

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

(July 16, 2017)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

**Sermon Series:** Disciples, On the GO!  
(Studies of the book of Acts)

### **Helping the Beginner Take “Next Steps” in Jesus**

(Acts 8:4-40)

Study #11

#### **Introduction: ...for dummies**

2016 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ...for Dummies books.

The first one, written in 1991, was DOS for Dummies. That book told us how to use the **Disk Operating System**, the system then in use for IBM compatible computers at the dawn of the computer age.

Since then, these books have flooded the market, as Ruth Graham wrote in Slate, a year ago:

*“Today, there are 1,950 ‘Dummies’ titles and counting: Jazz for Dummies, Canadian Wine for Dummies, The Internet for Dummies, Sex for Dummies, Homeschooling for Dummies, Congress for Dummies.*

*“Are you a dummy? Critical Thinking for Dummies could help.*

*“The blurb on the cover of Iguanas for Dummies says it all: ‘If you only get one book on iguanas,’ says a noted reptile veterinarian, ‘this is the one to choose.’*

*“There are currently, 300 million of these books in print, and the brand adds about 200 new titles a year.”*

...for dummies books help a beginner learn “first steps” in this or that field, and - what may be their greatest benefit - they have de-stigmatized ignorance. It’s OK to be a beginner, a novice, a “dummy.”<sup>1</sup>

*Everybody is a dummy in something*

Every one of us here today could benefit from a ...for dummies book because all of us are dummies in something.

There’s no need for embarrassment about being a dummy. Early on in anything, we need help.

That’s true with respect to history, science or math, and home and car repair. It’s also true when it comes to following Jesus.

*Faith dummies...*

I trusted Jesus for eternal life in 1971, so I’m not exactly a beginner. But I remember when I was.

A believing next-door neighbor told me about Jesus. I placed my faith in Jesus and He forgave my sins and saved my eternal soul.

Then, for about a year and a half afterwards, I floundered. I didn’t grow. Then, I was invited to a solid church where a few people showed me what it looked like to follow Jesus.

I was a “dummy” in Jesus. I needed friends to help me take my first “next steps.” And these friends walked me into spiritual growth.

Today, as we open the book of Acts, we’ll see a couple of scenes where beginners get just the help they need to take their “next steps.”

And you will be equipped to help those who are a step behind you take their next “next step” with Jesus.

---

<sup>1</sup> As we all know, “Ignorance is easily overcome. Just learn. Stupid and foolish are terminal.” ☺

When I say that, I don't want you to think I'm not talking to you. I am speaking exactly to you.

You are here, today, learning about Jesus. You have more experience and more knowledge about Jesus than some people you know. I can guarantee you that you know people who need the help you can give. This morning is for you.

*The scattering of the church...*

Last Sunday, we saw Stephen, who was one of a group of seven men who served widows in the church in Jerusalem, preach a powerful sermon - and was then stoned to death for his bold witness.

That act of violence sparked a wide-scale persecution against Jesus' followers<sup>2</sup> that resulted in a scattering of the first believers in Jesus from Jerusalem.

Luke tells us, **[8:4] those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.**

Among those who were scattered was another of the seven leaders of the widows' ministry - Philip<sup>3</sup> - and Acts, chapter 8 is all about the exploits of Philip.

When Philip left Jerusalem, he went to - of all places - Samaria.

*Philip went to Samaria...*

That's remarkable, because if there was one place on the planet Jesus' followers would have wanted to avoid, it was Samaria.

By the time we reach the first century, the Jews and Samaritans had hated each other for centuries. They were separated by geography, culture, race, and religion.

**(PLEASE SEE THE APPENDIX AT THE END: SAMARIA VS. ISRAEL.)**

But Jesus had already cast the vision of reaching Samaria.

In His last words to the disciples in Acts 1:8 He sent them to be His witnesses in the relatively friendly territory of **"Jerusalem and Judea"** and to the sexy, exciting **"remotest part of the world."** He also sent them to the less welcoming land of Samaria.

In obedience to Jesus, Philip branched out beyond the comfortable. He left Judea and headed into hard territory.

He went to Samaria - and Samaria is the place that's pretty close. It's geographically near. But the people there are not like us. They may dress and talk different. Samaria is culturally far.

