

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate the study of Acts 8:9-25 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the passage. This handout can be used for personal study or community group conversation. (I hope you join a group!)

ACTS 8:9-25 ESV

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.

STRUCTURE¹

- I. Inclusio: the word of God is preached outside Jerusalem (8:4)
- II. Success in Samaria (8:5-8)
- III. Challenges in Samaria (8:9-25)
 - a. The challenge of magic (8:9-13)
 - i. Simon's magic spellbinds the city (8:9-11)
 - ii. The power of God overwhelms the power of Simon (8:12-13)
 - b. The challenge of Spirit-baptism (8:14-17)
 - i. The apostles hear and Peter and John investigate (8:14)
 - ii. Explanatory comment: the Spirit had not yet fallen on them (8:15-16)
 - iii. The apostles pray and the Samaritans receive the Spirit (8:17)
 - c. The challenge of Spirit-manipulation (8:18-24)
 - i. Simon's sinful offer (8:18-19)
 - ii. Peter's dire warning (8:20-23)
 - iii. Simon's humble(?) response (8:24)
- IV. Inclusio: the word of God is preached outside Jerusalem (8:25)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

As a result of the persecution in Jerusalem, King Jesus spreads the good news across Jewish borders and then into Samaria through Philip's ministry of preaching and miracles (8:4-8). Philip enjoys widescale success, but as Acts consistently illustrates: no success in the kingdom remains unchallenged.

Verses 9 through 25 expand on verses 4 through 8 like an accordion. Philip's apparently unrivaled success faced a significant rival—Simon. His magic once captivated the city (8:9-13); people worshiped him as Yahweh (see

¹ The structure covers vv. 4-25 because this constitutes a single section, as visualized by the "inclusio" (literary "bookends") of verses 4 and 25. Since I have already preached on vv. 4-8, however, I will only cover the story of Simon (vv. 9-25) in the verse-by-verse commentary.

comments below). These verses present us with a Battle Royale, akin to Moses versus the Egyptian sorcerers or Elijah versus the prophets of Baal. The power of the Spirit overwhelms the power of Satan, with demons shrieking on their way out (8:7), people now heeding Philip's message instead of Simon's (8:12), and even Simon himself—the one who formerly "amazed" others (8:9, 11)—now "amazed" (8:13). The whole city, including Simon, believes and is baptized (8:12-13). Jesus overcomes the first challenge by superior firepower. God's power triumphs over Satan's. God makes space for Samaritans, but His kingdom offers no space for magic, idolatry, or syncretism. We enter God's kingdom by repentance.

After soaring over the first hurdle, the second one rises even higher. This time it's not Satan but God, it seems, who presents a challenge. Remember, on Pentecost the Jews had received the gift of the Spirit in proximity to their conversion (2:38-39), but here the Samaritans experience a delay (8:16). Why? The question must have confused Philip; it has confounded interpreters ever since. Pentecostals teach from this story that a "Second Blessing" of power awaits those who pray and tarry, but most evangelicals insist the Samaritan case is special. Ever since the northern tribes of Israel were overtaken by the Assyrians, they had become a mixed race—Samaritans—and they practiced a mixed religion. If Jesus had baptized these Samaritans in the Spirit at conversion, the generations-long rift between Jews and Samaritans would have likely remained. Worse, Ezekiel's prophecy about a Messiah-wrought reunification between Israel's northern and southern tribes (Samaria and Judea, respectively), could not have been fulfilled. King Jesus won't let that happen. By dispatching an apostolic delegation from Jerusalem, he forces the Samaritans to reunite with their brothers, even as they united with Christ. The unifying work of the baptism in the Spirit then seals their eternal brotherhood. What at first appeared to be a divine hurdle had instead been a divine solution to satanic division.

