

Home group study

Week beginning 26th February 2018

Please refresh yourself and the group about the incident involving Simon the Sorcerer. Then feel free to concentrate on the section on p2 if you think that more appropriate for your group. The first page may lead to an interesting discussion, though p2 may be more significant in people's lives.

Read: **Acts 8:9-24.**

The passage tells us (vv9-11) that Simon:

- Had practised sorcery in the city;
- Amazed all the people of Samaria;
- Boasted that he was someone great;

And that all the people, both high and low:

- Gave Simon their attention;
- Called him 'the Great Power of God';
- Followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery.

Later writings, not part of the Canon of Scripture, so possibly dubious, suggest Simon, known as Simon Magus (worker of magic) went back to sorcery and became court magician to the Roman emperor. This is given credence by the writings of Justin the Martyr to Emperor Antoninus Pius (138 to 161 AD) that: '... a Samaritan, Simon, a native of the village called Gitto, who in the reign of Claudius Cæsar, and in your royal city of Rome, did mighty acts of magic, by virtue of the art of the devils operating in him. He was considered a god, and as a god was honoured by you with a statue, which statue was erected on the river Tiber, between the two bridges, and bore this inscription, in the language of Rome: — '*Simoni Deo Sancto*,' 'To Simon the holy God.'

What we also need to bear in mind from the Acts passage is that v13 says, unequivocally: 'Simon himself *believed and was baptised*.' It goes on to say that he followed Philip everywhere, 'astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw': he clearly recognised that God's power was greater than his own.

So, to pose Dave's four questions from this week's news sheet:

1. Was Simon saved in the first place?

2. Did he lose his salvation through his evil play for power?

(Consider vv20-23: especially as the Message interpretation of v20, 'Peter said, "To hell with your money! And you along with it."' is probably more accurate than the 'polite' version in the NIV!)

3. Why did Simon not share the same fate as Ananias & Sapphira in Chapter 5?

4. Were his final words to Peter ('Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me', v24) genuine or was he blagging his way out of a tight fix?

It's perhaps easy to dwell on the wickedness and Satanic evil in Simon. But that black backdrop makes the light of God's goodness so much clearer and sharper to us.

Look at the few verses leading up to this section (Acts 8:4-8), and then look at vv12-13 (in which the word 'they' refers to the people in the city in Samaria where this all took place).

Why were the people of that city drawn to Philip and then to Jesus?

Why do you think Simon is so attracted to the works and miracles being performed by Philip?

Peter & John come down from Jerusalem and lay hands on the people for them to receive the Holy Spirit; that's when Simon offers them money to enable him to impart the Holy Spirit to people.

In v21 Peter tells Simon: 'You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.' In that context 'this ministry' may refer to the specific ministry of laying hands on people to impart the Holy Spirit or indeed may well suggest Simon is excluded from the gifts of the Spirit.

Do you think this means Simon has no chance of ever 'having a part in this ministry'?

If someone had reason to say something like that to us, what would we do about it?

It's vitally important to realise when discussing this question that Peter, by the Holy Spirit, knew that Simon's heart was 'full of bitterness and captive to sin' [v23]: Simon was motivated by Satan and moved in the power of Satan. That's why his forgiveness was in doubt [v22].

We all make mistakes and get things wrong, but those of us whose hearts are inclined towards God — or even just inclined towards being inclined towards God — can always know forgiveness.

Look at 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. Get the group to list the Gifts of the Spirit here.

Why, according to his passage, does God manifest his Holy Spirit?

Why is Peter's reaction to Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:20-21) so severe?

How does each of the gifts you have listed lead 'to the common good'?

How does each glorify Jesus?

How might we fall into a similar trap to Simon?

At the end of 1 Corinthians 12 Paul suggests that not everyone receives all the gifts. But he tells us (v31) to 'eagerly desire the greater gifts'.

How do we ensure we keep our motives pure in 'eagerly desiring the greater gifts'?

Pray for each other, to:

- Have pure minds, hearts and motives;
- To 'eagerly desire the greater gifts': or indeed *any* of the gifts of the Holy Spirit: all are good gifts;
- To receive and manifest gifts of the Spirit;
- That the Holy Spirit will increasingly glorify Jesus in our church.