Now, because the world has come to San Antonio, we have Samaritan neighbors. You might work with Samaritans or go to school with them.

Some of them might really appreciate knowing more about Jesus - and YOU have been strategically placed in their world.

Have you ever had the thought, *"Maybe those who are culturally far have been brought geographically near so that I can serve them in Jesus' Name. So that I can love them. So that I can tell them about Jesus."*?

If that's a new thought to you, I think it's a thought worth thinking about. And a first step toward becoming a "Philip" to your Samaritan friends might be to open your eyes to notice them, and then to pray to God for open doors to get to know them.

Philip left Jerusalem and traveled north through Judea, preaching Jesus as he went. He landed in Samaria, where the people his people hated the most lived.

<sup>2</sup> Saul, a young man (later to become the Apostle Paul) watched approvingly as the crowd stoned Stephen to death. Saul then became the chief opponent of the church, attacking believers, and dragging them from their homes to jail. (Acts 8:3)

<sup>3</sup> This Philip (NOT the apostle by the same name) is the only person in the New Testament identified as an **"evangelist."** (Acts 21:8)

## **Philip Went North to Samaria (vv. 5-24)**

### **An AMAZED Response to the Gospel in Samaria (vv. 5-8)**

*Philip proclaimed Christ to the Samaritans (v. 5)*

***[Acts 8:5] Philip went down<sup>4</sup> to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them.***

We're proud of Philip for bringing the good news about Jesus to Samaria. But, we wonder. Will the Samaritans pay any attention to what he, a JEW, has to say?

*Philip's message received! (v. 6-8)*

***[6a] The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. [7] For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed. [8] So there was much rejoicing in that city.***

The miracles God empowered Philip to perform softened the hearts of the Samaritans to the message Philip brought. So, small wonder, that there was "***much rejoicing***" in the city. Souls were saved. Bodies were made whole. Minds were renewed.

Luke tells us that there was a large, general turning to Jesus, and he also tells us about the response of one particular Samaritan.

### **A BELIEVING Response in Samaria (vv. 9-13)**

*The influence of Simon, the magician, in Samaria (vv. 9-11)*

***[9] 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>4</sup> Of course, by "down" Luke is referring to an elevation loss, as Samaria was north. Jerusalem sits at the highest elevation in Palestine.

***[10] and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God." [11] And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.***

This Simon was not a con man and he didn't do card tricks. He was involved in something far more sinister.

The kind of magic practiced by Simon - who was known as "***The Great Power of God***" - was the most debased form of religion in that age.<sup>5</sup> It was occult, demonic stuff.

But when Philip rolled into town, he performed miracles by the power of the one, true God. The Samaritans saw a power greater than Simon and received the Jesus Philip proclaimed.<sup>6</sup>

*The influence of the Gospel, in Samaria, generally (v. 12)*

***[12] 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.***

So, you could say that they turned from Simon to Jesus. We keep reading and find that Simon turned from demonism to Jesus.

*The influence of the Gospel's power, on Simon (v. 13)*

***[13] 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.***

Now, it's a big deal when anybody comes to faith in Jesus. Today or in the first century, in San Antonio or in Afghanistan. But it was a REALLY big deal when the Samaritans believed, because their turning to Jesus was the least-Jewish turning to Jesus yet.

---

<sup>5</sup> So, author Susan Garrett, who wrote [Demise of the Devil](#), a study of encounters between the Gospel and satanic powers in the writings of Luke (Gospel and Acts).

<sup>6</sup> Had Philip performed no miracles, the Samaritans might have concluded that Philip represented something inferior to Simon.

To this point, Christianity was 100%, Jewish. Now, Samaritans, who were only partly Jewish, have trusted Christ.

Word that the Christian faith had spread to Samaria quickly reached the mother church in Jerusalem. The news was so astounding that the apostles sent a delegation to Samaria to check out what was going on, firsthand.

