

SESSION 8

Samaria: A Second Gift

Acts 8:4-24

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim

Participants examine the strangest paragraph in the Acts of the Apostles, and the one on which this study's whole question turns: Samaritans who genuinely believed and were genuinely baptized, on whom the Spirit "had not yet fallen," and two apostles who took the road north to pray and lay hands on them so that they would receive the Holy Spirit. The group discovers that the apostolic Church knew a real giving of the Spirit, through apostolic hands, distinguishable from Baptism, visible enough that a magician tried to buy it. Tonight is the primary steelman session: the strongest Protestant reading of this passage gets built at full strength and answered with the text open.

Catholic Touchstone

The apostles imparted the gift of the Spirit to the newly baptized by the laying on of hands, and the Catholic tradition rightly recognizes this imposition of hands as the origin of the sacrament of Confirmation, which in a certain way perpetuates the grace of Pentecost in the Church (CCC 1288, drawing on Acts 8:14-17, which CCC 1315 quotes in full as the scriptural anchor of the sacrament).

What You Need to Know

Who the Samaritans were. To first-century Jews, Samaritans were the worst kind of wrong: half-foreign descendants of the northern tribes, worshiping on the wrong mountain with the wrong priesthood and only part of the Scriptures. Centuries of contempt ran both directions; "you are a Samaritan and have a demon" was a Jerusalem insult. Acts 8 is the gospel's first step across that wall, which is why what happens next matters so much: the first non-Jewish-in-the-full-sense church cannot be allowed to start life as a separate franchise.

Take the text's own inventory. Before anyone theologizes, make the group establish what Luke actually reports: Philip preached; the Samaritans believed and were baptized, men and women; Luke gives no hint their faith or baptism was defective; the apostles in Jerusalem heard and sent Peter and John; the two prayed FOR them THAT they might receive the Holy Spirit; "for it had not yet fallen on any of them"; then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Real baptism. Real subsequent gift. Real apostolic act in between. Everything tonight hangs on those three facts staying on the table.

Why the delay? The unity reading. The strongest account of why God withheld the falling of the Spirit until apostles arrived: so that the first church planted across Israel's bitterest boundary would be visibly, physically joined to the apostles, receiving the Spirit through Jerusalem's hands rather than alongside them. No rival Samaritan Christianity, no parallel start-up; one Body, one gift, one apostolic root. Hold this reading with appropriate confidence: it is an inference the text invites, not a statement the text makes, and you should present it as exactly that.

Simon saw something. Tonight's live discovery is Simon the magician, and his failed purchase is quiet gold: whatever happened when the apostles laid on hands, it was observable enough that a professional

in the wonder business assessed it as worth money. The giving of the Spirit at apostolic hands was not a private interior nuance; it was an event. His name became the name of a sin, simony, which the group will enjoy.

Two remainders come due tonight, and one gets paid. Session 5 left open what the apostles actually did when they gave the Spirit; tonight pays half of that debt (Ephesus pays the rest next week). Session 2's question about a Spirit who can be "sealed" remains open until Session 10. Track your debts; the group half-remembers them, and paying them on schedule is what makes the study feel inevitable rather than assembled.

For the parents in the room. Somewhere in your room is a parent whose own Confirmation felt like nothing: no experience, no change, a photograph and a party. Acts 8 is oddly good news for them, but only if you let tonight's honesty stand: the Samaritans' baptism was fully real before the apostles came, and the further gift was real whether or not Luke records anyone's feelings about it. God's gifts are events, not experiences; experiences may follow on any schedule, including decades later, including in a parish hall on a Tuesday during a study like this one.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- Moses laid his hands on Joshua, and Joshua was "full of the spirit of wisdom" (Deuteronomy 34:9; the commissioning itself in Numbers 27:18-23): the Spirit passing through appointed hands is older than the apostles. Tonight's Dig Deeper.
- The dry bones rose in two stages (Ezekiel 37, Session 1): bodies assembled first, breath summoned second, by God's explicit design. The group planted this pattern seven weeks ago; tonight it stops being a curiosity.
- Jerusalem and Samaria, divided since the kingdom split under Rehoboam, are rejoined not by treaty but by the one Spirit given through the one apostolic college.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage (*Letter to Jubaianus, around AD 255*)

St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage two centuries after the apostles, described the practice of his own day and grounded it in tonight's passage: what was done with the Samaritans, he wrote, is done now among us. Those baptized in the Church are brought to the leaders of the Church, and by prayer and the laying on of hands they obtain the Holy Spirit and are perfected with the Lord's seal. For Cyprian this was not a new ceremony but the Acts 8 pattern, still running.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