This "Samaritan Pentecost" creates a final challenge, however. Simon the former sorcerer has not exactly crucified his lust for power or his willingness to manipulate. Just as Peter confronted the financial sin of Ananias and Sapphira—with deadly consequences—he rebukes Simon also. Unlike them, Simon survives, but he'll perish with his money if he won't repent. By the end, he seems to welcome prayer in Jesus's name, although his spiritual status is questionable. The main point Luke conveys in this last challenge is that the power of the Holy Spirit, unlike the power of Satan, cannot be manipulated.

The church's triumph over each of these three challenges displays how King Jesus expands into new territory—satanically dark territory—by the power of the Spirit. By the Spirit, He conquers magic; by the Spirit, He conquers animosity. Ezekiel's prophecy is fulfilled, and the tribes united, through the miracle-working and baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit. To receive the Spirit's ministry, however, we must accept it on God's terms: repentance.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

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.

—"But":

- The previous verse said, "there was much joy in that city." This city (which was likely the capitol of Samaria) had accepted the gospel wholesale. The first word of verse 9 sets up the opposition. "There was much joy, BUT...."
- Even the most successful gospel campaign runs into hurdles. This one comes in the form of magic—and the greed that accompanies it.

—"a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic":

- It is from Simon that we get the word, "simony," which is the sin of buying or selling religious services (like administering communion or offering prayer), influence, or position. This practice became common during medieval times, when people bribed popes and archbishops to secure ecclesiastical offices.
- A story has been passed down throughout church history that Simon introduced a form of Gnosticism, built a large following of so-called "Simoniacs," and even curried favor by means of his magic with Emperor Nero. Supposedly, Simon claimed to mimic the ascension of Christ in the presence of both Nero and Peter, and as he ascended, Peter commanded the powers to cease, causing Simon to fall to his death. Nero, infuriated, condemned Peter to death. To me, this story sounds legendary. And I'm not sure it agrees with the trajectory of the text, although that is debated. We'll soon address whether Simon was truly saved.

- “previously”: we are not yet ready for a full exploration of Simon’s spiritual status—whether he was saved—but “previously” indicates he stopped practicing magic after he “believed” and was “baptized” (8:13). This is relevant.
- Magic in ancient times involved payments to grant favor with people, with gods, and against spirits. Payments could also secure curses. Sacred objects and rituals also played an important role. Whereas Christians see the world as governed by a God who cannot be manipulated, magicians sought to manipulate the spirit world through sacred stones and rituals, generally accompanied by long incantations.
- Magic centers the man of power; Christianity—an omnipotent God. Magic manipulates the spiritual world to affect the natural world; Christianity relates to God, who sovereignly acts upon the natural world as He chooses. Magic is about manipulating, but Christianity about relating. As Christians, we cannot even think of manipulating a God who sees through us and needs nothing. Nor would we want to. He who gave us His own Son, how will He not with Him also give us all things (Rom. 8)? We don’t need to twist the arm of a loving God to love us.
- I know of Christians who use “crystals” to pray for healing in Jesus’ name. Just because they use Jesus’s name does not mean it’s valid. This is syncretism—a mixing of religions. The point of this story is that magic and Christianity do not mix. Samaria receives the gospel, and in so doing, repudiates magic. No longer amazed by Simon’s signs, the wonders of the exalted Christ moved them to heed Philip’s words (8:6-8).
- Schreiner: “Simon symbolically stands for supernatural power struggling against the sovereignty of God. His response also shows that while Samaritans are welcome, pagan practices are disallowed. The door is open but not uncritically.”
- Schnabel: “In the ancient world, magic—what today we would call witchcraft, sorcery, or the occult—was based on the view that human beings, gods, demons, and the visible world are all connected by sympathies and antipathies in ways that can be influenced by rituals involving incantations and the manipulation of objects. Its purpose was to overcome public or private problems. Usually magic was defensive, harnessing the powers of gods or spirits in order to gain protection against diseases and demons. Active forms of magic sought victory in a race or success in sexual liaisons; the offensive use of magic against personal enemies, involving curses, was feared and often punished.”