### **Validating the Samaritan's Response to the Gospel (vv. 14-17)**

***[14] Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,<sup>7</sup>[15] who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. [16] For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. [17] Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup>***

To sum up what's happening here, God validated that this turning to Jesus was legit, by arranging for a second, Samaritan Pentecost. Peter and John saw it happen. They can now go back and tell the church in Jerusalem, "*Jesus saved THEM just like He saved US!*"

And had this NOT happened, there would have been a Jewish church, a Samaritan church, and, eventually, a Gentile church.

But with the Samaritans receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit exactly as the Jews did on the Day of Pentecost, it is clear that there is one church, consisting of Jews and Samaritans - and soon, Gentiles!

**(PLEASE SEE THE APPENDIX AT THE END: THE POST-CONVERSION RECEPTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SAMARIA.)**

So, the Samaritan church is legit. With Peter and John still in Samaria, the focus shifts back to Simon.

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, this is the last mention of the apostle John in the book of Acts.

<sup>8</sup> We are to understand that the reception of the Spirit here was marked by external manifestations such as had marked the Spirit's arrival on the first disciples at Pentecost - i.e. tongues, miracles, healings, exorcisms.

### **The Special Case of Simon... (vv. 18-24)**

*Simon's reprehensible offer (vv. 18-19)*

Luke has already told us that Simon believed and was baptized, just as others in Samaria believed and were baptized.

He has also told us that when Simon saw the miracles that Philip was performing, he - this man formerly known as **The Great Power of God** - was amazed.

Now, we learn that Simon was really impressed that Peter and John were able to bestow the Holy Spirit's gifts by the laying on of hands. He wanted the same power, so he made a simple offer.

***[18] Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, [19] saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."***

To be clear, Simon wasn't asking to buy eternal life. He wanted to buy the power to produce the signs of the Spirit's outpouring.

Naturally, Peter and John were appalled by the offer. Nor are we surprised that Peter had something to say back to Simon.

*2. Peter rebukes Simon (vv. 20-23)*

***[20] But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! [21] You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. [22] Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. [23] For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."***

**(PLEASE SEE THE APPENDIX AT THE END: THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF SIMON [MAGUS])**

Whatever else we might say, this is one scathing rebuke. And lots of people wonder what Peter's words tell us about Simon.<sup>9</sup>

But Luke has already told us a lot about Simon and his spiritual condition.

Simon believed, just as other Samaritans had believed. Simon was baptized, which at least tells us that Philip accepted Simon's testimony. Then, Simon "***continued on***" with Philip. Further, after Peter's rebuke, Simon begged the apostles to pray for him.

So, while what we have here is a mess, Simon was saved. And I want to highlight something from this episode that will be especially helpful to you as you seek to help someone else take a next step with Jesus.

### \*\*\*Helping the beginner #1: STAY ENGAGED

Simon's offer tells us that people who are just beginning to follow Jesus - like Simon was - will sometimes go off in dangerous and wrong directions.

Simon thought he could buy with money the ability to impart the Holy Spirit's presence and power. Yes. That's a serious error!

But is it really surprising that after having spent years (Acts 8:11 says "***a long time***") as a satanically empowered sorcerer known far and wide as "**The Great Power of God**" (!), Simon, after being a Christian for SEVERAL WHOLE DAYS, still had some baggage from his former life?

I'm not surprised at Simon's behavior at all. I am, though, instructed by Peter's response to Simon's reprehensible offer.

---

<sup>9</sup> Some people think that Peter had Judas Iscariot in mind when he spoke about Simon "***perishing***" with his silver. Others think that Peter's words about Simon having "***no part or portion in this matter***" refer back to what Jesus had said to him, personally, when he balked at Jesus' efforts to wash his feet in the upper room. (John 13:8)

He didn't dismiss Simon. He didn't roll his eyes, call him a loser, and walk away in disgust.

No. Peter dealt with Simon. He engaged him. He was blunt and highly confrontational. But he stayed in relationship with him.

And if you want to be helpful to beginners in Jesus, be patient. Take the long view. Stay engaged.

Direct them to truth. Call them to repentance. Point them to holiness.

When new Jesus followers get off track, it is up to those who have been following Jesus for a bit longer to help them. And the moment when a new Jesus follower falls into error, or gets mixed up in ugly stuff is not the time to back off. That's when you move in to help.

That's what we mean when we talk around here about the passionate pursuit of life-changing relationships.

