

CHURCH SCHEDULE

**Sunday School & Bible Study:
9:45 a.m.**

Sunday Service: 11:00 a.m.

**Wednesday Bible Study:
7:00 p.m.**

SPEAKERS

March 2: Ivan Niemela, *Holy Communion*

March 9: Mark Sunnarborg

March 16: Ivan Niemela

March 23: Ivan Niemela, *Potluck meal following the service*

March 30: Ken Storm

CONTACT

Website:
www.tapiolachurch.org

Mailing: P.O. Box 531
Houghton, MI 49931

Location:
17602 N. Lake Ave.
Tapiola, MI 49916
(906) 334-2766

Contact:
Pastor Ivan Niemela
(906) 231-0945

Simon the Sorcerer

“But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one” – Acts 8:9

Simon was a preacher well-liked by the people but was not a man of God. As our text shows, he used sorcery to captivate the people of Samaria, who unanimously believed that he spoke with the power of God: *“And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries”* (Acts 8:11). However, when Philip preached unto these same people about *“the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ”* (Acts 8:12), they believed him and were baptized. Even Simon himself believed and was baptized. He continued to listen to Philip’s sermons and was amazed by the miracles and signs performed among the people.

Sorcery is considered an abomination in the Bible. It can refer to the use of spells or divinations that circumvent the will of God. More broadly, it encompasses anything that leads people away from truthfully worshiping Him. In Simon’s case, the Samaritans—a mix of Jewish and Gentile ancestry—believed he was preaching the word of God. His messages likely drew on Scripture and mysticism. Similarly, another sorcerer named Bar-Jesus spoke in the synagogues of the Jews on the island of Cyprus. Like Simon, he probably referenced God from Scripture; otherwise, he would not have preached in a synagogue. However, Barnabas and Saul referred to Bar-Jesus as a false prophet because he disputed their teachings in an effort *“to turn away the deputy from the faith”* (Acts 13:6-8). His goal was not to lead others to a different religion but, rather, to promote his misguided understanding of faith, in opposition to the Apostles’ teachings. While both Simon and Bar-Jesus felt compelled to share their faith, neither had received a call from God, as evidenced by their lack of spiritual fruit (Jer 23:21). Thus, merely preaching from the pulpit—regardless of what others think—does not guarantee sound doctrine.

In contrast to the false prophets mentioned earlier, Philip was not a preacher but was called by God to assist the twelve Apostles. He was one of the *“seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom”* (Acts 6:3) chosen by the church for this role. This selection meant that only god-fearing men were eligible; it wasn’t open to just anyone, regardless of their desire to do it (Acts 6:5). Stephen was another man chosen to oversee this task. It quickly became apparent that the synagogue where Stephen preached had problems with his teachings. Like Philip, he proclaimed that salvation comes only through the blood of Christ, which some members of his synagogue disputed. Unable to counter his teachings, they hired false witnesses who lied about him, which ultimately led to his being stoned to death. This stoning was part of a great persecution against Christians in Jerusalem, which caused them to scatter abroad, preaching the word wherever they went. Consequently, Philip traveled from Jerusalem to Samaria to share the gospel.

When Peter and John heard that the Samaritans had received the word of God from Philip, they traveled from Jerusalem to Samaria. They prayed for the people so that they might receive the Holy Ghost, *“For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus”* (Acts 8:15-16). This shows that receiving the Holy Spirit is necessary for salvation and is distinct from water baptism. Apostle Paul confirmed this by saying, *“Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his”* (Romans 8:9). Therefore, we do not become children of God until we receive the Holy Ghost into our hearts. Peter and John *“Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 8:17).

Simon eagerly observed Philip's preaching and tried to purchase the power to give the Holy Ghost to others. This act demonstrated that Simon had not truly received the Spirit himself. If he had, God would have revealed to him that it is a gift from God for all who repent and, through His grace, believe in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Moreover, Simon's acceptance of Philip's preaching and his resultant baptism did not spiritually benefit him. He remained unchanged in heart and character, motivated more by a desire for attention and admiration from others rather than to glorify God. In response to Simon's request, Peter warned him that he and his money would perish in hell if he did not repent of this sin (Acts 8:22). He needed to pray to God for guidance.

Simon's actions, compared to those of Philip, Peter, and John, illustrate that salvation comes by faith, not works, including water baptism or preaching. In Ephesians 2:8-9, the Apostle Paul states that salvation is a gift from God. Acts 2:38, 41 emphasizes that this gift is none other than the Holy Ghost, which comes through the forgiveness of sins, but only if one can receive it. While water baptism is important, it is an act of obedience for a believer. Preaching is also important for sharing the Word (Romans 10:14-17), but the responsibility for faith lies with the listener. It is essential for each person not to believe every spirit, as the people originally did with Simon. Instead, they should prayerfully try the spirits, trusting God to reveal the truth (1 John 4:1). May God bless us as we travel toward the Promised Land in these latter days.

God's Peace,
Charles Korhonen