire time covered by the book seems to be about thirty years.²²

Situational Context of Acts 8:4-25

The events of Acts 8:4-25 occur immediately after the martyr of Stephen. Stephen's death caused the believers in Jerusalem to flee, spreading out the church and therefore taking the gospel to the rest of the world.²³ The first three verses of chapter 8 describe the persecution and scattering of believers across Judea and Samaria, highlighting the tragedy that was Stephen's death and the cruelty of Saul, who was throwing believers into prison for professing faith in Christ.

¹⁶ Donald R. Potts, "Samaria, Samaritans," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1437.

¹⁷ Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2018), chapter 2.

¹⁸ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 334.

¹⁹ H.J. Cadbury, "Acts of the Apostles" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 1: 28.

²⁰ Acts 1.

²¹ Cadbury, "Acts of the Apostles," 1:29.

²² Ibid.

²³ Fred L. Fisher, "Luke," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1534.

Verses 4 through 25 shows the aftermath of the scattering of believers. The passage begins with a generic description, stating that the believers “went on their way preaching the message of good news.”²⁴ However, Luke then proceeds to tell the specific story of Philip and how he healed many from both physical and spiritual ailments, bringing great joy to the people of Samaria.

The fact that Luke tells of the conversion of Samaritans as a direct result of the church’s spreading shows that he is following the model of Jesus’ command in Acts chapter 1. Before ascending into heaven Jesus tells His disciples, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”²⁵ The chapters preceding told stories of the gospel reaching Jerusalem, and now this passage tells of the church traveling to Samaria where the gospel changes lives and heals Samaritans.

Luke continues the pattern with the chapters that follow as well. The story immediately after Acts 8:4-25 tells of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, and how the Lord used Philip to explain Isaiah chapter 53 and to baptize the eunuch. Not only was the gospel reaching Samaria, but The Lord used Philip to continue his mission to the ends of the earth as well. Acts chapter 9 tells of Saul’s conversion and name change to Paul, and the rest of the book tells of his missionary journeys around the world.

Character Context of Acts 8:4-25

The main characters of this passage are Philip, Peter and John, and Simon the sorcerer. Philip was a deacon-evangelist who based his ministry in Samaria.²⁶ He was among those who traveled to Samaria as a result of Stephen’s death and the scattering of Christians from Jerusalem.²⁷ Acts chapter 8 features Philip’s ministry to two parties: Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch. After he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, he went to Caesarea, where Luke stops keeping track of him until Paul stays with him during his last journey to Jerusalem.²⁸

In verse 14 of this passage, Peter and John come into the picture as one unit.²⁹ Both Peter and John were part of the original twelve disciples, and they remained leaders within the early church after Jesus’ ascension into heaven. Peter focused mainly on Palestine and the Jerusalem

²⁴ Acts 8:4

²⁵ Acts 1:8.

²⁶ Robert G. Gromacki, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker House Books, 1974), 164

²⁷ F. Scott Spencer, *The Portrait of Philip in Acts: A Study of Roles and Relations* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 26-27.

²⁸ Paul Powell, “Philip,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1288.

²⁹ Acts 8:14

church and became known as “apostle to the Jews”.³⁰ John appears three times in Acts, each time alongside Peter.³¹

Simon the sorcerer was a man who practiced magic in Samaria, specifically demonic powers.³² The people of Samaria went so far as to give Simon the title “the Great Power of God,” showing that they are believing in Simon as a divine being himself.³³ Simon uses his powers for his own glory, whereas when Philip comes into Samaria, he uses miracles to point the people back to The Lord.³⁴

4. Paragraph Analysis

Paragraph one consists of verses 4 through 8. The theme of this paragraph is that when Philip brought the gospel to the people of Samaria, this directly resulted in signs of healing and abundant joy. As Philip preached the good news of the Messiah, the crowds followed him, and he demonstrated the power of the gospel by performing miracles of both physical and spiritual healing.

Verses 9 through 13 make up paragraph two, and in these verses Luke introduces the reader to Simon. The theme of this paragraph states that God’s power is greater than that of man. At first, the people are drawn to Simon, even deifying him, but when Philip gives them a glimpse of the miracles of God, they believe and are baptized. Even Simon himself believes and begins following Philip, recognizing that the power Philip possesses is greater than his own.