When you are involved with someone who is in the very beginning stages of a journey with Jesus (he only recently believed, she's just learning the stories, just starting to ask questions), make it your aim to stay lovingly engaged.

You'll never be of any help if you separate. But in relationship, the Lord can use you to make a difference.

Well, the adventure in this Samaritan city comes to a close, and we watch as Peter and John head back to Jerusalem, preaching the Gospel as they go.

***[25] So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.***

Here, Luke is describing the same Apostle John who had wanted to call down fire from heaven on the Samaritans when they refused hospitality to Jesus (Luke 9:51-55).

Now, John and Peter are inviting Samaritans to join them in faith and to become brother and sisters in Jesus! The Gospel really does break down walls - and the eighth chapter of Acts is only half over.

While things were wrapping up in Samaria, God sent Philip on another category-busting mission.

### **Philip Went South Toward Africa (vv. 26-40)**

#### **Philip Converges with an Ethiopian (vv. 26-29)**

*A re-commissioned Philip (v. 26)*

***[26] But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a desert road.)<sup>10</sup>***

Today, Gaza is a very ancient city. But then, Gaza was an ancient city even in the time of Philip.<sup>11</sup>

And Philip has now been sent to travel the Gaza road. He left Samaria, headed south (and uphill) to Jerusalem, and then continued south of Jerusalem (downhill) on the Gaza highway.

Not far out of town, he met up with a man who was on his way to his home back in Africa.

*A seeking Ethiopian (vv. 27-28)*

***[27] So he got up and went; and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace,<sup>12</sup> queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship, [28] and he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah.***

This Ethiopian was a high-ranking government official. Most scholars believe that he was the treasurer<sup>13</sup> of the kingdom of Ethiopia, a large territory south of Egypt that stretched far into the African continent (much larger than present-day Ethiopia).<sup>14</sup>

This man was a Gentile by both birth and culture. But, he had become a member of the Jewish faith (a proselyte) and was what the Jews referred to as a “God-fearer.”

When we meet him, he’s just returning from a time of worship at the temple in Jerusalem. He’s traveling by chariot<sup>15</sup> and is at the front end of a long, five-month journey back to Africa.

Philip, who was catching up to the Ethiopian, got word from the Holy Spirit (v. 29) to join the chariot, which he did.

<sup>10</sup> Gaza and Jerusalem were separated by about sixty miles of desert. The land between Gaza and Jerusalem was not “desert” in the sense that the land around Pecos, Texas is desert (whew!). It was simply uninhabited, “deserted” country.

<sup>11</sup> You may recognize the name “Gaza” as the Gaza Strip is sometimes in our news. The city of Gaza was/is near the coast of the Mediterranean, south of Jerusalem.

<sup>12</sup> The Ethiopians held that their king was the child of the sun and was, thus, too sacred a person to carry out the functions of royalty. So, the actual tasks of ruling were performed on his behalf by the queen-mother, whose title (not her proper name) was “Candace.” (as “Pharaoh” was the title of the Egyptian king, and “Caesar” that of the Roman emperor)

<sup>13</sup> He was a eunuch, the type of man typically put in charge of a king’s harem. Eunuchs frequently rose to governmental prominence.

<sup>14</sup> Ethiopia *then* is not the same thing as Ethiopia *now*. It was probably what is currently central Sudan, and nearly one thousand miles from the Mediterranean. It was also known as Nubia (Yamauchi, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Royal chariots used for long-distance travel sat three people, two passengers and a driver. There was probably a driver and/or a guard with this man.

## Evangelism, 101 (vv. 30-38)

*The Ethiopian asks for help (vv. 30-31)*

As he approached, he overheard the African reading from Isaiah the prophet, which means that he was reading out loud, the common practice in the ancient world.

Reading aloud actually enhances retention. It allows the reader to “hear” the words of the author. The reader takes in with both eyes and ears when words are read out loud. So, reading aloud is a great way to read.

Philip asked this man if he understood what he was reading.

The Ethiopian knew what he knew and he knew what he didn’t know. And he knew that he didn’t know what the prophet Isaiah was talking about.

**[31] And he said, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.**

Here’s what he was reading.