—“Samaria”:

- Samaritans were viewed as half-breeds because they were part Jewish and part “other”—resulting from the Assyrian occupation. They also had a mixed religion that only accepted the first five books of the Bible (with some changes). Jewish people would have considered them heretical half-Jews.
- Stott: “hostility between Jews and Samaritans had lasted a thousand years. It began with the break-up of the monarchy in the tenth century BC when ten tribes defected, making Samaria their capital, and only two tribes remained loyal to Jerusalem. It became steadily worse when Samaria was captured by Assyria in 722 BC, thousands of its inhabitants were deported, and the country was repopulated by foreigners. In the sixth century BC, when the Jews returned to their land, they refused the help of the Samaritans in the rebuilding of the temple. Not till the fourth century BC, however, did the Samaritan schism harden, with the building of their rival temple on Mount Gerizim and their rejection of all Old Testament Scripture except the Pentateuch.”

—“saying that he himself was somebody great”:

- This is always a bad sign. Never follow someone who brags.
- His words reflect his magic. Both foreground humans and their power rather than God and His power.
- This statement pairs with, “This man is the Power of God that is called Great” (8:10). It appears that Simon’s claim was not just of general greatness, but of divine greatness. Some say he was claiming to be Yahweh in the flesh. In essence, he was an antichrist.
- Schreiner: “‘the Great Power of God’ was a Samaritan name for Yahweh.”

—“they all paid attention (Gk. *prosecho*) to him”:

- This is the same word used a few verses earlier: “And the crowds with one accord paid attention (Gk. *prosecho*) to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did” (8:6).
- Luke thus emphasizes that the one who once captivated a city has been displaced. Now the signs performed by Philip seize their fascination. Unlike the signs of Simon, Philip’s signs point to Jesus. They don’t point to an ordinary man.

- In their culture, the “battle for attention” was decided by power. In our culture, most people don’t even believe supernatural power exists. Our “battle for attention” is over smartphones, television, and social media. How do we regain the attention of our culture? Acts 1:8 applies no less today than it did then. We need “power” for witnessing. The power of the Holy Spirit can seize the attention of those captivated by the power of an all-pervasive media.

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 when they believed... they were baptized”:

- This is the pattern throughout Acts. First we believe; then we are baptized. We don’t baptize babies because we can’t confirm faith in them.
- The “But” of this verse indicates that faith and baptism contradicted what came before. What came before? The city was amazed by Simon’s magic and claimed he was either a god or a guru. Faith and baptism repudiated Simon’s authority in their lives, for it affirmed the unique authority of the Triune God.
- Heiser (based on 1 Pet. 3:14-22): “In effect, baptism in New Testament theology is a loyalty oath, a public avowal of who is on the Lord’s side in the cosmic war between good and evil. But in addition to that, it is also a visceral reminder to the defeated fallen angels. Every baptism is a reiteration of their doom in the wake of the gospel and the kingdom of God.... Early baptismal formulas included a renunciation of Satan and his angels for this very reason. Baptism was—and still is—spiritual warfare.”
- We see Heiser’s observation at play in the present passage. Their decision to be baptized is a loyalty oath to Jesus as their new Lord. Furthermore, it is a reminder to the satanic forces over that city that Jesus had won the allegiance of their once-loyal subjects, that their doom is certain, and that their time is short.

—“as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ”

- At what point did they believe—when they saw the signs? No. They believed when they heard Philip preach. Signs bear witness to Christ, but unless we marry their witness to ours—unless we preach—people will not receive Christ.
- This continues the theme throughout Luke’s two volumes about the importance of both demonstration and proclamation. Jesus continues “to do and teach” (1:1) from the right hand of God through His Spirit-empowered church. If we “do” but don’t “teach,” we become charismaniacs; if we “teach” but don’t “do,” we become dry and ineffective. God designed His church to be Word and Spirit. The signs of the Spirit seize attention; the preaching of the Word conceives faith.
- “good news about the kingdom of God”: the good news of God’s reign. Ever since the Fall, death reigned (Rom. 5:14), sin reigned through it (5:17), and the devil became “the ruler of this world” (Jhn. 12:31). But when John and Jesus began announcing, “the kingdom of God is at hand,” everything changed. Now Jesus reigns in life and righteousness, and the devil has been dethroned. The present story illustrates this triumph.
- The kingdom was inaugurated in the First Advent; it is consummated at the Second.
- “the kingdom of God and name of Jesus Christ”: The name of “God” in this verse is God the Father. Jesus is the king of His Father’s kingdom, reigning from His right hand, perfectly representing Him, and sovereignly administering the Father’s heart on earth as it is in heaven.

