

Acts 8:5-25: From Sorcerer to Saint

In John 4, Jesus taught some Samaritans. In Acts 8, Philip, who was taught by the apostles, preached Christ in Samaria by preaching the kingdom of God and name of Christ (v5, 12). By miracles, the people were assured that God was with Philip in what he taught. Based on this evidence, men and women believed and were baptized. Simon, a sorcerer, knew that Philip's miracles were unlike his phony tricks, so he also believed and was baptized. Just as Jesus promised in Mark 16:16, they were saved. The saved are saints (Acts 9:13, 32).

Simon's conversion must have surprised many people. He had claimed to be someone great, and many people believed *This man is the great power of God*. Now they were all saints working together as a church, as in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42ff).

How is this different today? We do not see the miracles, but we can thoroughly investigate the record of them. The message of the kingdom of God and name of Christ has not changed—lost sinners who believe and are baptized are saved, made saints by God. These saints leave sin to serve Christ together, as nothing more or less than His church. Does this describe your conversion and habits since then?

Acts 8:5-25: “Samaria and The Spirit”

Because the gospel came to Samaria, we can learn that sinners (even sorcerers!) can become saints. From this occasion, we also learn more about The Holy Spirit.

Read Acts 8:14-17 to begin learning about receiving The Holy Spirit. What does it mean to receive someone? It may mean just to accept them (see Jn. 12:48), but does it mean that here? In verse 14, two apostles came to Samaria so that those who had received God's word could receive The Holy Spirit since He had fallen upon none of them. Notice here, receiving The Spirit means The Spirit “falling” on them (receiving miraculous power). Why had this not happened? Philip had power from the Holy Spirit (verse 6), but he could not give others that power. In verse 17, they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Only apostles could pass this power to others (Paul did this too in Acts 19:1-6).

There are no living apostles today so The Holy Spirit falls on no one, and no one can do miracles by His power. Today, we can receive the Holy Spirit just like we can receive Jesus and the Father—by wholeheartedly accepting Their word. Send us your comments and questions on this vital topic!

A Reader's Question About Acts 8: "Samaria and The Spirit" (1)

Each week we invite your comments and questions. We are not infallible, so your thoughts are welcomed. One reader recently asked about Acts 9:17, suggesting that the apostles were not the only ones who passed the Spirit's miraculous power to others. Read Acts 9:10-18 to begin our study.

Ananias said that God sent him so that two things could happen: Saul could receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. What does the Bible say happened as Ananias spoke to and laid his hands on Saul? Acts 9:18 says *he received His sight at once* but does not say "he received the Spirit at once." So, can we know whether Saul was or was not immediately filled by the Holy Spirit by Ananias' hands?

Acts 8:14-18 *Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given.* If someone other than the apostles could give the Spirit, why didn't Philip do it? Nowhere in Scripture did the Spirit fill someone by the hands of a non-apostle. Paul had this apostolic ability (Acts 19:6), and what Simon saw shows it was not given by man.

A Reader's Question About "Samaria and The Spirit" (2)

Last week, we studied the topic raised by an anonymous, vague letter. We are glad to learn what topics interest you.

Did Saul miraculously receive the Holy Spirit by Ananias' hands? Acts 8:14-18 indicates "No." Also, consider that whenever Saul was filled with the Spirit, he was equipped with the signs of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12). How did any apostle receive the power to do signs? What were the signs?

The Holy Spirit filled the apostles directly from heaven, without man's hands (Acts 2:2-4). Paul said he was inferior to the apostles in no way, so why would Paul be filled by the same Spirit and power by man's hands (2 Cor. 12:11)?

One sign of an apostle was that through the laying on of the apostles' hands The Holy Spirit was given (Acts 8:18). Paul showed this sign in Acts 19:6. If Paul had the same power as the apostles, why would he be filled with the Spirit in a different way than the apostles?

If it seems strange that Ananias' purpose for coming was so Saul could be filled but that he didn't do it, this is covered in an article on our website. If you do not use the internet, contact us, and we'll get you a free copy or, let's talk!

-- To study this topic in more detail, read "A Reader's Question About 'Samaria and The Spirit'" (full version), also available on our website, or in print by request (free of charge).

Acts 8:5-25: Baptized in the Name of the Lord Jesus

Two apostles visited Samaria when they heard that some had received God's word, which included being *baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus* (v14-16). This is the *one baptism* of Ephesians 4:5. What do you know about this baptism?

Study the word *baptize*. A basic Bible dictionary shows it means *to dip, immerse*. English dictionaries include “to pour or sprinkle” in their definition, but if they give any history of the word, they explain that it means *to immerse, to dip*. Pouring is pouring, not baptism. Sprinkling is sprinkling, not baptism. Baptism (immersion) is immersion (baptism).

Samaritans were immersed *in the name of the Lord Jesus*. This is not a verbal, baptismal formula since other passages use other phrases (Mt. 28:19; Acts 2:38; 10:48). In fact, many things in Scripture are done *in the name of the Lord* (Acts 9:27; 1 Cor. 5:4; Col. 3:17; Jam. 5:10). This phrase emphasizes why something is done rather than what is said when it is done. Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3, and 1 Peter 3:21 summarize why *the one baptism* is done. Learn and follow the will of the Lord, and then you will have acted in the name of the Lord, just like Simon and the Samaritans.