*Philip explains (vv. 32-35)*

**[32] Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this:**

**“HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER;  
AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT,  
SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH.**

**[33] “IN HUMILIATION HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY;  
WHO WILL RELATE HIS GENERATION?  
FOR HIS LIFE IS REMOVED FROM THE EARTH.”**

This passage from Isaiah 53 was known among the Jews of the first century as one of the “*Servant Passages*” (of which Isaiah has several). The Jews believed that these passages described the suffering of either Isaiah himself or the experiences of Israel.

They didn’t think that it was talking about the Messiah, because the Jews couldn’t wrap their minds around the thought of a Messiah who suffered. The Ethiopian was wrestling with the text, but he didn’t “get it.”

*A request for insight (v. 34)*

**[34] The eunuch answered Philip and said, “Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?”**

Keep in mind here that as a lifelong Jew, Philip would have possessed a wealth of knowledge about what we call the Old Testament.

Remember, too, that Philip was a recent convert to faith in Jesus and had heard the apostles’ teaching in Jerusalem. He knew about the life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

And as Philip listened to the words of Isaiah, he understood that the Person being described here was Jesus.

So, he was able to explain Isaiah’s words through a Jesus grid.

*Telling the best story ever (v. 35)*

**[35] Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.**

Here’s another crucial piece of help for you as you help your friend - who knows a little bit less than you do about Jesus - to take a spiritual “next step.”

Own your Bible.

**\*\*\*Helping the beginner #2: KNOW YOUR BIBLE**

I would have loved to have heard Philip explain Isaiah 53 to this Ethiopian official.

Did he march through the whole chapter, showing every place where the life of Jesus parallels the words of the prophet? Maybe.

Did he cherry-pick from other Old Testament Scriptures that spoke of the ministry of the Messiah? Probably.

He no doubt told what had happened in Jerusalem and throughout Israel during Jesus' three-year ministry, and then of His death and resurrection.

Philip drew on his knowledge of the Old Testament and the apostles' teaching to share Jesus with someone who was seeking God.

Here we go. The more thoroughly you "own" the Book, the more helpful you will be when those you want to help are just starting to learn about Jesus.

The questions about life and God that your friend is asking are addressed in the Bible.

- Is there a God and what is He like?
- Why is there evil in the world?
- Is there a point or any meaning to life?
- How can my sins be forgiven?

If you want to be the sharpest tool you can possibly be, someone the Holy Spirit can use to help beginners take "next steps", you'll regularly immerse yourself in the Bible. Like Philip did.

Well, after riding and talking for a while, it's clear that the Ethiopian, who has been listening to Philip, has come to faith in Jesus.

*The response of faith (vv. 36-38)*

***[36] As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"***

So, Philip must have told this Ethiopian eunuch about baptism.

He probably told about all those in Jerusalem who had believed in Jesus and had been baptized, and about how all of those who had just recently believed in Jesus in Samaria had been baptized.

It was perfectly fitting for this man to point to some water they were passing in that desolate area and request baptism.

He now believes that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. He has placed his trust in Jesus for salvation as Philip has told the stories.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the question. But what an odd way to ask the question. Not, "I want to be baptized" or "Baptize me now!", but, "***What prevents me from being baptized?***"

Remember. He wasn't quite a Jew. He was a proselyte, and there were restrictions on how fully a proselyte could participate in Judaism. And he was a eunuch, not quite a man. There were limits as to how fully he could participate in all things Jewish, because there were limits placed on eunuchs.

He wants to know if he - a proselytized eunuch - can be fully immersed in life in Christ?

*"Will I be accepted, just as I am? Will there be limits on my participation in this faith, too? You've told me, Philip, that baptism symbolizes full inclusion in life in Jesus. Is there anything preventing me from being baptized? Am I welcomed? Am I really 'in'?"*

There's no hesitation.

***[38] And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.***

---

<sup>16</sup> Harrison, Bock, and most other commentators, take verse 37 as a gloss. It almost certainly was not a part of the original book of Acts but was added later.



By that baptism, Philip obeyed Jesus' Great Commission, baptized the first African, and welcomed a man who had never been fully welcomed anywhere.<sup>17</sup>

And here is the third help from Acts, chapter 8, to help you help someone who is new to following Jesus.