—“both men and women”:

- Luke often includes these comments about women because the gospel of the kingdom includes them in new ways. There remain differences between the sexes in terms of church and family roles (Eph. 5; 1 Tim. 2), however the Spirit has been poured out indiscriminately (Acts 2). The Gospel spreads to and through both sexes (cf. Acts 8:3—where Saul arrests women, suggesting they had effectively evangelized the Empire).
- Church leaders should feel a holy tension over this issue. If we don’t feel a tension, we’ve probably settled for an unbiblical position. On one hand, gender roles are real, but on the other, the indiscriminate outpouring of the Spirit opens new vistas. While affirming biblical distinctions in biology and role, we must wholeheartedly affirm that women can be just as Spirit-filled as men, just as gifted as men, and just as effective at expanding the kingdom of God.

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

—“Even Simon himself”: Luke highlights Simon’s conversion as a sort of trophy. It’s like Luke is saying, “God not only conquered the devil by winning over the city; He even took the devil’s trophy and showcased Simon as His own!”

—I’m playing my hand here a little bit. I believe Simon’s conversion was genuine. In saying this, however, I do so hesitantly. Interpreters are divided over this, and many disagree with me. Hesitantly, then, here are the reasons I think Simon was saved:

- Verse 9 indicates that Simon stopped practicing magic after believing and being baptized. This suggests genuine repentance.
- The same formula—“believed... baptized” describes Simon and the city in back-to-back verses. There is no indication here that Philip baptized prematurely or that Simon’s faith was of a different nature than everybody else’s.
- The language, “Even Simon himself believed” in fact suggests that his belief was of the same fabric as everyone else’s. If Simon’s faith was spurious, we might have expected him to say, “Simon claimed to believe, but...”
- “believed” can be translated “came to faith” if the tense of the verb is interpreted as an ingressive aorist (Schnabel).
- Simon “continued (Gk. *proskartereo*) with Philip,” suggesting he followed Philip in discipleship. This same word is used of real disciples in Acts 2:42, 46, and 6:4 to highlight their extreme devotion and faithfulness. Luke seems to add this phrase to suggest, “his faith was real because he had follow-through...”
- The city had been amazed (Gk. *existemi*) by Simon’s miracles (8:9, 11), but now Simon is amazed (Gk. *existemi*) by Philip’s (8:13). Luke seems to use this word to communicate that the tables have turned. The one who once amazed others was now himself amazed. The former amazement was attached to faith in Simon as a great wonder-worker. It seems likely that the latter amazement is attached to faith also (in Jesus working through Philip).
- On that note, Luke points out how Simon’s amazement came after “seeing signs and great miracles performed.” This is no different from the rest of the Samaritans who “heard and saw the signs” Philip performed (8:6). In other words, we observe the same sequence: see, hear, believe, get baptized. Since the rest of the Samaritans’ conversions were genuine (8:8; cf. 13:52 and 8:14; cf. 11:1; 17:11), it suggests that Simon’s was genuine also.

—There are also sound arguments against Simon being saved, which I will address as the story develops.

—Either way, all should agree that Luke is not clear about Simon’s spiritual status (given what happens later in the story). This suggests that Luke’s primary point is not for us to discern whether he is saved or not. In the trenches of ministry, it is not always obvious whether people are saved. Luke’s primary message is located elsewhere.

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.

