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PHILIP THE EVANGELIST AND SIMON THE SORCERER

STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 29
ACTS 8:4-10

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We have already studied why we concluded that Saul of Tarsus was the worst sinner that ever lived, and became the greatest saint. Along with Moses, Paul gave to the world the greatest understanding of the grace of God.

Philip--The Second Deacon--The Evangelist

Philip had the gift of evangelism. Here we are going to study the Samaritan Pentecost. Up to this time it had appeared that the church was to be a Jewish monopoly. But this Scripture will indicate that Jews and Gentiles were in the same body. This Samaritan stirring by the Spirit of God is of great importance for we know of the bitter animosity which existed between the Jews and the Samaritans, and this had been building up for several hundreds of years. They despised each other, had no use for each other. Samaritans were half Jews and half Gentiles. They had been conquered by the Assyrians many hundreds of years before. Primarily the Samaritans were Elamites, and were a mixture of Persian, Median, and Assyrian blood. These people had been settled there in Samaria by the Assyrians. They had been conquered by the Assyrians in the Tigris and Euphrates River Valley and had been transported to Samaria and settled there. In 721 B.C. when the Jews were conquered by the Assyrians, they were taken out of those regions and settled in the Tigris and Euphrates River Valley. These are the so-called lost ten tribes. Jews came back from Babylonian captivity, and these people came back from Babylon also, and they were sort of a half breed people--half Jew and half Gentile. Now these half-breed Samaritans, when they are converted, they are just as much Christian as the Jews. This Samaritan Pentecost was given here to settle this question once for all. These strange things happened in Samaria to prove this point. We have had Stephen before us for some time, and we know of his greatness. Now we have Philip, the evangelist and deacon before us.

ACTS 8:5 "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them." Samaria is in the plain of Sharon, and they have a very beautiful little mountain there, and the plain of Sharon slopes down to the Mediterranean Sea. Herod the Great, who was a great builder and an engineering genius, decided to build a modern city there and dedicate it to Augustus Caesar. He called the city Sebaste, for Augustus. It was one of the most beautiful Greek cities in the world, called Samaria. It was antagonistic to the Word of God and to everything Christian. The Scripture here says Philip "kept on preaching Christ". He witnessed over and over again. People grow through knowledge of the Word of God. You can't ignore the Word of God and grow. So Philip preached messages based on the saving gospel.

ACTS 8:6 "And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." The response in Samaria was amazing. "The people with one accord" kept on giving heed. Please notice that Philip performed miracles. He was using Christ's credit card to get attention so he could preach to these people. We don't need this kind of thing today. The purpose of the miracles was not to alleviate suffering, but to establish Christ as the great Saviour and the provider of eternal life. Philip didn't allow the miracles to go to his head. If he had the "Philipites" would have been organized right there. The miracles gathered the crowd, then he preached and the people believed.

1. He was consistent in his ministry. He preached.
2. They gave heed--because of the miracles.
3. He didn't center on the miracles, but on the truth of the Gospel.

ACTS 8:7 "For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed."

Here we have emphasis on consistent witnessing. A Greek city was always filled with demons. They had a system which produced demons. We know this from 1 Cor. 10:20-21. The Devil's communion table is idolatry. The Greeks are glorified by historians, but this is not factual. The Persians actually had more stability than the Greeks. The glorifying of the Greeks in history is just another indication that the Devil is the ruler of this world. They had a lot of cults and homosexuality. Demons violently opposed the Gospel. Demons here came out of the victims crying with a loud voice. Apparently demon activity is now growing in our country, for there is much emphasis on speaking in tongues. There is no such thing as a bonified speaking in tongues. Here, these demons possessed people were sick, but they heard the Gospel, went on positive signals, and became believers. The departure of the demons from them happened as Philip preached and as these Samaritans believed. God recognized their willingness to respond and provided Philip to preach to them. God did his great work. Demons were removed and the people were healed all at the same time. No one can cope with the power of a demon except God. God actually killed two birds with one stone. He removed the demons and caused them to believe at the same time. Philip's credit card is operating over-time in Samaria.

ACTS 8:8 "And there was great joy in that city." This is the right kind of joy, a deep and abiding joy. These people were mentally and physically miserable. Demon possessed people are always miserable. Now this demon power is removed, they are saved, their demon illness is over, so they have great joy. David prayed, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation". These Samaritans had come out into the light of God's day and they were filled with joy.

ACTS 8:9 "But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:" Simon the Sorcerer. It doesn't mean he was a magician as we think of them today. This man was performing miracles on his own. He had received a fantastic education in the city of Alexandria, Egypt. He was in the system of Gnosticism and he brought this philosophy back to Samaria. He was one of the leading philosophers in Samaria. Simon was born in Samaria, taken to Alexandria as a young man, and there became a brilliant Gnostic philosopher. He practiced miracles, being demon possessed. He was the Devil's evangelist, the Devil's preacher. We know this from 2 Cor. 13. He was very successful in Samaria. So here is the Lord's evangelist and the Devil's evangelist face to face. The demon will be removed from Simon and he will become a believing Christian. He had been operating in Samaria quite a long time and had won many converts to his philosophy. He had within him an old sin nature and he had power and approbation lust. He was the great power in Samaria, the greatest power of all. Even after his salvation we see the old sin nature in operation.

ACTS 8:10 "To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God." This verse tells us the station Simon had in Samaria. But back in verse 5 we studied how Philip came and preached and the amazing success he had through his evangelistic campaigns. In other words, those who had been following Simon were converted and moved over to Philip's side.

Simon was a great unbeliever, popular, praised by all, living on power and approbation lust. You see, it is hard for such a great unbeliever to become a believer. (If Philip were living today, and would follow our present techniques, he would call on Simon to come and give his testimony.) As a rule, new converts need to sit down and keep their mouths shut until they learn some doctrine. No, you don't find Philip calling on Simon to give his testimony. But once he is converted he goes to the end of the line as far as receiving the Holy Spirit was concerned. Simon watches all those converts receive the Holy Spirit. So Simon goes up to Philip and asks how much will it cost for him to get that power so he can dispense the Holy Spirit to people.

You have heard of the word "Simony", which means buying or selling spiritual things for a price. It is a term for spiritual bribery. But Simon was a new convert and he needed to learn. Simon is a spiritual baby, and all a baby can do is cry. He was converted but he became a spiritual moron. Many people are like that today. They don't have enough doctrine to come in out of the rain. Madison Avenue techniques have gotten into the Gospel. But notice that Simon the Sorcerer wasn't asked to give a testimony. After Paul's conversion remember that he didn't walk up and give a testimony. He went down into Arabia and spent several years there getting his theology straightened out--then he was ready to testify. Paul spent months and even years walking and talking with Jesus Christ. Then God took him back to his home town and let him mature and he became spiritually mature before he finally hit the missionary trail. In Philippians 3 Paul later tells about the things in which he could boast. In that connection let us read Philippians 3:4-14 "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

A new convert should witness about his salvation, but a new convert needs above everything to study the Word of God and grow, or sooner or later he will go off on some wild issue and lose his effectiveness. I get greatly disturbed today when I see what is going on in evangelism and people call it the great power of God. There is no way to get people truly converted unless you get the Word of God in their minds. Lots of doctrine and the filling of the Holy Spirit makes a man a great Christian. Remember, you don't become a Christian by means of short cuts, public relations, and Madison Avenue techniques. So here we find Simon at the end of his line. Next time we will see what finally happened to him.