**\*\*\*Helping the beginner #3: WELCOME THEM FULLY**

Once someone has come to Jesus, there are no conditions to acceptance into Jesus' church. There is no probationary period for a beginning believer.

When you are out to help a beginner, welcome her with open arms. Accept him as warmly and as well as God does.

Give the newbie no reason to doubt that they are "in". Assure them that are accepted, both by your love and by your continuing invitations to grow.

Lead him to baptism.

Baptism is a significant growth step on the way to maturity in Christ. For two thousand years, per Jesus' instruction, baptism has been the identifying mark of the disciple.

Baptism symbolizes the journey from darkness to light, and it is the act that publicly declares, "*I have decided to follow Jesus.*" To be baptized is to be welcomed in.

And there is a lifetime of other growth steps that the beginner will need to take on his Jesus-following journey. Help him take those steps forward.

---

<sup>17</sup> Several commentators note that in the ancient world, Ethiopia was regarded by Asia and the Near East as "*the end of the earth.*" The inclusion of this episode may have been Luke's intentional tie-in with Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8. Although, clearly, the gospel continued to expand as Acts continues.

Help him take steps out of soul-deadening habits and into patterns of spiritual discipline.

You've been following Jesus longer than he has - maybe by years and maybe by days. The beginner desperately needs what you can provide to take those critical next steps with Jesus.

## APPENDIX

- *Samaria vs. Israel*

The tension between Israel and Samaria began because of geography when the kingdom of Israel divided north and south (into Judah in the south; Israel in the north), following the reign of Solomon.

The southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) were regularly ruled by direct descendants of David and Solomon, while the northern tribes (the other ten) were ruled by a succession of dynasties not related to the Davidic line.

The perennial tension became a permanent rift when the Assyrian Empire defeated the northern kingdom in 722 BC. These Assyrian conquerors intermarried with the Jews, creating a Jewish/Gentile race that was rejected by the pure-blooded Jews of the south.

The relationship was so bad that when the Samaritans offered to help the Jews who were rebuilding the broken-down Solomon Temple in Jerusalem (in the days of Ezra), the Jews would not allow the Samaritans to help. The Samaritans responded to that slight by erecting a rival temple on their own sacred hill, Mt. Gerizim.

During the days of Jesus and the apostles, the hatred of Jews against the Samaritans was intense. When traveling between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south, Jews would cross the Jordan River twice to enter the Decapolis to avoid polluting their feet on Samaritan soil.

Jesus, though, certainly didn't observe this custom. In John 4, he passed through Samaria (John tells us, "**He HAD TO pass through Samaria**") and spoke with a woman at Jacob's well. The woman placed her faith in Jesus and became the first evangelist to the Samaritans.

John tells us that **[John 4:39] many of the Samaritans believed in Him** after having heard the testimony of the woman at the well.

Of course, the disciples - including Peter and John - were with Jesus when He stopped off in Samaria.

No doubt Jesus' time there not only prepared some of the Samaritans to receive the Gospel through Philip, it prepared Peter and John for what they were about to see: a Samaritan revival.

- *The post-conversion reception of the Holy Spirit in Samaria*

I have always believed and taught that when people put their faith in Jesus, they receive the Holy Spirit. Simultaneously.

Yet that is clearly NOT what happened in Samaria. The Samaritans believed in Jesus. Days passed and THEN they received the Holy Spirit in the presence of the apostles Peter and John.

So, do I need to re-think my theology? Does a person now, in 2017, subsequent to trusting Christ, need to receive the Holy Spirit as a separate act? Is THAT normative?

And if not, if it is normative for a person to receive the Spirit when he receives Christ, why didn't it work that way for the Samaritans?

This much is clear: The New Testament says so frequently that it could go without saying that a believer in Jesus HAS the Holy Spirit's presence and power.

Consider these verses -

***[Romans 8:9] However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ (i.e. - the Holy Spirit), he does not belong to Him. [1 Corinthians 6:19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?***

***[Galatians 4:6] Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"***

And beyond apostolic teaching (see also 1 Corinthians 12), there is apostolic practice.

