

Outline

1. Persecution arises
 1. Scatters Christians throughout Judea and Samaria
 2. Apostles do not leave Jerusalem
 3. Saul
 1. Consented to Stephen's death
 2. Participated in searches for Christians
2. Samaria believes
 1. Philip "preached Christ"
 1. Many believed because of his words and miracles
 2. Belief brought joy
 2. Peter and John visit
 1. Conversion of Simon
 1. Considered a great sorcerer
 2. Believed and was baptized
 2. Peter and John come "that they might receive the Holy Spirit"
 3. Simon offers money and is rebuked
3. The Ethiopian treasurer
 1. Philip sent by the Holy Spirit
 1. Road from Jerusalem to Gaza
 2. Deserted area
 2. Ethiopian is reading from Isaiah
 3. Philip "preached Jesus to him"
 4. Eunuch confesses and is baptized

Commentary

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“Devout men; ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς. This word is applied to Simeon (Luke 2:25), and to the Jews who were assembled at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (ch. 2:5), and, according to the R. T., to Ananias (ch. 22:12); but occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It is not certain, therefore, that these men were Christians, though they might be. If not, they were pious Jews, men who feared God, and still loved Stephen as being himself a devout Jew though he was a disciple” (Spence-Jones, 250).

The disciples went everywhere “preaching the word.” The message’s content is essential for us to understand:

1. We are lost
2. Christ came to save
3. This he did by his death and resurrection

(cf Acts 2; 4:33; 1 Cor 2:2; 15:12-19).

Justin Martyr (c. 100-c. 165) wrote the following concerning Simon:

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There was 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”)

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And almost all the Samaritans, and a few even of other nations, worship him, and acknowledge him as the first god; and a woman, Helena, who went about with him at that time, and had formerly been a prostitute, they say is the first idea generated by him. (*Apology* 1.26)

While modern scholars tend to discount the story of the statue, this should give us an indication of the how highly regarded Simon was regarded by those in Samaria.

There is nothing in the text which would lend itself toward a justifiable belief that Simon was “never saved to begin with.” Lenski states:

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It is unwarranted to claim that in the case of Simon’s baptism we have “clear proof that baptism does not convey salvation.” The Baptist taught and practiced the baptism of repentance and remission of sins. The 3,000 were told to be baptized “for the remission of sins.” Paul’s sins were washed away by his being baptized (22:16). Baptism is “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5). Baptism is what it is irrespective of its recipient. A gold piece that is treated as being worthless is no less a gold piece. The only deduction that can be legitimately made on the assumption that Simon had only a sham faith at the time of his baptism is that baptism does not work mechanically, as an *opus operatum*, which means that the saving grace it conveys must be apprehended by the heart. The fact that a man does not appropriate something is not a proof that there was nothing to appropriate (322–323).

In this, I think that Lenski is **almost** correct. His statement that this incident does nothing to disprove baptism’s importance does not go quite far enough. There seems to be an

underlying assumption of “once saved, always saved.” That is, the assumption is that once baptism legitimately happens, there can be no change in state for the believer. The story of Simon appears to be the best possible proof that a person can be legitimately converted and yet fall into sin.

While we do not know what, exactly, Philip said when he “preached Jesus” to the Ethiopian, we do know that it must have led to the question “What hinders me from being baptized?” The only conclusion which may be drawn from this is that “preaching Jesus” involves saying something of baptism.

Thought Questions

Please consider the following thought questions:

1. Does Saul’s persecution of the church show how God can use evil events for good purposes? If so, how?
2. Why would these Christians go everywhere preaching the word instead of trying to “blend in”?
3. Why did Peter not instruct Simon to be baptized again?
4. What important points are seen in the interactions between Philip and the Ethiopian in Acts 8:36-39?
5. Why did the eunuch go on his way rejoicing?