

OUR *Guide* FOR USE IN *the Protestant Reformed Sunday School*

Lesson 65

Simon the Sorcerer

The Scripture Lesson *Acts 8:9-24*

Philip, like Stephen, was one of the seven deacons. After serving some time in Jerusalem as a deacon, Philip was appointed to be an evangelist, a preacher. And he went to preach in a city in Samaria.

He was not there very long before he met Simon, a sorcerer. Simon made his living by fooling people. He pretended to be able to do miracles — for money. Everyone was so astonished at the things he did that they all believed that his great power was from God.

But when Philip came to Samaria, those works of Simon seemed like *nothing*. Besides, after the people listened to Philip's preaching, they did not even think that it was *right* to do what Simon was doing.

So Simon followed Philip to see what he could learn from him. The miracles of healing that Philip did were absolutely amazing to Simon. Simon listened also to Philip's preaching; and the more he listened, the more he believed that Philip spoke the truth. So Simon was baptized right along with the other believers.

Then one day Peter and John came to Samaria. They found that the Spirit was working mightily among the Samaritans, for many of them believed

OUR GUIDE is published by the Protestant Reformed Sunday School Association.

and were baptized. But they saw that, among the Samaritans, there were yet no special *gifts of the Spirit* (like speaking in other languages). Peter and John therefore prayed that God would give those gifts also to the Samaritans, as He had already done for the Jews. And God did that. He gave those gifts to all those on whom the apostles laid their hands.

Simon saw Peter and John do that. It looked so very easy. Why could *he* not do that? If he were able, by laying his hands on people, to give them the powers that Peter and John gave them, then he could again be popular with the people. So he went to the apostles and offered them money if they would show him how to do what they did.

But that was very wicked. Simon believed that the giving of the Spirit was just another work of magic, like his own, only more powerful. And he did not understand at all what the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit is. Peter and John used their power for one purpose only — that the *church might be helped*. Simon wanted that same power for one purpose only — that *he might be more famous and make more money*.

Peter said to Simon, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money." Peter told

him that he must repent of such great wickedness. Stung by that rebuke, Simon asked the apostles to pray for him, that he not perish.

Are we ever like Simon the sorcerer? This story must remind us that whatever we have is a *gift of God*, and must be used not to *put ourselves forward* but to serve the *church* and the church's *King*.

The Ethiopian Eunuch

Acts 8:25-40

After Philip had been in Samaria for awhile an angel of the Lord spoke to him and told him that he must go to the desert road that led from Jerusalem to Gaza. The angel did not say *why* he must do that. And Philip didn't *ask* why. As a faithful minister of the Word, he was ready to go, without question, wherever the Lord would lead.

Soon after he arrived he saw a chariot coming down the road. It was plain to see that the chariot belonged to a rich and important man. That surprised Philip a little, to see a man like that in this desert place. But what surprised Philip even more was that the Spirit told him that he must join that man in his chariot. The man was an *Ethiopian*, and he was a *Gentile*. Must Philip now *preach* to this man?

Who was this man? The Bible says that he was a eunuch, in charge of all the treasure of Candace, queen of Ethiopia. Ethiopia was a country far away in Africa. But this man had met some Jews there and was converted to the Jewish religion. Worshiping God in the temple was therefore important to him, and he had traveled all the way from his home in Africa to the city of Jerusalem. When Philip saw him he was on his way back home.

Philip heard him reading from God's Word. The man had with him a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. That might sound strange to us, for we are so used to having many complete Bibles around. But in those days the New Testament was not yet written; and the books of the Old Testament were written on scrolls, each copy *handwritten*. The scrolls were expensive, and not many people owned them. The Ethiopian did; and while his

charioteer was busy driving, he himself was reading aloud from Isaiah.

He was reading chapter 53, where Isaiah wrote that someday One would die to bear the iniquities of God's people. This Redeemer, the prophet said, would be "led as a lamb to the slaughter." The Ethiopian wondered what that could mean.

Just then, Philip came along. Philip asked the man if he understood what he was reading. The man answered, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" Philip then began to tell the man about the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy — a prophecy about the Messiah, who would come to save His people from their sins. That Messiah, Philip said, had already come. Jesus of Nazareth, by His suffering and death and resurrection, had fulfilled all of the Old Testament prophecies.