A couple of chapters over in Acts there is no separation of time between salvation and the reception of the Spirit at the home of Cornelius, the Gentile (Acts 10:44-48).

In fact, nowhere else in Acts (besides here) can we point to an example of people being saved and then receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

(Some will point to Acts 19 as an example of a post-conversion reception of the Holy Spirit. But...the disciples that Paul found in Ephesus were not Christians, having only been baptized into John's baptism of repentance. They didn't know anything about Jesus, only that One was coming after John. As soon as they heard about Jesus, they believed, were saved, were baptized, and received the Holy Spirit, as is the norm.)

So, why the separation of days between FAITH and RECEPTION OF THE SPIRIT in Samaria?

It was to validate to the rest of the church (especially in Jerusalem) that the Body of Christ, the church, is One Church, not a Jewish church and a Samaritan church.

In Acts 11, there is another Pentecost-like experience when the Gentiles in Cornelius' home come to faith in Jesus, proving that there is not a Jewish/Samaritan church and a Gentile church. There is one church. Period.

Michael Greene sees the delayed reception of the Spirit as a "divine veto on schism" in the infant church, a schism which could have slipped almost unnoticed into the Christian fellowship, as converts from the two sides of the Samaritan curtain found Christ without finding each other. That schism would have been the denial of the one baptism and all it stood for.

What happens in Samaria defines the future of the church. It draws a line in the sand and says, *"Anyone who crosses that line by placing faith*

*in Jesus is united with every other person who has crossed that line. You may be Jewish or Samaritan. It doesn't matter."*

And, speaking bluntly, today, you may be left- or right-handed, blue- or brown-eyed, rich or poor, young or old. It doesn't matter.

You may hold to any or no particular political persuasion. You may be African-American, Hispanic, Asian, Anglo or whatever. You may have tattoos or not, piercings or not. You may be a patriot serving in the military or a pacifist.

You may be an athlete, a millionaire, a computer geek or homeless. You may have a shaved head or long hair, be all tattooed and pierced, a graduate school student or High School dropout - it doesn't matter.

If you have placed your faith in Jesus, you are united with every other person who has placed faith in Jesus. And you are welcomed here!

- *The spiritual condition of Simon (Magus)*

There is much discussion about the spiritual condition of Simon (i.e. - whether or not he was saved).

Some who argue that he was not saved make much of the fact that Simon didn't personally pray after Peter's rebuke. They will say that this proves that he didn't have a relationship with God or that he merely dismissed Peter's words (as in, *"You can pray if you wish. I'm not about to pray."*)

But it is also possible to see Simon's request for prayer as a humble petition from a believer that the apostles pray for him to receive fresh cleansing from God.

Many, too, doubt that he was saved because of the enormity of his sin / misunderstanding of spiritual things, shown in his desire to purchase with money the ability to impart the gift of the Holy Spirit.

But, as I have tried to show in the message, his misunderstanding is understandable when we remember his former life as a satanically-empowered magician.

Plus, what Peter said about Simon being in the *"bondage of iniquity"* is best taken as a comment about Simon needing to enter more fully into the freedom that Christ brings and NOT as a comment that he wasn't saved.

Besides, what believer is totally free of all bondage to sinful practices and habits? In Acts 19:19, for instance, believers in Jesus in the city of Ephesus burned 50,000 pieces of silver's worth of magic books - and this was 2-3 years after they had come to faith.

The best evidence that he was saved is that Luke tells us that *"he believed"* (8:13) and was baptized (indicating that Philip certainly counted Simon among the saved). Even the phrase *"he continued on with Philip"* indicates a seriousness of desire to follow Jesus.

So, yes, I believe that he was saved. He believed in Jesus and was baptized as a believer.

Lots of Bible scholars straddle the fence on this one, though.

One noted Bible scholar, Dr. Stanley Toussaint, lists seven reasons why he believes Simon Magus was not saved, and then, in a remarkable moment of candor, says, *"But we can't be sure. He might be saved."*

And Darrell Bock interacts with about ten theologians in his own commentary, all of whom represent different views - and then concludes that Luke leaves the matter open-ended.

Simon was without question a flawed man, was clearly a beginner in following Jesus, and, I think, a brother in Christ.