—“Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God”:

- This formula repeats in 11:1, where we read, “Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of the Lord.”
- Notice the similar wording: both begin with “now”; both introduce the response of the “apostles at Jerusalem”; both speak of how they “heard” a report; both focus on the specific report that a new people group “had received the word of God.”
- These linguistic hyperlinks are the key to unlocking the mysterious question as to why the apostles had to visit Samaria. Acts 8 is something like a “Samaritan Pentecost,” while Acts 10-11 represents a sort of “Gentile Pentecost.” The good news of the Kingdom and its associated Spirit-baptism has leapt the boundary of Jerusalem Jews, invading new geography and people groups.
- Why does that help explain the apostolic “validation” in Acts 8? Because the prophets had foretold that the word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem (Isa. 2; Micah 4). These two gospel-movements would require the blessing of Jerusalem to fulfill that prophecy. In Acts 8, no apostle had been present, so Peter and John are sent; in Acts 10, Peter was present to bless the movement so no delegation was needed.

—But why did the baptism of the Spirit occur after conversion for the Samaritans and simultaneous with conversion for the Gentiles? And which of these should we consider to be the normative Christian

experience—now that we are outside the “time warp” of the first century? We are touching on a debate between Pentecostals and others. The former believe the baptism of the Spirit is a “second blessing” while others (including Convergence) believe the baptism of the Spirit is concurrent with salvation. Here’s what I said when I taught on about the baptism vs. filling of the Spirit on October 2, 2022...

- I would argue that the Samaritans required the laying on of hands by Peter and John because they were a “special case.” If God was to reunite the southern and northern tribes of Israel (Ezek. 37:15ff)—which is to say, Jerusalem/Judea with Samaria—then the Samaritans would have to submit to Jerusalem’s leadership. If the Samaritans were not blessed by the Jerusalem church, the split between them would have continued, and Ezekiel’s prophecy would not have been fulfilled. I recognize this is an inference, but it makes logical sense of related Scriptures and cultural context.
- That Samaria is a “special case” is additionally supported by Luke’s parenthetical comment:
 - *[Act 8:16-17 ESV] 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.*
 - Dr. Allison remarks: “the Samaritan experience of the delay of the Holy Spirit is an unusual, rather than typical, experience, as only an unusual experience calls for an explanatory comment.”
- I would also argue Cornelius’ story (Acts 10-11)—where Spirit-baptism occurs at conversion—is intended by Luke to be the normative experience for Christians. Here is why I say Cornelius’ experience should be considered normative.
 - Ancient authors organized their works in such a way as to communicate truth. Luke is no different. The story of Cornelius’ Spirit-baptism is told twice, in the center of the book, as an emphatic centerpiece for normative Christian experience.
 - Out of the three people groups—Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles—only the latter existed, in a sense, outside of the historical time-warp. Jews and Samaritans had experience with the God of Israel and required special attending circumstances. In a word, there are reasonable explanations for the way God poured His Spirit out in other unique situations, involving Jews and Samaritans.
 - When Paul first (wrongly) assumes the salvation of the men in Ephesus, he asks, “Did you receive the Spirit when you believed?”—because this was the normative expectation. He did not expect them to receive the Spirit after years of waiting, of “tarrying”, of fasting, etc. He expected it to occur when they believed.
 - A cross-reference with 1 Corinthians 12:13 tells us that all Christians have been baptized in the Spirit: “For we are all baptized in one Spirit, into the body of Christ.”
 - The word “baptized” or “baptism” is a word the connotes initiation. Just as water baptism is associated with conversion, so must be Spirit baptism. In short, we must not divide asunder the sign (water baptism) and the thing signified (Spirit baptism). Both are associated with conversion as part of our initiation into the faith.
 - As John Stott says, “The norm of Christian experience then, is a cluster of four things: repentance, faith in Jesus, water-baptism and the gift of the Spirit. Though the perceived order may vary a little, the four belong together and are universal in Christian initiation...” Stott goes on to explain why the Spirit fell on some believers some time after conversion: “Pentecost caught up to them.”

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."