And the man believed. Seeing a stream near the road, he asked if he could be baptized. The two of them went down to the water in order that the Ethiopian might receive the sign of the washing away of sins by Jesus' blood. Then, as they went back up from the water, Philip suddenly disappeared. His work there was finished; the Lord snatched him away and put him in Azotus, so he might preach there.

The Ethiopian was very happy. His teacher was gone. But the man knew that the Lord had sent Philip to him, to one lone Gentile, to tell him about Jesus. And that was all he needed. He went on his way rejoicing.

MEMORY WORK

Group A

Acts 8:20 "But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money"

Group B

Acts 8:35 "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."

ACTIVITIES

This paper has been prepared in the hope that it will be used by students of all ages. The activities are designed so that the oldest will be challenged, and the youngest will find some of it within reach. Parents should encourage their children to attempt only what they can handle without frustration. For some that will be much, for others little.

DO YOU AGREE?

If you do, write Yes; if you do not, write No.

- ___ 1. Part of the reason why the people of Samaria gave heed to the things spoken by Philip was that the Samaritans and the Jews were such good friends.
- ___ 2. Because Simon the sorcerer used magic and pretended to have power from God, Philip refused to baptize him.
- ___ 3. When Peter and John came to Samaria and laid their hands on the Samaritans, they received the Holy Spirit.
- ___ 4. Simon offered the apostles money if they would give him the power to give the Spirit by the laying on of his hands.
- ___ 5. When Peter warned Simon of the judgment of God that his sin deserved, Simon asked Peter to pray for him.
- ___ 6. An angel of the Lord later told Philip to go and preach to the Ethiopian eunuch on the desert road leading from Jerusalem to Gaza.
- ___ 7. The Ethiopian eunuch was a Gentile who had already been converted to the Jewish religion.
- ___ 8. When Philip approached the chariot he heard the eunuch reading aloud from the prophecy of Isaiah.
- ___ 9. Philip asked the eunuch if he believed that what Isaiah said was true.
- ___ 10. The eunuch then invited Philip to join him in the chariot, and Philip preached to him about Jesus.
- ___ 11. So that Philip would not have to walk so far on the desert road, the eunuch brought him in his chariot to the city of Azotus.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUNGER READERS

1. What did Simon the sorcerer do for a living? What did the Samaritans think of him?
2. Why was Simon unhappy when Philip came to Samaria? What did Simon think of Philip's miracles? What did he think of Philip's preaching?
3. When Peter and John went to Samaria, what did they learn about the work of the Holy Spirit among the Samaritans?
4. What did Simon try to buy from Peter and John? Why did he want that power?
5. What did Peter say to Simon? How did Simon answer him?
6. What can we learn from the story of Simon?
7. Why did Philip leave Samaria?
8. Where was Ethiopia? Why had the man from that country traveled all the way to Jerusalem? What was missing in this man's faith after he was converted to the Jewish religion?
9. What was the Ethiopian doing when Philip met him on his long journey home? How was his "Bible" different from ours?
10. What passage was the man reading? What did he not understand about that passage? How did God teach him?
11. What happened to Philip after he baptized the Ethiopian? Why did the Ethiopian go on his way rejoicing?

COMPLETING SENTENCES

1. After Philip's work as a deacon in Jerusalem was finished he was evidently ordained to what was a special office for that time, the office of evangelist. It was as an evangelist that he went to preach the gospel to the Samaritans. This preaching of the Word in Samaria marked a significant advance for the cause of the gospel because, for the first time, the preaching of Christ was being extended beyond the bounds of Jewry. All the more remarkable this was, because for centuries there had been open hostility between the full-blooded Jews of Judea and the people of mixed race (part Jew, part Gentiles) in Samaria. A deep gulf was therefore being bridged when _____ went down to a city of Samaria and preached _____ unto them (Acts 8:5).

2. Not only did Philip have to contend with the deep-seated prejudice between Jew and Samaritan, but he found also that a man called _____ practiced magical arts among the people of Samaria and had for a _____ time _____ them with sorceries. To this man the people gave heed, from the least even to the _____, saying, This man is the great _____ of _____ (Acts 8:9-11).

3. However, when Philip arrived, the people with one _____ gave heed to the things that he said, hearing and seeing the _____ which he did. And they _____ Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and they were _____, both men and women (Acts 8:6, 12).

