

Lesson 1: Samaria: Syncretism
Sermon Date: January 6th
Text: Acts 8:4 - 24

1. Scan through the first few chapters of Acts. What is the state of the church and its growth as of the start of Chapter 8?

2. Read Acts 8:4-8. Why did the Samaritans pay attention to Philip and his message?

3. Read 8:9-24. Compare the reaction of the Samaritans to Philip's words and actions to that of what Simon said and did. What is different?

4. Peter and John come to Samaria to see first-hand what has happened there as a result of Philip's ministry. After they arrive, they pray for the Holy Spirit to come to the new believers. For a man of Simon's background, how do you suppose he reacted to all of this?

5. What is Simon's motivation behind his request in v. 19?

6. Why do you suppose Peter's response (v. 20) is so strong?

7. How is syncretism a concern for us (Hillside) as we strive to be a church that appeals to the world we are trying to reach?

Getting Started (ideas for how to transition to begin this study):

- Syncretism – what does that mean? How have you heard this term applied before?
- What attracted and caused you to ‘pay attention’ to the Gospel message?

Digging Deeper (optional material to consider):

- Definition: Syncretism (Webster) – the combination of different forms of belief or practice.
- We’ve seen from Jesus’ ministry (John 4) that Jews didn’t think highly of Samaritans. Why? Consider the definition of ‘syncretism.’ How does this word relate to how the Jews viewed Samaritans?
- Philip was one of the seven in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:5), who has become an evangelist, proclaiming the Christ (Messiah); see also 21:8. Philip is an example of one of those who were “scattered” (see v. 4).
- Some manuscripts have "the city of Samaria," a reference to the old capital Samaria, renamed Sebaste or Neapolis (modern Nablus).
- According to early Christian literature, Simon, the "sorcerer" (Simon Magus) is described as the arch-heretic of the church and the "father" of Gnostic teaching. It is difficult to know whether Simon's faith was genuine. Even though Luke says Simon believed (v. 13), Peter's statement that Simon had no part in the apostles' ministry because his heart was not "right before God" (v. 21) casts some doubt on the depth or sincerity of Simon’s decision. The claim that he went on to be the ‘father’ of Gnostic teaching adds more weight to the notion that his acceptance of the Gospel message was either false or short-lived. If so, what do you suppose was the cause of his downfall?
- The practice of the main church (in Jerusalem) going out to check on the evangelical actions of those it sent out to spread the word and launch new churches was common. This helped to ensure the message was delivered, accepted and being acted upon in the right manner – a critical step to ensure the growth of the early church. Compare this practice to that of Hillside launching The Creek or coming along side Canto Nuevo. Consider also the risks involved as new cultures become entwined with the beliefs and practices of Hillside – that ‘syncretism’ effect.
- Look at Deuteronomy 29:16-20. How does this passage relate to Simon and the concern of the church leaders (e.g., Peter and John) for the health and safety of the young church?