Verses 14 through 23 bring Peter and John into the story and make up paragraph three. In this paragraph, we see that Simon’s motivation for following Philip was actually more for his own gain rather than because he believed the gospel. The theme of this paragraph is that one cannot purchase the power of the Holy Spirit for personal gain. Simon attempted to purchase the gifts of the Holy Spirit rather than accept them freely, and he shows that though his faith seemed genuine in verse 13, he still fell into the patterns of his old life. Peter and John rebuke Simon for attempting to buy the Holy Spirit’s gifts, and Simon is unable to join them on the rest of their mission to Samaria.

The last paragraph consists of verses 24 through 25, and it records Simon’s response to Peter and John’s reprimand. Simon asks them to pray for him, and Peter and John return back to Jerusalem evangelizing. The theme of this paragraph highlights that sin hinders us from fully

³⁰ Steven L. Cox, “Peter,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1282.

³¹ R. Alan Culpepper. “John” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003.), 932

³² John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (SP Publications, 1983), 372.

³³ Acts 4:10

³⁴ Stanley E. Porter, “Magic in the Book of Acts,” in *A Kind of Magic: Understanding Magic in the New Testament and Its Religious Environment*, ed. Michael Labhan and Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolt (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 121, EbscoHost.

participating in God’s mission. Through Simon asked for prayer, his attitude still kept him from evangelizing with Peter and John because he was left behind.

5. Verse Analysis

In verses 4 through 8, it is important to note that Philip went down to Samaria, proclaiming the good news of the Messiah to the Samaritans. Not only did the Samaritans listen to Philip “with one mind,” but they found joy and healing in what he was proclaiming. The fact that Philip traveled to Samaria shows that though the death of Stephen scattered in apostles, they refused to stop preaching the Gospel, even in the places where they could have faced hatred, such as Samaria.³⁵

In verses 9 through 13, Luke draws strong distinctions between two types of magic: the sorcery of Simon and the miracles of Philip. The main difference between Simon and Philip’s magic is that Simon focused on giving all of the attention to himself while Philip pointed his miracles back to God.³⁶ When he writes about the “magic” of Simon, he highlights Simon’s desire to manipulate the power of God for his own purposes. However, Luke points out that the ultimate purpose of the “miracles” of Philip is to glorify God and provide access to the gospel.³⁷ Philip is empowered by the Holy Spirit and recognizes that the power he evokes is not his own. Not only that, but it is a free gift available to everyone, not just to one person as is the case with Simon’s magic.³⁸

Things take an interesting turn when Peter and John come onto the scene in verses 14 through 17. These verses state that the Holy Spirit did not come down onto the Samaritans until Peter and John laid hands upon them, but why did the Samaritans have to wait for Peter and John in order to receive the Spirit if they had already been baptized by Philip? The believers in Samaria needed to wait so the Jewish and Samaritan church could be unified into one body. When Peter and John came and saw that the Samaritans’ faith was legitimate, they could unite as one church body and work together.

However, Simon the Sorcerer is the unique outlier among the Samaritan believers because Peter and John have to rebuke him starting in verses 18 through 25. In these verses, Simon attempts to manipulate the power of the Holy Spirit by purchasing it for his own selfish gain. In the past, Simon used his sorcery for his own gain, and he tries to do the same thing with the Holy Spirit because he falls back into his power-hungry ways. Because of this, Peter actually curses Simon and tells him to repent rather than laying hands on him. This episode demonstrates

³⁵ V.J. Samkuty, *The Samaritan Mission in Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 131, EbscoHost.

³⁶ Michael Becker Máyoi, “Astrologers, Ecstatics, Deceitful Prophets: New Testament Understanding in Jewish and Pagan Context,” in *A Kind of Magic: Understanding Magic in the New Testament and Its Religious Environment*, ed. Michael Labhan and Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolt, (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 106. Ebscohost.

³⁷ Porter, “Magic in the Book of Acts,” 121.

³⁸ Hans-Josef Klauk, *Magic and Paganism in Early Christianity: The World of the Acts of the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 19

that the power of the Holy Spirit cannot be bought and used for selfish purposes, for it brings glory to God alone.

