



ACTS 8-9 SIMON MAGUS; PHILIP BAPTIZES THE EUNUCH; PAUL CONVERTED

In the previous study, we covered the initial story of Simon Magus, who had been a sorcerer and was baptized by Philip (Acts 8:13). We now continue with the account. When the apostles heard that Samaria was receptive to the Gospel, they sent Peter and John to visit them. As seen, this shows Peter was not in charge of the Church, but that the apostles made the decisions for the Church by reaching a *consensus* among them.

Luke writes, "Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.' But Peter said to him, 'Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.' Then Simon answered and said, 'Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.' So when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans" (Acts 8:14-25).

Peter saw that this man was not really converted and was actually evil, lusting for spiritual power and position, so Simon was rejected as a disciple and warned to repent.

Peter's words would prove to be prophetic, as Sir William Ramsay notes, "Peter rebuked him in strong and prophetic terms. The prophecy is concealed in the ordinary translation: the Greek means 'Thou art for a gall and a fetter of unrighteousness, i.e., a cause of bitterness and corruption to others.' This makes it plain. Peter

was uttering a prophecy by the Holy Spirit. He was telling what this Simon was to become" (*Pictures of the Apostolic Church*, 1910, p. 60.)

Nothing else is said directly in Scripture about this Simon, but many who lived about a century later testify to what he did and of his false doctrines, thus he is likely the first heretic. Many of the Epistles focus on rejecting Gnostic and pagan heresies which are traced back to him.

F. F. Bruce comments, "Simon the sorcerer, or Simon Magus (as he is usually called) plays an extraordinary role in early Christian literature. In post-apostolic times he is depicted as the father of Gnostic heresies...the Samaritan Simon impressed his fellow-countrymen greatly by the exercise of his magic powers, so much so that they accepted his own account of himself and regarded him as the Grand Vizier [vicar] of the supreme God, the channel both of divine power and of divine revelation" (*NIT, Acts*, 1974, p. 178).

This grandiloquent title is similar to the one used by a religious leader at the Vatican in Rome.

One key witness about Simon Magus was Justin Martyr, a Christian writer from Samaria, who had come from the same area as Simon Magus, and writes around 150 AD, "There was a Samaritan, Simon, a native of the village called Gitto, who in the reign of Claudius Caesar (41-54 AD), 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 such was honored 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). And almost all the Samaritans, and a few of even other nations, worship him..." (*The First Apology of Justin, Anti-Nicene Fathers*, p. 170).

Another witness was Irenaeus, writing around 180 AD, who identifies Simon as the father of Gnosticism and says, "Simon the Samaritan was that magician of whom Luke, the disciple and follower of the apostles, says, 'But there was a certain man, Simon by name, who beforetime used magical arts in that city, and led astray the people of Samaria...He, then, not putting faith in God a whit the more, set himself eagerly to contend

against the apostles, in order that he himself might seem to be a wonderful being, and applied himself with still greater zeal to the study of the whole magic art, that he might the better bewilder and overpower multitudes of men. Such was his procedure in the reign of Claudius Caesar, by whom also he is said to have been honored with a statue, on account of his magical power. This man, then, was glorified by many as if he were a god; and he taught that it was himself who appeared among the Jews as the Son, but descended in Samaria as the Father while he came to other nations in the character of the Holy Spirit [a type of Trinity]. He represented himself, in a word, as being the loftiest of all powers, that is, the Being who is the Father over all, and he allowed himself to be called by whatsoever title men were pleased to address him" (*Against Heresies, ANF*, p. 347).

So, according to just about every Church writer of the first four centuries, Simon Magus developed a false Christianity centered in Rome.

Adolf Harnack, a famous church historian, mentions, "The following may be asserted here with some confidence: Long before the appearance of Christianity, combinations of religion had taken place in Syria and Palestine, *especially in Samaria*, in so far, on the one hand, as *the Assyrian and Babylonian religious philosophy*, together with its myths, as well as the *Greek popular religion* with its manifold interpretations, had penetrated as far as the eastern shore of the Mediterranean..."

He then adds that Simon Magus and his followers, "proclaimed a doctrine in which the Jewish faith was strangely and grotesquely mixed with Babylonian myths, together with some Greek additions. The mysterious worship...in consequence of the widened horizon and the deepening religious feeling, finally the wild syncretism [a blending together of religious beliefs], whose aim was *a universal religion*, all contributed to gain adherents for Simon....We can therefore understand how, afterwards, all heresies were traced back to Simon..."(*History of Dogma*, Vol. 1, p. 244-246). Then, in a footnote on page 246, he adds, "The main point in Simon is his endeavor to create a universal religion of the supreme God. This explains his success among the Samaritans and Greeks. He is really a counterpart to Jesus..." So, in many parts of the world, it was

the tares, or false brethren, and not the wheat of the Church, who had won popularity and power.

Next, Philip is given another task, "Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, 'Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' This is desert. So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go near and overtake this chariot.' So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' And he said, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. The place in the Scripture which he read was this: 'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation his justice was taken away, and who will declare his generation? For his life is taken from the earth.' So the eunuch answered Philip and said, 'I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?' Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea" (Acts 8:26-40).

The Bible Knowledge Commentary mentions, "'Ethiopia' here refers not to modern-day Ethiopia but to ancient Nubia, the region from Aswan in southern Egypt to Khartoum, Sudan. Candace was a title given to the queen-mother, as Pharaoh was used of the king of Egypt. Governmental power rested in the hands of Candace, for the royal son,

worshiped as an offspring of the sun, was therefore above such mundane activities as ruling over a nation. Rulership was therefore vested with the queen-mother."

It is also interesting how Philip was transported through the air to another city, Azotus, or ancient Ashdod, about 20 miles from where he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch.

Also, the verb used, "caught away" (*harpazo* in the Gk.) is the same one used in 1 Thes. 4:17, when the saints will be "caught up" into the sky. So this is one possible way for the Church to be taken to "her place" of safety mentioned in Rev. 12:14.

Next comes Paul's conversion in Acts 9:1-25, "Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' Then the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' So he, trembling and astonished, said, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?' Then the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.' And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here I am, Lord.' So the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.' Then Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call

on Your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.' And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, 'Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?' But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket."

Here, God intervenes directly in history to call His "chosen vessel" to transmit to the world His Gospel, for both Jews and Gentiles. It took quite a humbling, Jesus appearing and talking with Him while on the road to Damascus. "Kicking against the goads" refers to the reaction of an ox when it is goaded with a sharp stick. The meaning being that Paul was stubbornly going against God's will and that he better realize it and repent, which he did.

So after fasting and being blind for three days, he was humbled enough to accept God's will. Ananias, a Church leader in Damascus, was sent by a vision and he baptized Saul, who also took the name of Paul (Acts 13:9). During this time, Paul states in Gal. 1:13-17 he was led to Arabia for an undefined time, where he was especially prepared by Jesus Christ, as he later explains, and where he learns the details of Christian doctrine to reveal to the world. They are in his epistles we so cherish.