—“saw that the Spirit was given”: there must have been some kind of supernatural display that accompanied the gift of the Spirit or else Simon could not have observed the gift of the Spirit. This occurs wherever Spirit-baptism spreads to a new people group—whether Jews (Acts 2), Samaritans (here), and Gentiles (Acts 10-11). It’s how the early church deduced that the Spirit had come upon a new people (10:44-48; 11:15-18).

- I am not suggesting that supernatural signs exclusively accompany the gift of the Spirit when new people groups receive the gospel. The group in Acts 19 is Jewish, and their Jewish brothers had already received the Spirit, yet they speak in tongues and prophesy.
- I am simply suggesting that Luke appears to emphasize supernatural display in the reception of the Spirit when a new people group is involved because this is how they knew the promise of the Father had spread.

—“offered them money... ‘Give me this power’”: this was the world Simon had lived in for many years. Money and supernatural power trafficked together.

—Simon’s concern is not merely that he might receive the baptism in the Spirit but rather that he might be able to impart it to others. In other words, he wanted to be an apostle. He had grown so accustomed to being “the man of power” that his flesh did not take kindly to being deplatformed.

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.”

—“May your silver perish with you... obtain the gift of God with money”:

- This recalls Acts 3, where Peter tells a beggar, “I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” (3:6).
- It also recalls Acts 5, where Peter calls out Ananias and Sapphira over money.
- The stories of Acts 5 and 8 contrast not only with Peter’s humble indifference to capital gain but also the radical generosity of the Jerusalem church (2:42-47; 4:32-37).
- The thread in all these stories is that greed endangers the church, but the Spirit severs our heart-tie to money and releases us for radical generosity.
- Given the echo of Ananias, to “perish” would not necessarily entail the loss of salvation. Ananias was probably saved and died under God’s discipline. I believe true believers persevere until the end by not committing apostasy and dying in such unbelief. However, I do believe that in some cases God mercifully removes a believer from this life, due to discipline, so that further harm is avoided (see 1 Cor. 11:29-32).
- But is Peter uttering a curse? Aren’t we to bless our enemies?
 - There is a fine line between uttering a curse and pronouncing that divine consequences will befall one who refuses repentance. Besides, Simon is not portrayed as an enemy to Peter, but rather as a sinner whose wickedness is revealed.
 - Schnabel: “Peter’s words imply at least the threat of curse, which in view of the call to repentance (v. 22) is a warning of serious consequences if Simon persists in the mind-set with which he has approached the apostles.”
 - This reminds me of Paul’s statement that “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the LORD will repay him according to his deeds” (2 Tim. 4:14). Paul does not wish Alexander harm, but he does predict it.
 - A more difficult text would be in Acts 13, where Paul pronounces (temporary?) blindness over a sorcerer. We’ll have to address that when we arrive there 😊

—“You have neither part nor lot in this matter”: Is Peter saying “you have no part in Christ” or “eternal salvation”? That’s reading into the text. “This matter” refers to the previous verse—purchasing supernatural and ecclesiological power. Peter is saying you can’t buy the supernatural, and you can’t buy the apostolic office. This would be an attempt to manipulate the power of God for one’s own benefit—both a sin to attempt and an impossibility to achieve.

—“for your heart is not right before God”: this could be a strong case for Simon’s conversion being false. It is quite soon after conversion that he’s already committed grievous sin. If there is a case for Simon to not be saved, it would be this:

- His heart is grievously wicked, quickly after “salvation.”
- Peter pronounces something like a curse on him.
- Peter might suggest by “if possible” that his heart is too far gone to obtain forgiveness.
- The “gall of bitterness” associates Simon with the curse in Deuteronomy (see below)—the “root of bitterness” associated with covenant unfaithfulness.
- We might have expected the “bond of iniquity” to be broken if true conversion had been present.

- Simon's request for prayer might fall short of true repentance, for it lacks the words, "I repent," and possibly concerns itself with consequences rather than righting his heart with God.