Simon's response in verse 24 shows no sign of repentance, but rather he seems fearful of the consequences of his actions because he asks Peter to pray that "nothing you have said may happen to me."³⁹ This shows that Simon is more concerned with the repercussions of his sin rather than actually repenting of the sin itself, and because of his lack of true repentance, Peter and John continue on their Samaritan mission, leaving him behind.

6. Theme

The overall theme of Acts 8:4-25 is that no race, baptism, or monetary value can bring salvation to any person, and through the example of the Samaritans and Simon the magician, Luke presents this theme to his audience.

By starting out talking about the scattering of believers into Samaria, Luke challenges the racial prejudices of his Jewish audience towards the Samaritans. In order for the Samaritans to receive the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter and John must humble themselves as Jews and lay hands on them, demonstrating that they are now brothers and sisters in Christ together. Not only that, but by portraying Philip's healings in a similar manner to those of Jesus and the apostles, Luke gives legitimacy to Philip's ministry to the Samaritans and demonstrates to his Jewish audience that the gospel is for all people, and the Samaritans were also included in God's salvation plan.⁴⁰

Not only does Luke write about Philip preaching the Gospel to the Samaritans, but he portrays the Samaritans both listening and accepting the gospel. The Samaritans believed what Philip said and were baptized as a result, and even Simon the magician is included in the baptisms. However, as Luke shows later in the story, just because someone was baptized does not necessarily indicate salvation. Philip baptized Simon, but Simon still did not fully understand the power of the Holy Spirit and fell back into his old selfish ways. He still desired personal glory above all other things, and Peter and John called him out on it. Simon's baptism did not bring about his salvation, only by giving up his own desire for self-glorification was that going to be possible. As Luke shows in verse 24, Simon never seems to truly repent but rather still focuses on how Peter and John's curse affects him alone.

The third aspect of the overall theme is that no monetary value can purchase salvation. In verse 18, Simon tries to offer Peter and John money for the Holy Spirit's power because he desires the authority that the apostles possess. Peter responds both by cursing Simon and money because the idea that one can buy the Holy Spirit's power diminishes its essential nature as a gift from God. No amount of money could ever equal what the Holy Spirit is worth.

In conclusion, the theme of this passage states that the gospel of Jesus Christ transcends racial barriers and can only be attained through faith, not by good works or money. The example of the Samaritan mission relates to the modern church today because just like Simon, we so often try to manipulate the power of God through our earthly works. We try to be "good enough" to earn our salvation when in reality our debt is already paid. Not only that, but racial prejudices still run rampant among the local church to this day. Yet, the gospel is for all people, and if the

³⁹ Acts 8:24.

⁴⁰ Samkutty, *The Samaritan Mission in Acts*, 157.

Jews and Samaritans could overcome their differences for the sake of the gospel, surely the local church today can as well.

7. Word Study

βαπτίζω

Within Acts 8:4-25, *βαπτίζω* or a form of it appears three times, once referring to Simon's baptism and twice in reference to the Samaritans.⁴¹ This Greek word for the English term "baptize" is a variation of *baptein*, which means "dip frequently or intensively, plunge, immerse."⁴² Two distinct meanings for *βαπτίζω* are evident in the New Testament. The first refers to the religious action of baptism in water, such as in the case of John the Baptist.⁴³ John's baptism was one of repentance in preparation for the baptism of identification with the church, and the true meaning of baptism is only understood through the death and resurrection of Christ.⁴⁴ K.S. Wuest specifically references Romans 6, stating that, Paul is referring to "the introduction or placing of a person or thing into a new environment or into union with something else so as to alter its condition or its relationship to its previous environment or condition."⁴⁵ This passage is a prime example of how *βαπτίζω* can possibly refer to a metaphorical baptism rather than a literal definition of dipping.⁴⁶

The second meaning of *βαπτίζω* in the New Testament describes the literal ritual of baptism as an initiation into the early Christian church. In this definition, *βαπτίζω* refers to the ceremony as a whole, including the specific action of dipping in water.⁴⁷ This practice occurred from the time of the Pentecost and continues today, and it is linked with repentance and reception of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸

This is the meaning which Luke refers to in Acts 8. Each time that the word *βαπτίζω* appears, it is referring to the New Testament concept of initiation into the local church. The act of baptism occurs after Simon and the other Samaritans show interest in following Christ, demonstrating Philip's symbolic welcoming them into the church with him. Baptism in this passage, however, does not necessarily imply belief on the part of the person being baptized. In

⁴¹ Acts 8:12-16.

