

# Acts 8:9-13

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*Many Samaritans believe in Jesus and are baptized, including a magician named Simon. For a long while he was called “the Great Power of God” by the Samaritans, but now he sees true power in the miracles of Jesus through Philip. The Samaritans pay him no attention anymore, now only attentive to Philip. Simon follows Philip around the city, amazed by the healing he performs.*

Philip the Evangelist is healing people and preaching the gospel in the city of *Samaria*.

We are now introduced to a man named *Simon*, a magician who was famous among the Samaritans. The *people of Samaria* had drifted from Judaism, only teaching the five books of Moses as God’s word, ignoring the rest of the Old Testament. Their beliefs were heretical and misguided, to the point where evidently they honored a sorcerer as being sent by God. The book of Deuteronomy, one of the books they supposedly revered, taught harshly against sorcery (Deuteronomy 18:10-13), but for whatever reason, they were beguiled by *Simon* the magician. The Bible is clear that magical practice is not from God.

King Manasseh of Judah committed terrible acts of evil by practicing magic:

“He made his sons pass through the fire in the valley of Ben-hinnom; and he practiced witchcraft, used divination, practiced sorcery and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger.”  
(2 Chronicles 33:6)

Sorcery is also mentioned as one of the “deeds of the flesh” that prevent those who practice it from inheriting the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).

It is not clear whether *Simon* was merely an illusionist, or if he was actually aided by demonic powers in *practicing magic in the city*. Whatever works he did, whether truly supernatural or only skillful deceptions, he captivated the city’s *attention*. Every Samaritan, *all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him*. From the beggars in the streets to the wealthy, from children to the elders, everyone revered *Simon* for his *magic*.

Because of his *magic*, *Simon* was *claiming to be someone great*, and the *people of Samaria* agreed. They gave *Simon* a special title, “*This man is what is called the Great Power of God.*” They thought *Simon* must be from God to perform his *magic*. He profited from this status. The Samaritans *were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts*. So he has been around for quite some time, *for a long time he has astonished them*. His career is about to suddenly come to an end.

Luke, the author of Acts, writes that *Simon* was *formerly practicing magic* and that the Samaritans were *giving him attention* in the past tense, because now Philip the Evangelist, a

servant of the true God, had come to *Samaria*. Philip took away the *attention* once given to Simon because of his preaching and “the signs which he was performing” (v. 6).

Philip’s signs (or attesting miracles) were not merely *astonishing* displays like Simon’s routine. He performed supernatural acts of healing for the Samaritans, casting out demons and curing paralytics and lame people so that they could walk and move their limbs again (vs. 7-8). Philip’s miracles, performed by the power of the Holy Spirit, were beneficial to the *people of Samaria*.

The sense we get about Simon’s *magic arts* is that they did nothing for the Samaritans other than shock and awe them, while boosting his career and social status among the people. He apparently never healed anyone, since the Samaritans immediately turned their attention to Philip when he began healing them. We also know that these acts of supernatural healing and casting out of demons only come from God (Matthew 12:26, John 9:32-33, Acts 3:12-16). Simon’s *magic* primarily benefited Simon. God’s power benefits the lost and the broken, providing healing and reconciliation with Him.

The Samaritans not only responded to the healing, they looked to where the healing came from. While they had *formerly* called Simon “*the Great Power of God*” due to his *magic*, they did not turn around and apply to Philip any sort of divine honorific. They listened to his *preaching* of the *good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ*. They saw that the healing came from God, and was performed in the *name of Jesus*, who was the Son, the Messiah, the *Christ*. This was the true *Great Power of God*, the *good news* of Jesus’s death and resurrection, the saving from sin and destruction. The Samaritans *believed*, and were *baptized, men and women alike*.

And, amazingly, *Simon himself believed*. He recognized a power greater than his own, or, assuming he was only an illusionist, he had finally encountered the real thing. He *believed* in Jesus, *and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip*. Philip was doing something Simon had only ever pretended to do. But his motives were not yet pure. It seems he *continued on with Philip* not only to learn more about God, but to take notes and be like Philip. While following Philip around, *he observed signs and great miracles taking place, and he was constantly amazed*.

And while the text plainly states that Simon really *believed* and was *baptized*, his former life still preyed upon his motivations. He was not yet transformed by the renewing of his mind, as is an opportunity for all believers (Romans 12:1-2). He will soon encounter the Holy Spirit, and make a choice between lust for power to exploit or channeling the power of the Spirit to benefit others, in service to God.

## **Biblical Text**

**<sup>9</sup> Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great; <sup>10</sup> and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, “This man is what is called the Great Power of God.” <sup>11</sup> And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts. <sup>12</sup> But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized,**

men and women alike. <sup>13</sup> Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.