

Introduction.....	2
A City Under Deception (Acts 8:4-11).....	4
The Shocking Conversion & The Great Transgression (Acts 8:12-19)	9

The Strange Case of Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:4-24)

Pastor Gene Giguere, August 16, 2026

Reading

“And Saul approved of his [Stephen’s] execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Philip Proclaims Christ in Samaria

⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much joy in that city.

Simon the Magician Believes

⁹ But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great.” ¹¹ And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." ²⁴ And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

²⁵ Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans."

Introduction

- 1) Church, there is a dangerous lie wafting through some corridors of the modern Christian Church, or, perhaps, a dangerous misconception.

It is the comfortable – but ultimately crazy – idea that once we cross the line of faith – once we ‘say the prayer’ and, perhaps, step into the waters of baptism – our old sinful way of thinking just vanishes and gives way to a new God-inspired thought-life forever!

But the Word of God paints a far more sobering reality. The Christian life is a fierce, daily battlefield between *a newly justified spirit* and *an unrenewed mind*.

The Apostle Paul warns of this tension in **Romans 7:22–23**, saying, “For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.” That’s the true picture of the believer’s post-salvation state!

This morning, I want to begin talking about *deserved* suffering – the suffering we bring upon ourselves by refusing to grow, or continuing to say ‘no’ to the Holy Spirit.

- 2) When we sin, we have the means of recovering our fellowship with Jesus in confession. However, when we remain in sin – when we live in continual, unrepentant sin – we grieve the Holy Spirit (**Ephesians 4:30**). And if we allow our rebellion against God to continue, eventually, we quench the Holy Spirit – we pour water on His fire (**1 Thessalonians 5:19**).

Grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit are two distinct ways that we can hinder the Spirit’s work. Just as one can grieve a loved one by breaking his or her heart, a believer can grieve the Spirit by metaphorically breaking His heart.

I think the idea of God ‘grieving’ is an anthropopathism,¹ but it communicates accurately the Spirit’s displeasure. We grieve the Spirit by choosing worldly desires over His leading. And when we do, we disrupt our fellowship with Him and hinder the production of the Spirit’s fruit.

While grieving the Spirit is largely *active* – brought about by sinful thoughts or actions – quenching the Spirit is largely *passive*: we embrace the sin we’ve chosen to live in and we keep on ignoring the Spirit’s work in our life. We fail to respond to the Spirit’s conviction to repent.

This, of course, does not cause us to lose our salvation, nor God’s indwelling presence in us, but it does cause us to lose joy, and peace, and self-control, and temperance, and kindness – all fruits of the Spirit. And furthermore, it presents us as candidates for divine discipline. And that is an astonishingly dangerous place for a believer to be.

- 3) We’ll see *how* in good time, but we’re getting ahead of ourselves. This morning, I want to do a character study of someone who is a real character! He’s often misunderstood in one very important way. He’s also *under*-studied.

But his story points up a very important truth about undeserved suffering: one that we’ll get to this morning – as well as a 2000-year-old controversy. Today,

¹ An anthropopathism is figure of speech which ascribes to God a human characteristic or emotion which He does not possess.

we are going to look into a biblical mirror. We are going to travel to the ancient, spiritually confused streets of Samaria to meet a man named Simon.

He's a man who Christian writers – from the Church Father so beloved modern-day teachers – tell us was a monster, a fake, and a hollow hypocrite. The Apostle Peter roto-tilled up one side of him and down the other in what is perhaps the most terrifying Apostolic rebuke to be found in Scripture.

But there are secrets to be found when we lift the veil of tradition and execute a word-by-word exegesis of the Text. When we look closely at the raw, literal grammar through which it pleased God to tell this story, we uncover a much deeper – and infinitely more complicated – story.

- 4) What if Simon the Sorcerer, or Simon Magus, wasn't an outsider trying to sneak into the Church. What if Simon was a brand-new, uninstructed, carnal believer who brought his old, toxic world into his new life with God?

And, if Simon was a true believer who stumbled into spiritual catastrophe, then his story is not a warning to the unsaved world, it's an urgent, flashing red light for every believer within the hearing of my voice – the preacher included!