⁴² Lars Hartman, "Baptism," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:583.

⁴³ Howard Marshall, "The Meaning of the Word Baptize", 8.

⁴⁴ J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney, "Baptism," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 163.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 238.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Howard Marshall, "The Meaning of the Word Baptize," 9.

⁴⁸ W.F. Flemington, "Baptism" in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*

the case of Simon, when Peter and John arrive to Samaria, they denounce him for his unbelief and desire to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁹ Simon desired the power that the Holy Spirit could give him, not the Spirit himself, but even though his belief was misguided, he still participated in the process of baptism.

11. Outline

- I. General Description of the scattering of believers
 - a. Believers preach the word wherever they go
 - b. The Gospel begins to spread outside of Jerusalem
- II. Specific story of Philip going to Samaria - the gospel reaches to all people
 - a. Philip performs miracles and signs
 - b. Samaritans are healed physically and spiritually
 - c. Philip preaching the gospel brings joy to the Samaritans
- III. Simon the sorcerer - the power of the gospel is greater than that of man
 - a. The people of Samaria deify Simon because of his magic
 - b. When Philip comes preaching the gospel, the people recognize that the miracles of Philip are greater than those of Simon
 - c. The people, including Simon, believe in Jesus Christ and are baptized
- IV. Peter and John come from Jerusalem to observe the happenings in Samaria - the power of the Gospel transcends racial prejudices
 - a. The believers had been baptized, but they had not received the Holy Spirit yet
 - b. Peter and John lay hands on Samaritan believers and they receive the Holy Spirit
- V. Simon's Interaction with Peter and John - the power of the Holy Spirit cannot be bought with money
 - a. Simon offers Peter and John money in exchange for the powers of the Holy Spirit
 - b. Peter rebukes Simon and curses both him and his money
 - c. Peter calls on Simon to repent
- VI. Simon is left behind in Samaria
 - a. Simon asks for prayer, but he is mainly concerned with the consequences of his sin rather than the sin itself
 - b. Peter and John return to Jerusalem, continuing to preach the Gospel throughout Samaria as they go back

12. Homiletical Outline

- I. **Theme: no race, baptism, or monetary value can bring salvation to any person**
- II. With the scattering of believers as a result of persecution, the gospel began to spread across the region, following the pattern of Acts 1:8
 - a. first starting in Jerusalem, here in chapter 8 we see the Gospel reaching the people of Samaria
 - b. Who are the Samaritans?

⁴⁹ Acts 8:20-23.

