Simon the Sorcerer



Scripture Reference: Acts 8:5-25

Suggested Theme: Magic tricks are just “tricks,” but miracles are by the power of God.

Memory Verse: “You are the God who did miracles. You showed people your power.” Psalm 77:14, ICB

Story Overview:

Philip was one of the original seven helpers in the church. When he preached in Samaria, a well-known sorcerer (or magician) named Simon believed and became a Christian. Simon had only ever done clever magic tricks, so he was amazed when he saw real miracles performed. When the Apostles came to Samaria, Simon noticed that they laid hands on people to give them the power to do miracles. Simon wanted to have that power. He offered to pay lots of money if the Apostles would sell him the same power they had. One of the Apostles, Peter, told Simon that no one can buy the power of God. God gives the power.

Background Study:

Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts

The Christians are Persecuted and Scatter (Acts 8:1-3)

At the conclusion of the story of the Stoning of Stephen, we are first introduced to a man named Saul. When the angry Jews were stoning Stephen, Saul showed his approval by taking care of the cloaks of those who were throwing the stones. After that event, Saul seems to go on a rampage against the followers of Jesus in an attempt to destroy the church. He even went from house to house, dragging off men and women and putting them in prison. When a person or group suffers harm or hurt by others because of their beliefs, this is called “persecution.“

Because of the great persecution, followers of Jesus left Jerusalem in great numbers and went to live in other regions. As they went, they shared the good news of Jesus Christ. So, ironically, by trying to destroy this Jesus movement, Saul actually played a part in making it spread and grow. You can learn more about how Saul’s life changed drastically in the story Paul (Saul) Becomes a Christian.

Philip preaches in Samaria (Acts 8:4-8)

Philip was one of Jesus’ followers who left Jerusalem and shared the gospel with others. Philip was known to be a faithful man and was one of the seven men who were full of the Spirit and wisdom and who was chosen to be one of the helpers in the church. Later in Act 8, we learn more about Philip in the story of Philip and the Ethiopians. In Acts 21:8-9, we read about Philip living in Caesarea and being the father of four unmarried daughters that prophesied.

He taught the people in Samaria about Jesus and performed many miracles. The Samaritans were very impressed and received the news with joy. Up to this time, only Jews had obeyed the Gospel. Samaritans

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had Jewish ancestry and had much in common with the practising Jews but were regarded by Jews as inferior and unclean. They were looked down on by the Jews and also despised by non-Jews. Samaritans were a mixed race of people with some ancestral ties to the northern kingdom in the Old Testament. They practised the Jewish religion but had their own version of the Pentateuch. They also had their own temple in Gerizim until the Jews destroyed it in the 2nd century B.C. This was the place referred to by the Woman at the Well (John 4:20).

Simon the Sorcerer Believed (Acts 8:9-11)

Simon was famous in Samaria and was said to have divine power, which the people called "the Great Power." Simon was unafraid to boast about his greatness and had a wide following. Even though Simon had been impressing people with his magic tricks, he recognised that the power of the Holy Spirit, as seen in the miracles Philip performed, differed from what he had been doing. Magic tricks can be learned and explained, but a miracle is an event that is not explained by natural laws or science. Simon joined many Samaritans in believing what Philip was preaching and became a follower of King Jesus by being baptised. Simon was so impressed that he followed Philip around and watched him perform even more miracles.

Peter and John Fulfil the Words of Jesus (Acts 8:12-17)

At the time Philip was teaching in Samaria, the Apostles were still living in Jerusalem, Judea. Jesus had told them to begin their work there.

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus told the Apostles that they would be His witnesses from that point onward. They would not be alone. The Holy Spirit would come to them and give them the power they needed to accomplish the mission. Boundary after boundary would be broken as the Apostles displayed the power of the Holy Spirit in ever-widening areas.

> "But the Holy Spirit will come to you. Then you will receive power. You will be my witnesses—in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, in Samaria, and in every part of the world." [Words of Jesus in Acts 1:8, ICB]

When the Apostles heard about the people of Samaria turning to Jesus, two of them (Peter and John) travelled there.

Upon the arrival of Peter and John, the Samaritans witnessed the same kind of great outpouring of the Holy Spirit that had been seen before and after Peter had preached the famous Sermon at Pentecost in Jerusalem. When Peter and John placed their hands on them, these new Christians received the special ability to perform miracles themselves. Before, the Spirit had not "come upon" them, but now the Spirit most certainly had! The Spirit had been manifested in Judea and now in Samaria. This showed that God accepted the Samaritans, too, to be part of His one people.

The Gospel is for everyone. In the Book of Acts, there are other examples of the Holy Spirit being poured out in a special way to show that God was breaking a barrier and accepting a new group of people. This happened with:

- The First Jews (Sermon at Pentecost)
- The First Non-Orthodox Jews-Samaritans (Story of Simon the Sorcerer)
- The First Gentiles (Cornelius Became a Christian)

Simon Wants Powers for Himself (Acts 8:18-25)

Peter and John fulfilled the special role that Jesus had commissioned them to play. Instead of viewing the power of the Holy Spirit as a witness of Jesus, Simon saw it as a magic power that could be purchased and used.

Peter and John took Simon's request very seriously.

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> “Peter said to him, ‘You and your money should both be destroyed! You thought you could buy God’s gift with money. You cannot share with us in this work. Your heart is not right before God. Change your heart! Turn away from this evil thing you have done. Pray to the Lord. Maybe he will forgive you for thinking this. I see that you are full of bitter jealousy and ruled by sin.’” Acts 8:20-23, ICB

Simon immediately begged Peter to pray for him. The Scripture ends with Peter and John returning to Jerusalem and teaching other Samaritans along the way.

