

Cindy Bassett

The Bible Corner



The magician of Samaria II

Nearly 100 of Samaria's citizens had already gathered at the river by the time Philip arrived. Simon Magus was not among them. Those who did come had accepted Philip's offer of initiation into the new Church. "If you truly believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, you must be baptized in His name."

Philip, heartened to see so many new believers, was careful to remind them that all other false gods must no longer be worshipped. And that included Simon and his magic. At the end of the day, Philip received a message from Simon and went directly to see him.

Simon Magus resided on the very outskirts of town, far removed from the common folk of the region. As soon as Philip entered his house, he saw that there was nothing ordinary about it. The room nearly overflowed with charms, amulets and a whole array of stone pots with magic formulas inscribed on them.

Simon Magus sat in the very midst of the clutter. "Tricks of the trade," he said, giving Philip a wink. "Don't look so downcast. There is much we can learn from each other."

"There is nothing I want to know about your false ideas of God!" Philip snapped.

"False ideas?" Simon asked. "You are the one guilty of false ideas. Didn't you promise the people eternal life?"

"Eternal life through belief in Jesus Christ as the one true God," Philip stated firmly.

"Ah, but you have forgotten something," Simon said wryly. "I have special powers that enable me to predict the future. You're going to die the same sort of death as Stephen."

"Of course my body will die some day," Philip replied. "But my spirit will live forever."

"How did Jesus do it?" Simon asked. "How was He able to rise from the dead?"

Philip eyed Simon disdainfully. Long ago in Egypt, Moses had also been challenged by Pharaoh's magicians with their secret arts. But they had been defeated by the truth.

"Belief in Jesus is not a magician's trick that can be learned with your mind," Philip said. "It's something you feel in your heart. If you truly believe, you will do everything you can to bring glory to His name, not your own, Simon."

The discussion between the two men went on for a long time. Philip, prompted by the Spirit, refuted all of Simon's arguments as well as his attempts to distort the truth. Finally, Simon surprised Philip by requesting, "I would like to be baptized so that I can become a follower of your Jesus, too!"

Philip's message to the apostles in Jerusalem was joyful. "Peter," he wrote, "there is much good here in Samaria. Many have heard the message of Jesus and joined us. There have been healings, but nothing quite as dramatic as the conversion of Simon. He has become my constant companion."

There was something about Philip's letter that hadn't set quite right with Peter. "Come, John," he suggested after reading it, "let us go to Samaria and see the good work for ourselves. Those who have been baptized are now ready to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

In a few days, Peter and John stood with Philip before the new followers in Samaria. They prayed that these people would be strong in their faith in Jesus and not return to their false gods. After the brief service, Peter and John laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Meanwhile, Simon Magus had stood watching from a distance. When the apostles had finished, he saw his chance to approach. "I want to receive your power," he began, "so that I can give people the Holy Spirit, too. I am a very rich man, I will pay you well!"

"Philip was wrong about you!" Peter shouted, his face reddening. "Your heart is evil if you think that you can buy what he offers freely to His believers. You are jealous of God, and for that I am certain you will be punished!"

"Pray to this God for me," Simon stammered. "If you do, I am sure He will not inflict terrible things on me."

Simon Magus did not change his ways. He continued to rely on his own false powers. Many years later, when Peter went to Rome, he found Simon in that city, challenging him again.

Today, Simon Magus is known as the father of heresy. The practice of buying and selling spiritual favors is known as simony.

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Scripture Reference: Acts, Chapter 8:14-24.

Father Albert Shamon

A Word for Sunday



God bless America

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 11:25-30; (R1) Zechariah 9:9-10; (R2) Romans 8:9, 11-13.

Sometimes I think we forget that patriotism is a virtue, that love of homeland goes hand in hand with love of home.

I have traveled widely in foreign lands, and I assure you I have never found a land more lovely than America. God has blessed our land with resources surpassing those of all other lands. But one of His greatest blessings is liberty.

On July 4th, we celebrate liberty, a right that imposes great responsibility. God's people, freed from Egyptian slavery, yearned for slavery rather than shouldering the arduous burden of liberty.

Liberty is not license—doing as one pleases. Liberty is the power to do as one ought. Either we use it responsibly or we abuse it. If we abuse it, we soon lose it. "Confirm thy soul in self-control," wrote Katherine Lee Bates, "Thy liberty in law!"

Only the law-abiding will secure liberty. Lincoln said America would never fall to enemies from without, and—assuming we did fall—it would only be to enemies within. We can be our own worst enemies.

One of the lessons of the Iran-Contra affair is that the press must act more responsibly, exercising more prudence and restraint, and less exaggeration and sensationalism.

The plight of our youth today, and society in general, tells us loud and clear that we've acted irresponsibly in taking God out of schools, civic affairs and government. The shibboleth of "separation of Church and state" is only a subterfuge for "separation of state from God." It literally "kicks" God out the life of a nation founded on God and prosperous because of its allegiance to God.

A Fourth of July resolution could be to pray that God be brought back into our lives, schools, media, society and government. Another resolve could be to get patriotism back into American life. And we can start by making the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag compulsory in all our schools. Why not? What is wrong with that?

Our lawmakers in Albany this past February, however, voted down by 74 to 49 a bill requiring that each day's legislative session open with the Pledge of Allegiance. Imagine that! Legislators putting party and politics ahead of love of country. How sad and ironic!

When I was in Budapest's airport this year, soldiers with tommy guns and muzzled dogs surrounded our plane. Then a Pan Am plane flew in with the American flag painted on its tail; a thrill of pride ran through me, and I whispered, "God bless America!"

Our beautiful flag—emblem of values all Americans hold dear: the red badge of courage, the white of sincerity, the blue of loyalty; and the 50 stars, symbolizing 50 states as one nation under God, free, shining in a dark world as beacon lights of liberty.

Our beautiful flag—reminder of our roots. The 13 stripes of the 13 colonies: seven red ones for the blood spilled while securing liberty and six white ones for the nobility of the cause for which blood was shed—liberty and justice for all!

And the pledge—vocal affirmation of justice and liberty for all, born and unborn.

Who would dare refuse such a pledge to such a flag?

Perhaps another July 4th resolve could be to re-read George Washington's farewell address.

He said, "Citizens, by birth or choice, of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections."

And then these unforgettable words that ought to be emblazoned on the desks of every politician serving this nation, whether in the oval office or in the Supreme Court or in the halls of Congress:

"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens."

"Let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education... reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

I am an American!

I am proud to be an American!

I love the flag!

I love the Fourth of July!

I love the George M. Cohan brand of patriotism.

I love my country!

It is my homeland!

May God bless her!

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