—These reasons compel many to conclude that Simon is unsaved. But I'm not convinced by them, principally because 8:9-13 so strongly suggests he is saved. Furthermore, anyone who has led a hardened sinner to Christ recognizes that character transformation is gradual. I'm thinking of a gang member I led to Christ. I'm also thinking of a drug-addicted family I saw converted. The old self dies hard. Simon had given up magic (8:9), showing signs of repentance, but pride dies harder than any other sin. Beneath the symptom that was magic, Simon wanted apostolic prestige. Finally, it's not obvious that "Pray for me" is unrepentant. While that is possible, it is equally possible that the statement reflects a personal humbling. He even asks Simon to pray "to the Lord," who in context would be the Lord Jesus. Given that Simon once considered himself a god, he ascribes that status to Jesus here.

—I would also add that the story echoes that of the Egyptian sorcerers who confronted Moses with their own magic arts, but with one stark difference. Despite the superior display of Yahweh's power, Moses's enemies do not even halfway repent. Here, however, Simon "believed" and was "baptized." This suggests a more hopeful outcome than Moses witnessed. There, Yahweh triumphed but did not win hearts. Here—if I'm right—Jesus triumphs AND wins "even" (8:13) the hardest of hearts.

—"if possible":

- These words trouble me. Why would it not be possible for Simon to be forgiven?
- This probably connects with Deuteronomy 29:16-21: *16 "You know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed. 17 And you have seen their detestable things, their idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold, which were among them. 18 Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a **root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit**, 19 one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.' This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. 20 **The LORD will not be willing to forgive him**, but rather the anger of the LORD and his jealousy will smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven. 21 And the LORD will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for calamity, in accordance with all the curses of the covenant written in this Book of the Law.*
 - As seen in the emboldened text above, Deut. 29:18 ("root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit" relates to Acts 8:23 ("gall of bitterness") and Deut. 29:20 ("The LORD will not be willing to forgive him") relates to Acts 8:22 ("if possible... forgiven").
 - Considering this, Peter seems to hold out hope that Simon is truly saved, for he insists that it is "possible"—whereas Moses in Deuteronomy says it is not possible. There, the person is not forgiven because he "blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.'" This hubris does not seem evident in Simon's request for Peter's prayer. Did Peter's rebuke humble him?
 - Of course, one could argue that "if possible" can also mean that Peter did not feel confident about Simon's spiritual status. This is true to experience. We don't always know who is saved and who isn't.

—We can't decide fully about Simon's spiritual status until we reach heaven. It's often this way. And to fixate on that issue misses the point. Luke leaves the question open.

—The biggest messages are that we can't allow the gospel to be perverted by (1) avarice or (2) syncretism. The gospel not only conquers darkness but demands purity.

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.

—Philip had already led them to Christ, but now Peter and John share their own experience ("testified").

They also feed the nascent church ("spoken the word of the Lord").

—This verse bookends verse 4, where "those scattered went about [from Jerusalem] preaching the word." Now the apostles return to Jerusalem preaching the word.

—"many villages of the Samaritans":

- The Samaritans represented the northern tribes of Israel, which Ezekiel prophesied would one day be united to the southern tribes. Ezekiel 37:15-24: *15 The word of the LORD came to me: 16 "Son of man, take a stick and write on it, 'For Judah, and the people of Israel associated with him'; then take another stick and write on it, 'For Joseph (the stick of Ephraim) and all the house of Israel associated with him.' 17 And join them one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. 18 And when your people say to you, 'Will you not tell us what you mean by these?' 19 say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am about to take the stick of Joseph (that is in the hand of Ephraim) and the tribes of Israel associated with him.*

*And I will join with it the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, that they may be one in my hand... 22 And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And **one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms.** 23 They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions. But I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God. 24 "My servant David shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd.*

- After Philip leads what was probably the capitol city of Samaria to Christ, Peter and John now preach to the rest of the northern kingdom. Jesus is the "one king" who is "over them all"—both Judah (southern tribe) and Samaria (northern tribes). He is also "My Servant David" and the "one shepherd" who leads the formerly disjointed nation. Luke portrays the evangelistic campaign in Judah/Samaria as Israel's restoration to Jesus and each other.