Tertullian of Carthage (*On Baptism, around AD 200*)

Tertullian, the earliest Christian writer in Latin, walked through initiation as his church practiced it around the turn of the third century: after the bath in water, he says, the hand is laid on, invoking and inviting the Holy Spirit through blessing. Washing, then hand and invocation: the two moments of the Jordan pattern, both there, in order.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH**St. John Chrysostom** (*Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles*)

Preaching on this very chapter, St. John Chrysostom paused over the oddity the group will notice too: Philip could preach, work signs, and baptize, yet the giving of the Spirit waited for Peter and John. This gift, Chrysostom observed, belonged to the apostles; the deacon evangelized, and the apostles completed what he began. The division of roles was not a failure of Philip's but the order of the Church working as designed.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1288.** The apostles, fulfilling Christ's will, imparted the gift of the Spirit to the newly baptized by the laying on of hands; this imposition of hands is rightly recognized as the origin of the sacrament of Confirmation.
- **CCC 1315.** Quotes Acts 8:14-17 in full as the opening of the Church's brief statement of this sacrament.
- **CCC 1289.** Very early, an anointing with perfumed oil was added to the laying on of hands, the better to signify the gift of the Holy Spirit. Leader's knowledge tonight; do not develop the anointing forward.

Thread Watch

The two-stage pattern surfaces. When a participant connects Samaria to the dry bones (assembled first, breath second) or to the Easter-breath-then-wait puzzle from Session 6, the study's longest quiet setup has worked. Confirm it warmly and fully; this one is meant to be caught tonight. If nobody catches it by Question 5, the answer box hands it to them.

Thread C: The Oil. Tonight is hands only; that is what the text gives, and the discipline matters. If someone asks where oil went, the honest answer is that tonight's passage has none, and the study follows the text. The oil returns when the Church's earliest practice enters in force. Two more weeks of patience.

Session Goals

1. Participants can state the three facts of Acts 8 from the text: real baptism, Spirit not yet fallen, apostolic prayer and hands.
2. Participants have found Simon the magician themselves and can say what his failed purchase proves about the visibility of the gift.
3. The group has built and faced the full-strength "Samaria was a one-off" objection, including Cornelius, presented by us before anyone else could raise it.
4. At least one participant has connected the two-stage pattern back to the dry bones or the locked room unprompted, or received it from the answer box.
5. Each household has taken home the hand-blessing practice.

Time Note

Full plan runs about 75 minutes. To land at 60, make these cuts and no others: drop Win question 2 (keep question 1), skip the Dig Deeper box on Joshua, and shorten the steelman by presenting the

objection yourself in ninety seconds; tonight's steelman is the study's most important and should be the last thing you shorten. Never cut the inventory question, the Simon discovery, or the steelman itself.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: *Come, Holy Spirit. You fell on Jerusalem in wind and fire, and in Samaria You fell when the apostles came and laid on hands, visibly binding the new church to the old. Teach us tonight how You give Yourself: in Your order, at Your time, through the Church You built. We are not in a hurry to be wrong. Make us patient enough to be right. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Win: Opening Questions

Parent and candidate pairs. Two minutes each question, then a few pairs share with the table.

1. When has a physical gesture, a hand on your shoulder, a hug, a handshake, said something to you that words could not have said?
2. Has anything in your life ever required someone official to show up in person to make it real: a signature, a ceremony, an inspection? Why did it have to be in person?

Build: Into the Text

Scene One: The Inventory (Acts 8:4-17)

Households read Acts 8:1-17 at home. Have verses 4-8 and 12-17 read aloud now, and put a piece of paper in the middle of each table.

Question 1. Before anyone interprets anything: inventory only. List exactly what Luke reports, in order, with no additions. What happened in Samaria before Peter and John arrived? What state does verse 16 describe? What did the apostles do, and what happened when they did it?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The inventory: Philip preached Christ; the crowds gave heed; there were signs, deliverances, healings, and much joy; they believed Philip's preaching and were baptized, both men and women. Luke breathes no criticism of their faith or their baptism. Verse 16: the Spirit "had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." The apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, then laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (Luke does not say what, if anything, was visible; hold that.) Keep this list on the table physically for the rest of the night. Every argument that follows has to survive contact with it.