- i. Explain the racial tensions between Samaritans and Jews
 - ii. **the point: the fact that the Jews were going to the Samaritans shows that the gospel transcends racial barriers and should be available to all people no matter what**
 - c. Not only is the gospel reaching the Samaritans in general, but Luke gives a specific example of the conversion of Simon the sorcerer, who was previously using his magic to highlight his own power and bring glory to himself
 - i. Simon is baptized, but that doesn't change his attitude
 - ii. He still tries to use the power of the Holy Spirit to gain authority because he is power-hungry. He wants the same authority that Peter and John have to lay hands and bestow the Spirit upon people
 - iii. **The point: Therefore, even though Simon was baptized by Philip, that does not necessarily imply a repentant heart, and he ultimately falls back into his old ways.**
 - d. Peter and John curse and rebuke Simon for his attempt to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit with money
 - i. **The point: the power of the Holy Spirit cannot be reduced to a mere earthly transaction. It requires a repentant heart, which Simon was lacking even after Peter rebukes him.**
- III. Application and Challenge
 - a. The example of the Samaritan mission relates to the modern church today because just like Simon, we so often try to manipulate the power of God through our earthly works. We try to be "good enough" to earn our salvation when in reality our debt is already paid.
 - b. Not only that, but racial prejudices still run rampant among the local church to this day. Yet, the gospel is for all people, and if the Jews and Samaritans could overcome their differences for the sake of the gospel, surely the local church today can as well.
 - c. Questions for challenge:
 - i. Who are you prejudiced against? Are you actively sharing the gospel of Christ with them? If not, how can you begin doing so?
 - ii. Are you stuck in a routine of trying to earn your salvation through your works or even through your money? How can you learn to rely solely on The Lord for your salvation and not on your own efforts?
- IV. Desired Audience Response
 - a. My desire is that the audience takes a look into their own lives and motivations for desiring the power of the Holy Spirit. I want them to gain repentant hearts and to recognize that there is nothing they can do to earn their salvation. I want them to learn from the example of Simon and recognize that they must come to the Lord with a repentant heart, not trying to earn his favor with money or works.
 - b. I also want the audience to examine their hearts and recognize who they might be prejudiced against, whether that be consciously or not. I want them to begin to see specifically that racial prejudices exist in our churches still, and if Philip, Peter, John, and the other believers of Acts 8 could overcome those prejudices for the sake of the gospel, the modern local church can as well.

13. Commentary Comparison

The New American Commentary

One new insight which this commentary expands upon is the idea that the Samaritans had their own viewpoints concerning the coming Messiah. The Samaritans labeled their messiah the *taheb*, and he would restore the true place of worship on Mt. Gerazim.⁵⁰ This would only reinforce the Jewish dislike towards the Samaritans because they would have seen them, not only as culturally inferior, but as heretics as well.

When Philip came onto the scene and began preaching “the Messiah” to them, this would mean that he had to show them the error of their old ways. When the Samaritans believed Philip’s preaching, they not only accepted the gospel but they rejected their old mentality and embraced a Jewish Messiah.⁵¹

This commentary also provides more insight into Simon’s mentality concerning the purchasing of the powers of the Holy Spirit. Trading secrets of sorcery for money was common for this culture, so Simon’s attempt to pay Peter and John would not have been out of his character.⁵² This shows more clearly that Simon completely misunderstood the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is more than human magic, and it cannot be treated as just another commercial trick.

The International Critical Commentary

One thing which this commentary discusses is what exactly Luke meant when Peter and John laid hands on the Samaritans to bestow the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Analyzing the Greek, C.K. Barrett points out that there must have been some sort of outside sign for Simon to physically see the results of the Holy Spirit’s power.⁵³ Barrett explains this by showing that the baptized Samaritans, while still believers before Peter and John arrived, did not receive the “charismatic phenomena of inspiration.”⁵⁴ When Simon saw the physical change in the people whom Peter and John touched, he wanted that same power.

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary

Something which this commentary highlights is Luke’s purpose in including the accounts of Philip and Peter and John’s ministries to Samaria within the same passage. It seems that Philip has no actual interaction with the other two disciples, yet they all have separate encounters

⁵⁰ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary 26 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 214.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 215.

⁵² *Ibid*, 219.

⁵³ C.K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles Vol. 1*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 412.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

with Simon and it seems that Peter and John's ministry builds off of Philip's. According to Longman and Garland, Luke writes in this way to emphasize the continuity and unity within the early church.⁵⁵ While some propose that Luke is minimizing the ministry of Philip in favor of that of Peter and John, Luke is actually validating Philip's ministry by showing that Peter and John desired to continue it.⁵⁶

Another issue which this commentary addresses deals with the Samaritans' reception of the Holy Spirit. Longman and Garland ask the question, "What if both the logical and chronological relationships of conversion...had been fully expressed in this case?"⁵⁷ They argue that had Philip been the one to bestow the Holy Spirit's gifts, the church in Jerusalem might not have taken the Samaritans' conversion as seriously because he was not viewed as highly as Peter and John.⁵⁸ Therefore, God withheld the Holy Spirit until Peter and John could arrive, ensuring both the spread of the Gospel to Samaria and the acceptance of the new Samaritan believers by the church in Jerusalem.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Richard N. Longnecker, *Luke - Acts Vol. 10*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 2012), 840.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

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