A City Under Deception (Acts 8:4-11)

- 1) Now, to understand Simon, we have to understand the soil he ministered in. The Book of Acts tells us that persecution had scattered the Church out of Jerusalem, save the Apostles.

Philip the Evangelist went “down” to a racially mixed, religiously-confused region called Samaria (**Acts 8:1–5**). We've developed before the idea that the Jews hated the Samaritans – so much so that they would inconvenience themselves to travel around it rather than through it. The Philip in view here was one of the seven deacons chosen in **Acts 6:5**.^{2 3 4}

² Munck, Johannes, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Anchor Bible*, Revised by William F. Albright and C. S. Mann (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), *ad loc.*

³ Cheng, Belinda, and Robert Stutzman, *An Exegetical Summary of Acts 1–14*, Exegetical Summaries (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2017), p. 235.

⁴ Packer, J. W., *The Acts of the Apostles: Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), *ad loc.*

C.K. Barrett explicitly points out this is *not* the Apostle Philip.⁵

Philip the Deacon, or Philip the Evangelist was a Grecian Jew and therefore perhaps more broad-minded than some of the Aramaic-speaking Jews in Israel (cf. **6:1**); and so, off he went to the Samaritans.⁶

Samaria is north of Jerusalem, but Luke tells us that Philip “went down” because Samaria is lower in elevation than Jerusalem. The Samaritans are a syncretistic people who hold to a modified version of Scripture and are deeply open to superstitious, occultic practices.

✠ Unlike the Jews, they accept only the Pentateuch (the first five books of Moses, or the Torah) as Holy Scripture.

✠ Furthermore, they believe that Mount Gerizim is the sacred place chosen by God for worship (**John 4:20**). To this day, Samaritans still worship on Mt. Gerizim. It remains the absolute center of the Samaritan religion and is considered by that community to be the holiest place on Earth. The Jews, on the other hand, believe that Mount Zion/Jerusalem is the place chosen by God for worship; it’s there they built their Temple.

But now comes Philip, preaching the true Gospel of Jesus Christ! And the result was miraculous!

“The crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much joy in that city” (**8:6-8**).

For a very long time, Samaria had been under the psychological and spiritual sway of one man. His name was Simon – he’s often called Simon Magus or Simon the Sorcerer. Look at verses **9** through **11**:

“But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest,

⁵ Barrett, C. K., *The Acts of the Apostles, A Shorter Commentary* (London & New York: T & T Clark, 2002), *ad loc.*

⁶ Toussaint, Stanley D., “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), II:372.

saying, 'This man is the power of God that is called Great.' And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.”

OK, let’s take a closer look at this. Luke says he “practiced magic.” This translates the present active participle of a single Greek word, **μαγεύω**. The participle form here indicates *an ongoing practice* – in this case, *a career in professional sorcery*.

In the ancient world, a **μάγος** could refer to:

A Persian (and later Babylonian) wise man or priest, or

An expert in astrology – especially one who sought to use astrology to manipulate supernatural forces, or

An authority in the interpretation of dreams or omens, or

A practitioner of various other occultic dark arts – particularly one who was practiced in the use of incantations control forces in the spirit realm.⁷

But a **μάγος** can also refer to an out-and-out fraud, a cheat, a huckster. So, one scholarly view is that Simon was simply a charlatan who practiced magic for personal gain – that much like an early American snake-oil salesman, he sold charms for healing and divination. Or perhaps he developed magical formulae derived from the various mystic cults which thrived in the Hellenistic world.⁸

So, what *kind* of a ‘sorcerer’ was Simon? The Bible doesn’t tell us much. Only that, whatever kind of magic it was, it *amazed* people.

The word “amazed” is a strong word; it translates **ἐξίστημι**, which means to enter a state of mental displacement because of something one cannot understand. In other words, it means to *confuse* or *astound*, to be *knocked out of one’s normal state of mind*, or to *experience a “feeling of astonishment mingled*

⁷ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 608.

⁸ Silva Moisés and Merrill Chapin Tenney, in *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, Q-Z* (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 2009), p. 1092.

*with fear caused by events which are miraculous, extraordinary, or difficult to understand.”*⁹

Whatever Simon was working at, it seriously unnerved people! And no one was more active in promoting Simon’s image as a professional ‘astonisher’ than Simon himself: he liked to tell people “that he himself was somebody great” (**Acts 8:9b**).