Before hearing about Jesus, Simon’s livelihood and reputation depended on his ability to perform magic tricks for people. In sharp contrast, the Holy Spirit is a living and active part of God himself. Miracles performed by the Spirit are beyond any human ability.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Perform an obvious magic trick. You can perform a card trick or borrow magic books from the city library. Once you have performed it a few times, allow the children to see how it is done. “Children, in today’s bible story, we will learn about a man who could do lots of magic tricks. He learned a very important lesson about the difference between tricks and the real power of God.” *(More about this in the post Miracles versus Magic Tricks.)*

The Story:

To persecute someone is to cause harm to them on purpose so that they suffer. In Jerusalem, some people persecuted followers of Jesus. Many followers of Jesus began leaving Jerusalem and moving to other places.

Wherever the followers of Jesus went, they preached about Jesus. One of these Jesus followers was Philip. He was a wise man who lived according to the Holy Spirit. Because he had been with the Apostles, he could perform miracles to prove that the word of God about Jesus was true. Philip travelled to Samaria and told the people there about Jesus.

Simon was a famous magician who lived in Samaria. Simon performed magic tricks, and everyone thought he was amazing. They even said that he had power like a god.

But when Philip told the Samaritans the good news of Jesus Christ, many of them believed. When the people saw the miracles Philip performed by the power of the Holy Spirit, they knew that miracles from God were far better than mere magic tricks. Anyone can explain a magic trick. But a miracle cannot be explained by science and can only be done through the power of God.

Many people accepted the teaching of Jesus and decided to be baptised.

Even Simon the Sorcerer was baptised. After that, Simon followed Philip everywhere and watched him perform miracles.

The good news about the Samaritans spread to the Apostles in Jerusalem. Two of the Apostles, Peter and John, travelled to Samaria to see Philip and the new followers of Jesus.

Peter and John remembered a time when Jesus told the Apostles that they had an important job to do. They knew Jesus better than anyone else, and they were to make sure people knew that Jesus wanted everyone to be part of the family of God. The Holy Spirit would give them special power to do this.

Peter and John laid their hands on some of the people in Samaria and gave them the power to do miracles like Philip had been doing.

Everyone was amazed. These Samaritans were receiving powers from the Holy Spirit just like other believers in Jesus had.

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Simon watched Peter and John very carefully. They laid hands on people and gave them power, so Simon wanted to be able to do that, too.

Simon tried to pay Peter and John money and said to them, “Give me this ability, too. I want to lay my hands on people to give them the power of the Holy Spirit, too.”

But Simon was very wrong to think this was about money. This was not magic; this was the power of the Holy Spirit!

Peter reacted very strongly. How dare Simon think anyone could buy what was only God’s to give? No one can buy the gift of God with money! Peter told Simon that he must repent and ask God for forgiveness.

Simon asked Peter and John to pray for him.

Peter and John continued to preach to the people about God until it was time for them to return to Jerusalem. They even talked to people about Jesus while they were travelling home.

It was just as Jesus had first said to the Apostles:
“But the Holy Spirit will come to you. Then you will receive power. You will be my witnesses—in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, in Samaria, and in every part of the world.”

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, or other forms of group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child’s spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- What was the name of the Sorcerer who practised magic in this story? (Simon)
- Where did Simon live? (Samaria)
- Did Simon the Sorcerer become a Christian? (Yes)
- Which Christian did Simon spend time with before he met Peter and John? (Philip)
- What happened when the Apostles laid hands on people in Samaria? (They received the power to do miracles)

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- What did Simon the Sorcerer want to buy from the Apostles? (The ability to give people the power to do miracles)
- What is the difference between a “magic trick” and a miracle from God? (A magic trick is just a trick to fool you. The magician makes you think there is magic. A miracle is something that God really makes happen that human beings could never make happen, no matter how hard they tried)
- What did Simon learn about the Holy Spirit and God’s power? (One example: People cannot buy God’s power. God gives us His power, Holy Spirit, and spiritual abilities as a gift. There are other things Simon learned that the children can share)
- What does this story show you about God?
- What does this story show you about people?

Reflection:

- What miracles and wonders do you think Simon could have seen Philip doing in Samaria?
- Were you surprised to hear that Simon became a believer?
- How do you think Simon felt when he first saw God’s power working through people to do signs and wonders?
- Why do you think Simon asked the Apostles to be given “power so that when I lay my hands on a person, he will receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:19)?
- How do you think Peter knew that Simon’s heart was not right with God and full of bitterness?
- Simon asked Peter and John to pray for him that God would forgive him. Why is it good to ask others to pray for us?
- Who have you asked to pray for you? Has someone ever asked you to pray for them?
- How do you hope this story ended? What do you hope happened next with Simon?
- What other miracles do you remember God doing in the Bible?
- What part of this story was most interesting to you?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- ABC: Jesus Died for You and Me Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- My God is So Big Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Learn and perform some simple magic tricks and discuss the difference between magic (tricks) and miracles(from God). Click here for instructions and examples.
- The people listened to both Philip and Simon. Compare and contrast what each of them preached and did. Adapt this “drawing contrasts” activity.
- Find Jerusalem and Samaria on a map. Calculate the distance. Or have the children copy the map, then write the following across or below it: *“And everywhere the believers were scattered, they told people the Good News.” Acts 8:4*
- Have children act out the story.
- Play the Spinner Game and the listed review questions to review the story.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

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Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Detailed information and map of Samaria (Bible atlas)
- Additional background information about Samaria and the Samaritans (Bible study tools)

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