Question 2. Sit in the strangeness before explaining it. These people were genuinely baptized, and Luke, who told us in Acts 2:38 that baptism brings the gift of the Spirit, now says the Spirit had not yet FALLEN on them, and the apostles treated that as something requiring a forty-mile trip. What does the apostles' reaction itself tell you, before any theory does?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The reaction is the revelation. The apostles did not write back saying "your baptism sufficed; nothing further is needed"; they sent Peter and John, two apostles, in person. Whatever "fallen upon" means beyond what Baptism had already truly given, the apostolic Church considered it real, urgent, and apostolic business. Be precise here and keep the group precise: Baptism gives the Holy

Spirit; the Church has always taught it, and nothing tonight unsays it. What Samaria shows is a further giving, a falling-upon, a completion, which the apostles would not leave undone and would not delegate. The text does not name this act, and note for precision: Luke records that the apostles themselves came, without telling us they could not have delegated; the Church's later discipline (in which bishops are the ordinary ministers and priests can confirm with the faculty) grew from this seed without being spelled out here. Tonight, just make sure the group has seen that the act exists.

Question 3. Why Samaria, and why the delay? Recall who Samaritans were to Jews: centuries of contempt, the wrong mountain, the wrong blood. The first church across that wall, and God holds back the falling of the Spirit until Jerusalem's own apostles are physically present. What might God be building by that timing?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Offer this as the reading the text invites rather than a verse you can point to, and say so: if the Samaritan believers had received everything with no connection to the apostles, church history's first chapter would have included an independent Samaritan Christianity, born across the bitterest boundary in the region, owing Jerusalem nothing. Instead the Spirit falls through the hands of Peter and John, and the first frontier church begins life physically joined to the apostles: one Body, one gift, one root. God delayed the falling, on this reading, precisely to weld the new church to the old at the moment of maximum temptation to split. The Spirit builds unity into the delivery mechanism. Flag the epistemic status honestly: this is inference, well-grounded and ancient, but inference; the inventory on the table is fact.

Scene Two: Live Discovery

Do not announce the passage. Read the clue and let the tables hunt. Allow three minutes; it is close to where they have been reading. If they stall, say: same chapter, keep going.

DIG DEEPER

The clue. *"A professional magician watches the apostles closely, sees something happen when their hands come down, and reaches for his wallet. He offers money for the power. His first name became the permanent name of a sin. Find him, and find out what two apostles said to his offer."*

When found, have the discovering table read Acts 8:18-24 aloud.

Question 4. "Now when Simon SAW that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money." Simon is a professional in the amazement business; he had been Samaria's biggest act. What does his sales assessment tell us about the laying on of hands? And what does Peter's furious answer protect?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Simon's wallet is a hostile witness, which makes it a good one. Luke does not tell us what Simon saw, and honesty keeps it that way; but he SAW that the Spirit was given through the apostles' hands, and whatever the observable effect was, the region's reigning wonder-worker rated it worth

buying. Some compelling effect attended the act; its exact nature Luke withholds. And Peter's answer, "your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money," protects the one thing simony forgets: the Spirit is a GIFT. He cannot be bought, earned, inherited by talent, or unlocked by achievement, which, said gently to your candidates, also means Confirmation is not a merit badge for the kids who did the service hours. The sin still bears Simon's name, simony, so the Church would never forget which mistake this is. The group found the origin of a word tonight; let them enjoy it.

Question 5. Now the oldest question in this study comes due. Where have we seen God give life in two stages before: a first act that makes something real, and a second act that completes it with the Spirit? There are at least two answers, one from the first night and one from two weeks ago.

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The valley of dry bones: the bodies assembled, sinews and flesh and skin, complete "but there was no breath in them," until the breath was summoned from the four winds as a second act, and only then the host stood on its feet (Ezekiel 37:8-10; Session 1, where the answer box told you to hold the thought lightly because you would meet the pattern again in Acts; tonight is that day). And Easter evening: the risen Jesus breathed the Spirit on the apostles, and still commanded those same men to WAIT for the further gift of Pentecost (John 20:22 with Acts 1:4-5; Session 6's open puzzle). Held as the suggestive typology it is rather than a proof: Scripture repeatedly shows God giving the Spirit in more than one act, for more than one purpose, in His own order, real life first, power and completion second, and the second is not an insult to the first. The Church has long seen Samaria inside that pattern. Samaria is not an anomaly in the story the group has been reading. It looks like that story, happening to a church.

The Push-Back: A One-Time Exception?

This is the study's most important steelman. Build it at full strength, add the Cornelius evidence yourself before anyone can, and give the answer the time it needs.