4. Simon must have recognized very quickly that he was no match for Philip. For whereas his own works depended on deception, the works of Philip could be done only by the exercise of a real power. But Simon also listened closely enough to Philip's preaching to become convinced that the evangelist spoke the truth. Though he did not yet possess a Spirit-wrought faith that comes from a regenerated heart, he nevertheless _____ the preaching; and when he was _____, he _____ with Philip, and _____,

beholding the _____ and signs that were done (Acts 8:13).

5. Meanwhile, word of Philip's success in Samaria reached the apostles in Jerusalem. Since the preaching of the gospel was under their supervision, they decided to send _____ and _____ to inspect and evaluate the work of Philip in Samaria. When they arrived they found that the Holy Ghost was _____ on none of the Samaritans. They were only _____ in the name of the Lord Jesus. The idea here is that, though the Spirit had indeed worked conversion in the hearts of the Samaritans, the Spirit had not yet given any special gifts (like speaking in tongues) to the Samaritans as visible evidence of His presence among them. Peter and John therefore, after they had _____ for them, laid their _____ on them, and they _____ the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:14-17).

6. Simon watched with interest the effect of the apostles' laying on of hands. The power of Philip to work miracles must have seemed to Simon to be beyond his own reach; but this laying on of hands was an *act*, which perhaps could be *learned*. Simon saw the possibility of recovering some of his hold on the people, if he could only do what Peter and John did. And since he saw this as a way to earn a living, he thought it only fair that he pay for whatever the apostles might share with him. He therefore offered them _____ and said, "Give me also this _____, that on whomsoever I lay _____, he may _____ the Holy Ghost" (Acts 8:18, 19).

7. Thus did Simon reveal the absence of true faith, and a complete lack of understanding of what it meant to be a minister of Christ. He showed that he was motivated by ambition alone. In order to make Simon aware of the enormity of his sin, of the just judgment of God that threatened him because of it, and of the necessity of repentance, Peter pronounced an awful curse on Simon: "Thy _____ perish with _____." And Peter added, "_____ therefore of this thy _____, and _____"

God, if perhaps the thought of thine _____ may be _____ thee” (Acts 8:20-23).

8. In what may be a sign of true repentance, Simon answered, “Pray ____ to the Lord _____ me, that _____ of these things which ye have _____ come upon me” (Acts. 8:24).

9. Peter and John, after having _____ and _____ the Word of the Lord, returned to _____, stopping however on the way to preach the gospel in many _____ of the Samaritans (Acts 8:25).

10. Philip was also soon to leave Samaria. For an _____ of the Lord told him to go to the road that leads from Jerusalem to _____ which is _____. Philip must have wondered why he should leave the fruitful labor he enjoyed in Samaria and go to a *desert* area; but as a faithful minister of the Lord, he did not question but simply “_____ and _____” (Acts 8:26, 27).

11. It was on that remote desert road that Philip at length saw the chariot of a man who, as it turned out, was a high-ranking government official of a country in Africa. He was a man of _____, a eunuch of great _____ under _____, queen of the Ethiopians, having charge of all her _____. Though obviously, thus, a Gentile, he was also a Jewish proselyte, since he had come to _____, perhaps at the time of one of the feasts, to _____ (Acts 8:27)

12. Philip must have wondered at the instruction of the Spirit to go near and _____ himself to this _____. The gospel had not as yet been preached specifically to a Gentile, and the church had not as yet faced the question of the manner in which this should be done. But again Philip simply obeyed. He _____ thither to the chariot, and, to his further surprise, heard the man reading aloud from the prophecy of _____ (Acts 8:29, 30).

13. The eunuch was a convert to Judaism. He

therefore believed the Old Testament Scriptures. Given the prominence of the Christian movement in Jerusalem, the man must at least have heard there about the suffering and death of Jesus, which had occurred several years earlier. But, in the providence of God, he had not yet come to a knowledge of the truth about Jesus of Nazareth. It was reserved for Philip to teach him on the road to Gaza. When Philip asked him, “_____ thou what thou _____?” the eunuch readily admitted that he needed a guide. And, understanding Philip’s question to be an offer to help, he asked him to come up and _____ with him (Acts 8:30, 31).

