

## Acts 7 - 8

### A Martyr, A Murderer & A Magician

Read 7: 54 – 8:3

*Background - 6:8 - 7:53 – Stephen is seized and then defends himself by preaching to the Sanhedrin.*

> Stephen is the 1<sup>st</sup> Christian MARTYR

def: someone who is murdered for a cause; the death often advances the cause

> Significant elements surrounding Stephen's death:

(1) It did not STOP THE GROWTH of the church – instead, it actually caused the church TO SPREAD!  
(see 8:1 – the disciples were “scattered”)

(2) Saul APPROVED Stephen's murder.

\* Likely, Saul was in a position of leadership over the stoning – giving necessary approval for it to happen. His position would make Saul RESPONSIBLE.

> Food for Thought:

Q: What 2 barriers make it hard for us to empathize with or apply the story of Stephen's stoning to our lives?

(1) We think of Christian martyrdom as ANCIENT HISTORY

(2) We are rarely touched by martyrdom IN THE WEST

Q: What should our attitude be toward martyrdom

\* Dread it, but be willing to face it if necessary (*easy to say ... but hard to imagine*)

\* Take action to avoid it coming here – we need BOLDNESS.

Q: What steps can we take to keep or re-make the USA into a “Christian” nation?

\* PRAYER for those who are being persecuted!

Q: How does persecution impact the church? (see 8:1 and 8:3)

Q: How have people historically misunderstood persecution? Why? (asceticism, “martyr complex”, etc)

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For more info on modern-day martyrs, visit ***The Voice of the Martyrs*** ([www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com))  
Recommended reading: *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, Edited by William Byron Forbush (a literary classic!)  
and

*Jesus Freaks – Stories of Those Who Stood for Jesus*, by DC Talk and Voice of the Martyrs

*“There are more Christian martyrs today than there were in 100 AD-in the days of the Roman Empire. According to a study done at Regent University, there were close to 164,000 Christians martyred around the world in 1999. Their stories must be told.”*

## 8: 4-25 Simon the Magician

Simon's story gives us some insight to the question of why we see so much supernatural activity in Acts.

### (1) Simon practiced SORCERY / MAGIC

“sorcerer” – “A practitioner of magic arts, enchanter with drugs, observer of clouds, witchcrafts.”

> The result of his magic:

- a. He AMAZED people
- b. The public believe he was A GOD (“the divine power known as the Great Power”)

### (2) People associated magic (signs and wonders) with DIVINE or GODLY power.

- > With what do **we** associate magic? ILLUSIONS, SLIGHT OF HAND, SPECIAL EFFECTS
- > Does our cynical view of magic limit the amount of supernatural activity we experience?
- > Is magic real? Was Simon practicing real magic? Or Illusion?

-- Sorcery was condemned under the Law of Moses (Deut. 18:9-14)

The Big Question: Was Simon really saved?

- > This is a dangerous question because judging a person's salvation is very iffy! (Mt. 7:1)
  - \* What caused Simon to believe? (signs and wonders) Is this cause legitimate? (Yes)
  - \* 8:21 – Simon's heart was “not right before God”
  - \* In early Christian literature, the “sorcerer” (Simon Magus) is described as the arch-heretic of the church and the “father” of Gnostic teaching.

\* What gave away Simon's heart? Trying to BUY HS POWER!

“SIMONY” – “the ecclesiastical crime of paying for holy offices or positions in the hierarchy of a church”  
-- paying for indulgences, for prayers, for loved ones to escape purgatory, etc.

> What does this episode have in common with Acts 5?

(misuse of money: trying to buy prestige, power)

> What was the apparent reason that Simon became a believer?

(so that he could have more power to do his magic)

> Can a person “get saved” for the wrong reasons? Is this true salvation? What are some examples?

\* Did Simon ever repent? (see v.24)

- > What was Simon afraid of? (v.20) – How does the startling events of Acts 5 color Simon's response?  
(it was likely he heard of the death of Sapphira at Peter's word)
- > We have NO RECORD that Simon repented and had a “right heart” – only fear of Peter's curse.
- > What does v.24 tell us about Simon's spiritual state?  
(he didn't pray himself – he asked Peter to pray for him)