And, you know what? *They totally bought into the legend.* Verse **10-11** says, “They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘This man is the power of God that is called Great.’”¹¹ And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic.”

Be careful of self-promoters – people who will tell you all about their talents and all they’ve done. A lack of humility in a believer is always a sign of immaturity. The wisest man who ever lived – save our Lord – wrote: “Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth; an outsider, and not your own lips” (**Proverbs 27:2**). This is a charge to avoid boasting, talking about our own accomplishments. It’s a call to let our actions speak for themselves – to live our lives before the Lord and let others notice our hard work and godly character naturally.

In **Proverbs 25:27**, Solomon warned that it’s “not good to eat much honey, nor is it glorious to seek one’s own glory.” As one man put it, “Only arrogant and insecure people feel the need to toot their own horn.”¹⁰ Self-promotion is simply gross; it’s an instant turn-off. Furthermore, it’s dangerous!

Why? Because, in **Luke 14:11**, Jesus warned, “All those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Who are those in the New Testament who loved the praise of men? *The Pharisees.* **John 12:43** says of them, “They loved human praise more than praise from God.”

⁹ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 350.

¹⁰ Houdmann, S. Michael, ‘What is the value of letting another man praise you (Proverbs 27:2)?’; <https://www.gotquestions.org/let-another-man-praise-you.html>

The apostle Paul taught that “when people commend themselves, it doesn’t count for much” (**2 Corinthians 10:18a**, NLT). And even Jesus (!) said OF HIMSELF, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me” (**John 8:54**). So be very careful of self-promoters!

Instead, pay attention to those who continually point *away* from themselves and *toward Jesus*. Paul could have gone on and on about his gifts and accomplishments. But what did he say? “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (**Galatians 6:14a**).

If we boast in anything, let it be that we have come to know the Lord.

Jeremiah 9:23–24: The Lord said, “Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight.”

- 2) Well, the Samaritans paid no heed to Solomon and Jeremiah; they bought into Simon’s self-promotion hook, line and sinker! They saw him as someone great, and they paid attention to him because he’d dazzled them for a very long time (**Acts 8:11**).

However, the text doesn’t tell us *how* he dazzled them. Scholars debate what Simon’s magic actually entailed. It is probably historically inaccurate to describe Simon as a magus or magician, since there is no evidence in Acts that Simon performed any “magical” deeds.¹¹

What is clear from the narrative is that Simon’s powers—whatever they were—paled in comparison to the ‘real’ power of the apostolic miracles! Simon may have astounded people as Philip did, but the wonders of Simon were clearly inferior to those of Philip. So much so that Simon – the ‘amazer’ – was himself was ‘amazed’ by what Philip was doing through the power of God the Holy Spirit.

He recognized that Philip was operating in *true power*, not trickery or illusion. Philip manifested the true power of God, while Simon was not all that people

¹¹ Litwa, M. David, *Simon of Samaria and the Simonians, Contours of an Early Christian Movement* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2024), pp. 46-47.

thought he was. Nonetheless, Luke writes that Simon did all of this, “saying that he himself was somebody great.”

And it worked for him! The Samaritans gave him a semi-divine title, calling him “the Great Power of God” (ἡ δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ). To them, *he was the physical embodiment of God's power on earth.*

And here’s the thing: he *liked* the stage; he *loved* the applause; he *treasured* the intoxicating feeling of being seen as an elite conduit of supernatural, God-like power. These verses describe a person who held spiritual dominion over people thru the ‘wonders’ he performed – whether real or bogus.

The Shocking Conversion & The Great Transgression (Acts 8:12-19)

- 1) But then, the true Gospel arrived with Philip. He began preaching Jesus to them and backing it up with manifestations of true divine power. God was performing signs through him. Demonic spirits came flying out of people *screaming!*

Acts 8:7 says, “Unclean spirits [πνεύματα ἀκάθαρτα, *demonic entities*], crying out with a loud voice [*screaming!* βοῶντα φωνῇ μεγάλῃ], came out of many who had them.”