14. The eunuch was reading from Isaiah 53. He understood that the prophet was foretelling that life would come out of death, exaltation out of humiliation. But he did not think to connect this prophecy with the Jewish expectation of a Messiah — and certainly not to Jesus of Nazareth. Bewildered, he therefore said to Philip, “I pray thee, of whom _____ the prophet this? Of _____, or of some _____ man?” (Acts 8:32-34).

15. Philip then began at that same _____ and preached unto him _____. Proceeding no doubt from one scripture to another, Philip showed how the Old Testament pointed to the work of Jesus Christ. Through that preaching, and by the operation of the Spirit in his heart, this Gentile came to believe that the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 was none other than Jesus of Nazareth, who by His death had washed away *his* sins. In the course of his teaching, Philip must have explained that baptism was the seal of discipleship. When therefore they came unto a _____ water, the eunuch said, “See, here is _____. What doth _____ me to be baptized?” (Acts 8:35, 36).

16. When the two of them came up out of the water, after the baptism, the Spirit of the Lord _____ away Philip, that the eunuch _____ him no more. The eunuch however understood, for he went on his way _____.

Philip was next seen in _____, another city of the Philistine plain. From there he continued northward, and _____ in all the cities along the coastal road until he came to _____ (Acts 8:37-40)

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Can you explain how the two activities of Philip recorded in Acts 8 represent two significant advances in the progress of the gospel?
2. Simon must have viewed Philip initially as a competitor. How would the preaching of Philip affect the work of Simon?
3. We read in Acts 8:13 that Simon believed the preaching of Philip. It was surely on the basis of a confession of that faith that Philip baptized him. In light of the rest of the story, how, do you suppose, should we understand his “belief”?
4. We read in Acts 8:14 that when the apostles heard of the success of Philip among the Samaritans they sent Peter and John to Samaria. Why would they do that?
5. There could have been no faith on the part of the Samaritans apart from the work of the Spirit. How, then, should we understand Acts 8:16, which indicates that, before the arrival of Peter and John, the Spirit had “fallen upon none of them”?
6. Simon saw the miracles of Philip (Acts 8:6, 7) and he saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ (Peter’s and John’s) hands the Holy Ghost was given. He must have coveted both. Can you think of a reason why he tried to buy the latter power but not the former?
7. Read Acts 19:13-15. What similarity do you see between the sinful thinking of the seven sons of Sceva, and the sinful thinking of Simon in Acts 8:18, 19?
8. Simon’s sin was that he aimed to make use of a spiritual power and gift, not in the service of Christ and the church, but for his own personal advantage. Can you think of ways in which we can sometimes be guilty of the same kind of thing?
9. Peter’s admonition to Simon to repent and to pray

for forgiveness (Acts 8:22) is surely an expression of his desire not for Simon’s destruction but for his salvation. Why then, do you suppose, does Peter begin by saying, “Thy money perish with thee” (Acts 8:20)?

10. From Simon’s response (Acts 8:24) to Peter’s sharp rebuke, does it seem to you that he may have repented?
11. Even before Philip talked to the man in the chariot on the desert road to Gaza, he must have had some idea as to who this man was — perhaps that he was an Ethiopian, surely that he was a man of high rank, and likely that he was a proselyte. Can you think of the clues that would have helped Philip determine that?
12. Was the Ethiopian’s problem with Isaiah 53 that, though he understood that the prophecy was Messianic, he did not connect it to Jesus of Nazareth; or was his problem that he didn’t even see that the prophecy was Messianic? (Try to support your answer from the information provided in the Bible account.) Why would it not have helped the eunuch to bring his question to the Jewish rabbis of the day?
13. The eunuch asked Philip to baptize him. What must he therefore have come to believe concerning the prophecy of Isaiah 53?
14. Rightly understood, Philip’s sudden disappearance would give the eunuch added reason to go on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:39). Why is this so?

THINGS TO DO

1. Find sorcery in a Bible dictionary and see if you can discover, from the information given, what it was that Simon practiced in Samaria.
2. Try to find a verse in Acts 10 that shows that the laying on of hands was not a necessary part of the communication of gifts of the Spirit.
3. Look up the word simony in a dictionary and see if you can find not only the meaning of the word but also where it came from.
4. Find Candace in a Bible dictionary to learn whether or not the name Candace of Acts 8:27 was a personal name.
5. Read about Ethiopia in a Bible dictionary. After doing so, do you think that Philip could tell right away that this man was not a Jew?