

REFLECTION GUIDE

ACTS 8:9-40 - THE GOSPEL CONFRONTS AND COMFORTS

KEY TERMS

Simon the Magician - A man living in Samaria who had gained great recognition for the magic he performed; magicians in the 1st century operated most commonly by illusion, but the NT also suggests that Satan can empower people to perform false magic that distracts from Jesus (Mt 24:24; 1 Thes 2:9).

The Ethiopian Eunuch - A man from Ethiopia who was a servant of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians; it was common in the ancient world to make royal servants into eunuchs. Ethiopia in the 1st century did not refer to the modern-day country of Ethiopia but was a kingdom in the region where Sudan is today.

Gall of Bitterness and Bond of Iniquity - These terms are used to describe Simon after he asks to buy the Holy Spirit's power and can also be translated *full of bitterness and captive to sin* (NIV). The term *gall of bitterness* recalls Deut 29:18 where the Israelites are warned "Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit," and *bond of iniquity* recalls God's desire to loose "bonds of wickedness" in Isaiah 58:6.

BACKGROUND

As the Church moves into Judea and Samaria, Luke tells two powerful stories about two unique individuals. The first is about Simon, a popular magician in Samaria, who heard the good news of Jesus and became a disciple (vv. 9-13). However, after seeing the Holy Spirit come upon the Samaritans, Simon wants to buy the power to give the Spirit (vv. 14-20). Peter responds by saying that the Spirit can't be bought and that what matters is the *heart* (v. 21). The way the Spirit comes upon the Samaritans – only after the apostles come and lay hands on them even though they had believed in Jesus and been baptized – is unique to this story and is not the normal pattern in Acts. The second story is about an Ethiopian eunuch, a servant to the queen of Ethiopia, who was a convert to Judaism and was reading Isaiah on his way to Jerusalem (vv. 26-28). Phillip is led by the Spirit to talk to him and explains that Jesus is the fulfillment of the passage he was reading, Isaiah 53:7-8. The Ethiopian Eunuch believes in Jesus and is immediately baptized (vv. 34-38). These two stories show how the gospel is moving forward beyond Jerusalem, now in Samaria and Africa.

GOING DEEPER

Read Genesis 12:1-3, Isaiah 49:6, Matthew 28:18-20, and Revelation 7:9-12. What do these verses teach you about the global nature of the Church? In what ways have you seen the vision of Revelation 7 displayed in the Church? How have you seen it *not* displayed? How do these verses challenge you?

DID YOU KNOW?

Baptism comes from the Greek word *baptizō* meaning "to dip or immerse." Jews baptized proselytes (non-Jewish converts to Judaism) and John the Baptist baptized people to prepare for the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. Early Christians, following the example of Jesus, baptized new believers and the Church continues to do so today.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read Acts 8:9-25. Make 5-7 quick observations about these verses. What is surprising? What is difficult? What is the main focus?
2. What was Simon's main problem (see verses 21-22)? What does this tell us about the importance of abandoning our own ways and our own good works to trust Christ alone as our Rescuer?
3. Now read Acts 8:26-40. Make 5-7 quick observations about these verses. What is surprising? What is encouraging? What is the big idea?
4. What can we learn about sharing our faith from Phillip's interaction with the Ethiopian who believes the gospel and is baptized?

LIVING THE WORD

5. How is pointing out false spirituality an act of love, even if our secular culture sees it as an act of hostility? When done in a Christ-like manner, how is this a part of loving our neighbor?
6. When you consider how the same gospel saves both Phillip (a middle-class, Jewish man from Jerusalem) and the Ethiopian (a wealthy, black, African eunuch from modern-day Sudan), how does that encourage your faith in God's love and the gospel?
7. What is one way you want to think differently or live differently because of this passage?