

# Discussion Questions

September 8, 2024

## Acts 8:5-25

### Wizards & Weirdos: The Church Gets Messy



1. Read Acts 8:5-25 and summarize the story in your own words.

What do you think it would have been like for thousands of Jewish Christians to relocate to Samaria.

2. Why did Peter and John travel to Samaria to lay hands on the believers?

What does this event tell us about the role of the Holy Spirit in the early church?

3. The church is scattered because of persecution, yet God uses the Christians powerfully in Samaria, the place they really don't want to be.

Share an example of how God used a very difficult circumstance in your life to move you to a healthier place, one you likely would not have reached had you not gone through it.

Are there any areas where you feel like you are in "Samaria" right now, and yet God might be asking you to seek Him? How might God want to use you in the midst of the hardship or circumstances?

4. While the church began very homogeneous, in chapter 8 it begins to look very different.

In what ways do churches today tend to remain homogeneous and deter "outsiders" from taking part?

Discuss how we (not only as a broader church, but individually) can create space in our own churches for people who might feel out of place or marginalized.

5. James spoke about how "messy" the early church was. Discuss what it looks like for a church to healthily live in the tension of welcoming and caring well for people who are struggling or who take a lot of energy and resources, while also being a safe space for people to grow and flourish and not burn people out.

6. How can we be part of loving well those whom God has put us in relationship with that we see have grown calloused to sin in their lives? What can we do to not be judgmental, but to help point them to freedom in Christ?

**Acts 8:9–25 (NLT)**

A man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, amazing the people of Samaria and claiming to be someone great. Everyone, from the least to the greatest, often spoke of him as “the Great One - the Power of God.” They listened closely to him because for a long time he had astounded them with his magic. But now the people believed Philip’s message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself believed and was baptized. He began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed by the signs and great miracles Philip performed.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God’s message, they sent Peter and John there. As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new believers to receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit.

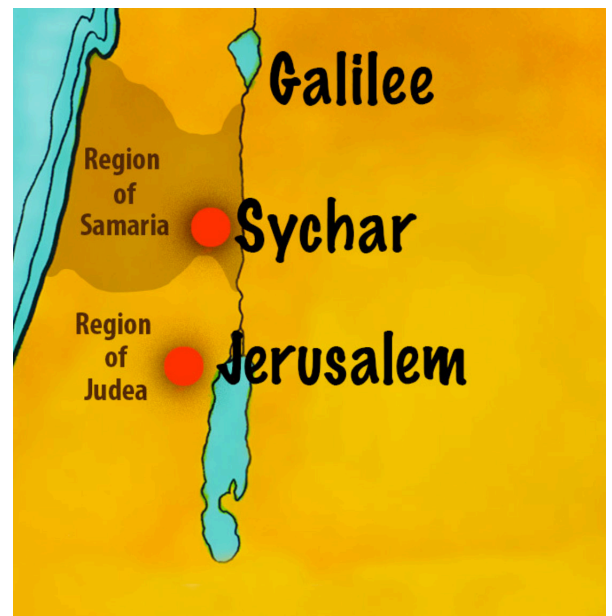
When Simon saw that the Spirit was given when the apostles laid their hands on people, he offered them money to buy this power. “Let me have this power, too,” he exclaimed, “so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!” But Peter replied, “May your money be destroyed with you for thinking God’s gift can be bought! You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right with God. Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil thoughts, for I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin.” “Pray to the Lord for me,” Simon exclaimed, “that these terrible things you’ve said won’t happen to me!”

**Acts 8:1 (NLT)**

A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria.

**Acts 8:5 (NLT)**

Philip, for example, went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah.



**Acts 8:6-8 (NLT)**

*Crowds listened intently to Philip because they were eager to hear his message and see the miraculous signs he did. Many evil spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims. And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city.*

**Acts 8:9-11 (NLT)**

*A man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, amazing the people of Samaria and claiming to be someone great. Everyone, from the least to the greatest, often spoke of him as "the Great One - the Power of God." They listened closely to him because for a long time he had astounded them with his magic.*

**Justin Martyr - The First Apology (155 A.D.)**

*"[Simon] did mighty acts of magic, by virtue of the art of the devils operating in him. He was considered a god...And almost all the Samaritans, and a few even of other nations, worship him, and acknowledge him as the first god"*

**Acts 8:12-13 (NLT)**

*But now the people believed Philip's message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself believed and was baptized. He began following Philip wherever he went, and he was amazed by the signs and great miracles Philip performed.*

**Acts 8:14-17 (NLT)**

*When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God's message, they sent Peter and John there. As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new believers to receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

**Acts 8:18-19 (NLT)**

*When Simon saw that the Spirit was given when the apostles laid their hands on people, he offered them money to buy this power. "Let me have this power, too," he exclaimed, "so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit!"*

**Acts 8:20-23 (NLT)**

*But Peter replied, "May your money be destroyed with you for thinking God's gift can be bought! 21 You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right with God. Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil thoughts, for I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin."*

**Clinton Arnold - Zondervan Exegetical Commentary - Acts**

The literal wording of the phrase is "you are in a gall (poison) of bitterness" Peter's language echoes Moses' warnings to the people of Israel when they renewed the covenant with God: "Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison" (Deut. 29:18). Simon is not bitter; rather, he is full of a bitter poison. This is consistent with the next line that describes him as a "captive to sin."

**Acts 8:24 (NLT)**

*"Pray to the Lord for me," Simon exclaimed, "that these terrible things you've said won't happen to me!"*

**Acts 8:25 (NLT)**

*After testifying and preaching the word of the Lord in Samaria, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem. And they stopped in many Samaritan villages along the way to preach the Good News.*