

What can we learn here? All of us who live for Christ can be subtly twisted by the temptations of power, our reputation, of having some other-worldly connection to God that others don't.

It's why Jesus taught his disciples:

...if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. ²⁴For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. Matthew 24:23,24

4 Things to watch out for in Body of Christ:

1. When ministry exalts a person rather than Christ.
2. When ministry draws a following with promises to solve temporal problems.
3. When ministry exercises counterfeit power.
4. When ministry is preoccupied with health and wealth.

Community Group Questions:

1. In this story are two controversial topics. How the Holy Spirit is received and when is someone saved. Can you embrace differing opinions on difficult topics?
2. How would you say the Holy Spirit has shown up in your life?
3. What do you think Luke is saying by how he closes the story in verse 25?



Sorcery in Samaria Who Gets To Speak For God? Acts 8:9-25

A man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, amazing the people of Samaria and claiming to be someone great. ¹⁰Everyone, from the least to the greatest, often spoke of him as "the Great One—the Power of God."¹¹ They listened closely to him because for a long time he had astounded them with his magic. ¹²But now the people believed Philip's message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized. ¹³Then Simon himself believed and was baptized. He began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed by the signs and great miracles Philip performed. ¹⁴When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God's message, they sent Peter and John there. ¹⁵As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new believers to receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸When Simon saw that the Spirit was given when the apostles laid their hands on people, he offered them money to buy this power. ¹⁹"Let me have this power, too," he exclaimed, "so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!" ²⁰But Peter replied, "May your money be destroyed with you for thinking God's gift can be bought! ²¹You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right with God. ²²Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil thoughts, ²³for I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin." ²⁴"Pray to the Lord for me," Simon exclaimed, "that these terrible things you've said won't happen to me!" ²⁵After testifying and preaching the word of the Lord in Samaria, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem. And they stopped in many Samaritan villages along the way to preach the Good News.

Background on the story:

Samaria had long been at odds with Israel due to the Assyrian (722BC) and the Babylonian (586BC) exiles that left the territory (Samaria) between Galilee and Judah, practicing a different form of Judaism with each religion having their own temple.

Phillip, not to be mistaken with the Apostle Phillip, left Jerusalem when persecution broke out after the killing of his fellow deacon Stephen and went to the land of Israel's enemy and purposefully began to preach the Gospel to the Samaritans.

Belief and Baptism Despite their conversion the Samaritans had not received the Holy Spirit as their Jewish brothers and sisters did back on the feast of Pentecost.

Apostles Upon hearing of the Samaritans conversion the Apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John, who when laying hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit. (most likely, though not stated, as believers first had on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem.

Simon the Sorcerer was famous for practicing sorcery, either by illusion, or demonic power or both. But when he heard Phillip preach and saw the miracles God worked through Phillip, he believed and was baptized. Later after Peter's arrival as he witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit, he offered to buy the power from Peter, and was severely rebuked for doing so.

Why did the Samaritans only receive the Holy Spirit after Peter and John arrived?

Jewish believers would have had a difficult time accepting the Samaritans without Apostolic approval, and the fact Peter and John were eye witnesses to the coming of the Holy Spirit would confirm that God's message had indeed come to the Samaritans.

The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:14-17

We see the same thing with Peter and the Gentiles in Acts 11 The Holy Spirit told me to go with them and not to worry that they were Gentiles. ... ¹⁵"As I began to speak," Peter continued, "the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he fell on us at the beginning. ¹⁷And since God gave these Gentiles the same gift he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to stand in God's way?"

Acts 11:12,15,17

Simon the Sorcerer's Story:

Can a person believe and be baptized and not be saved?

According to Jesus, it is quite possible for someone to have an initial positive response to the gospel without being saved.

The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. ²¹ But since they don't have deep roots, they don't last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God's word. ²² The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. Matthew 13:20-22

Simon's belief and baptism was a good start, to believe in Christ is first, to accept, what he says as truth. This we can assume Simon has done. Second, and more importantly, belief in Christ means to trust and rely upon Him. Putting one's complete confidence in Him. It appears Simon is attracted to the miracle power of God, above and beyond, being attracted to the message of God.

Luke's narrative isn't as interested in Simon's fate as much as Simon attempting to bring the Spirit *under human control or into some economic gain or both.*