

No Magic Involved

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Modern people disagree when it comes to the subject of magic—not about the stage magic we see on TV, but supernatural works of the devil. Some believe magic is no more than conmen using stage tricks to fool people who don't know any better, while others believe it's a very real danger.

In the ancient world most people believed in magic, and many people would do anything to gain that kind of power. At times, Jesus's enemies even accused Him of being a devil! So when His disciples began healing the sick as Jesus had done, the questions began. Many who saw them were frightened... but others wanted that power for themselves.

The Bible tells us about some of those power-seekers.

This particular story comes from Acts 8:1-25.

When Saul began persecuting the church in Jerusalem,
the believers ran for their lives, going all over the countryside.
And wherever they went, they preached about Jesus.

Philip went to Samaria—a place where Jews weren't welcome—
but his preaching won the Samaritans over.
He healed many people of sicknesses and demons
and brought great joy to the city.

Now there was a magician in Samaria named Simon,
a man the Samaritans called "the Great Power of God."
He had a lot of influence in the city because of his powers...
until Philip arrived, that is.

People began to ignore him and follow Philip,
so he went to see what was so great about this 'nobody' who had just arrived.
He followed Philip around for a while... and he was shocked.
He had NEVER seen anyone do what Philip was doing!
He was so amazed that he believed Philip's preaching, was baptized
and began to listen to Philip himself.

The apostles back in Jerusalem had not run when the persecution started,
but had instead gone into hiding.
And when they heard about what was happening in Samaria
they sent Peter and John to check out the reports.
When they arrived and saw that the reports were correct,
they prayed for the new believers to receive the Holy Spirit as they had.

Now the Bible tells us that the new believers
"had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus."

That sounds strange to us today, but this was the first time
that a large number of people who weren't "pure Jews"
responded to the Gospel. So the apostles—
the leaders of the church, who had been with Jesus from the start—
needed to make sure this was real.

And it was! The Samaritans received the Holy Spirit just as they had.
It was a sight as amazing as it had been at the Upper Room on Pentecost.

Simon was completely amazed. He had never seen such power before!
So he went to the apostles and offered them money
if they would just give him the same power.
"I want to be able to lay hands on people and give them the Holy Spirit,
just like you do!"

To say Peter was upset would be an understatement.
"God's gift can't be bought!" he told him.
"May your money perish with you for even thinking such a thing!
You can have no part in this because your heart is not right with God!
Turn from your evil ways. I can see that
you are full of bitterness and a slave to sin."

Simon begged them to pray for him,
and ask that he would not suffer the punishment Peter predicted.
Then Peter and John, satisfied that
the Samaritans had truly been accepted by God, went back to Jerusalem...
and stopped in many Samaritan villages along the way
to tell them the good news that God had saved them too.

But what of Simon?
Based on what Peter said, it sounds as if Simon started following Jesus
mainly in hopes that he would regain his position of power in Samaria.
And Simon's response isn't that he wants to be saved;
rather, it sounds as if he just wants to avoid the punishment.
But did he eventually listen to Peter and truly turn to God?

We don't know.
That's the last the Bible tells us of Simon.
But here is what we do know:

God's blessings cannot be bought for any price.
Rather, God's blessings are a gift, freely given
to anyone who honestly turns to God and follows Him.
And God isn't fooled by people who only want His gifts and not Him.

Because the real power of God isn't magic.
The real power is His love for His people...
and THAT is priceless.