These ‘loud shrieks’ (βοῶντα φωνῇ μεγάλῃ) “confirmed that a miraculous liberation from evil spirits had taken place.”¹² Furthermore, those who were “paralyzed” or “lame” (crippled) were healed. And the word “many” (πολλοί) occurs twice in verse 7: The “unclean spirits” came out of “MANY” shrieking as they were forcibly evacuated, and “MANY” who were paralyzed or lame were healed.

“The repetition of the word “many” (πολλοί) indicates that miraculous healings were not isolated events but frequent occurrences.”¹³

¹² Schnabel, Eckhard J., *Acts*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Expanded Digital Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), pp. 406–7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Schnabel, *Acts*, pp. 406–7.

These were visible miracles. And what was the result? JOY! Pure joy! That's what happens when the Gospel arrives! Verse **8** simply says, "So there was much joy in that city!"

"Since the miracles resulted in a large number of people experiencing relief from ailments that had afflicted them, presumably, for many years, there was "great joy" (πολλή χαρά) among the inhabitants of the city."¹⁴

So, the progression goes like this:

✠ The crowds listened to Philip's presentation of salvation in the name of Jesus Christ (**Acts 8:6**);

✠ Then miracles occurred (**Acts 8:7**);

✠ Then the people rejoiced (**Acts 8:8**).

2) So, the people took notice of how God was working in Philip. And *Simon* noticed. Let's continue in verse **12**:

"But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."

But hold the phone! Verse **13**, shockingly, says this:

"Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed."

We'll return to this, but the story continues:

"Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit."

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, Schnabel, *Acts*, pp. 406–7.

✝ Now, what we're witnessing here is what scholars call *the Samaritan Pentecost*.

The Book of Acts is a transitional book. The *Jewish Pentecost* came in **Acts 2**. The *Samaritan Pentecost* came in **Acts 8**. The *Gentile Pentecost* came in **Acts 10**.

✝ Now the Jews and Samaritans were very polarized. If the Samaritans had been saved and started their own independent church without the Jerusalem Apostles, a permanent, racial rift would have fractured the early Christian church from its inception.

✝ And so, God withheld the Spirit until Peter and John arrived to validate the Samaritans faith and authenticate their part in Christ's Body. **Ephesians 4:3** instructs believers to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Having the Apostles (remember, Philip was a deacon) here to oversee the bringing of the Samaritans into the Church brought it an important, Apostolic credibility.

✝ As soon as the Apostles laid their hands on these ne Samaritan believers, the Holy Spirit fell upon them with Pentecost-like visible manifestations (**Acts 8:14–17**, matching **Acts 2** and **Acts 19**).

3) But then this: ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

✝ Simon stood watching this from the sidelines and knew this was *real* power! And when Simon saw this external, repeatable ritual that brought the Holy Spirit down upon these new believers, I think the decades of his old, unrenewed occultic programming kicked back in.

✝ Notice that Simon didn't ask to receive the Holy Spirit for his own holiness, his own comfort, or his own brokenness.

He offered them "money" to buy an apostolic office. The word translated "money" is *χρῆμα*, which can refer to any kind of valuable thing,

including currency or even property.¹⁵ But, make no mistake about it, he was asking Peter and John (of all people!) to give him the authority to dispense the power of the Holy Spirit – he said, “Give me this power [ἐξουσία – ‘authority’] also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”

- ✠ He saw the Apostles not as the holy messengers they were, but perhaps superior occult practitioners who possessed a high-level trade secret.
- ✠ All of this caused Simon’s past to flood in. He wanted his old crown back; he wanted to be ‘somebody great’ again. He missed being called “the power of God” (**Acts 8:10**). And here, he makes a VERY big mistake!
- ✠ By the way, have you heard of the sin of *simony*? Simony is the sin of trying to buy or sell spiritual things. This includes trying to purchase a position of leadership in the Church. Or, in the Roman Catholic Church, it even includes the sale of religious items for profit, such as relics. And where does the word ‘simony’ come from? Its name of course, comes from Simon – *this* Simon, Simon Magus – who offered money to the Apostles to buy the authority to dispense the Holy Spirit.

So, what happened next?

²⁰ Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.”

There’s a lot to talk about here. We’ll unpack it all next time!

¹⁵ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 1089.