The objection. Samaria is a unique, unrepeatable moment of salvation history, not a template. God delayed the Spirit this once, for exactly the unity reasons you yourselves just gave: to certify, before apostolic eyewitnesses, that despised Samaritans were fully included. It is a Samaritan Pentecost, a founding-era milestone like the day of Pentecost itself, and milestones do not repeat. Sharpen it further, as its best defenders would: "fell upon" in Acts may denote the manifest, empowering outpouring, prophecy, tongues, visible power, rather than the Spirit's regenerating indwelling, which the Samaritans, as true believers validly baptized, already possessed; on that reading nothing sacramental was missing at all, only the public Pentecost-sign extended to Samaria before apostolic eyewitnesses. Luke is DESCRIBING what happened, not PRESCRIBING a ceremony. And the surrounding chapters prove there is no fixed rite: turn to Acts 10, and the Spirit falls on Cornelius and his whole household BEFORE baptism, with no hands laid at all, while Peter is still mid-sermon. If Acts 8 establishes Confirmation, Acts 10 abolishes it. The honest conclusion: the Spirit blows where He wills, the narratives vary, and building a permanent, mandatory sacrament on one exceptional story is bad hermeneutics. Baptism plus faith is the pattern; everything else is scaffolding the Catholic Church built later and read backward into Acts.

Question 6. This deserves the best answer we can give, with everything conceded that should be. Work through it: what stands, what falls, and what does the apostles' own behavior establish even inside the objection's strongest reading?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Concede generously, because much of this is right. Samaria IS a unique salvation-history moment; the unity reading we gave an hour ago says so. The manifestation reading has real force too: Luke's Spirit-language is varied, and "fell upon" does often attend visible power; a Catholic gains nothing by pretending the verse-16 wording settles the theology alone. Cornelius IS real: the Spirit truly fell before baptism, no hands in sight, and Catholics gain nothing by hiding the Bible's untidiness; God is free, and Acts shows Him exercising the freedom. And Luke IS writing narrative, not rubrics; nobody should pretend Acts 8 is a liturgy book. Now watch what survives every concession. First: in the unique situation, the apostles' chosen INSTRUMENT was prayer and the laying on of hands for the giving of the Spirit; the situation was unrepeatable, but they reached for an act they evidently knew, and next week the same act appears in another city, from another apostle who was not even present in Samaria, treated as normal ministry. One exceptional context does not explain a repeated instrument. Second: Cornelius cuts the other way on inspection. When the Spirit fell early, Peter did not conclude that the outward acts were therefore optional; he immediately COMMANDED baptism (Acts 10:48). God's freedom to give ahead of the sign did not, in the apostles' own judgment, retire the sign; if anything it proves the acts were the norm from which God occasionally, sovereignly, ran ahead. Third: even on the objection's own reading, Acts 8 establishes this much beyond appeal: valid Baptism and the falling of the Spirit through apostolic hands are DISTINGUISHABLE gifts; whatever else is debatable, "it is all one indivisible package" died in Samaria. The honest remainder, stated plainly: Acts alone gives narratives, not a rulebook, and a Catholic should not claim the sacrament arrives fully labeled in chapter 8. What Acts plants, the apostolic Church waters: whether the earliest Christians after the apostles treated post-baptismal hands and invocation as standard practice is a factual question, and Cyprian and Tertullian, early and weighty North African witnesses in tonight's Voices, testify to it for their churches; next week adds the second biblical witness and more. The steelman is owed exactly that evidence, and it is coming.

DIG DEEPER

Deuteronomy 34:9 (and Numbers 27:18-23). If time allows: "Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him." At God's explicit command, the Spirit's commissioning passed through appointed hands a millennium and a half before Peter and John took the road north. The apostles did not invent the gesture; they inherited it.

One Last Glimpse

Read Acts 19:1-2 aloud yourself, without introduction.

Years later, hundreds of miles away in Ephesus, Paul finds some disciples and asks them a question: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they answer: "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." Say only this, and then stop: notice what Paul's question assumes: that receiving the Holy Spirit is a definite thing that either happened to you or did not, and that a person could know which. Next week, we watch what Paul does about their answer, and whether it looks like anything we saw tonight.

Send: Closing Questions

1. The Samaritans had joy, faith, and baptism, and the apostles still came to complete the gift. Where in your faith are you tempted to say "what I have is enough" to avoid asking for more?
2. Simon wanted the Spirit's power for what it could do for him. Honestly: what is one selfish reason you are drawn to Confirmation, and what would the unselfish version of that same desire be?

Live It This Week

For every household, parent and candidate together. Once this week, unhurried: parent, place your hand on your candidate's head or shoulder and pray one sentence of blessing over them, out loud, in your own words. Candidate, receive it without deflecting; then place your hand on your parent's shoulder and pray one sentence for them. The gesture is ancient, the words can be simple, and sixty seconds is enough. Blessing is allowed to feel awkward the first time. Do it anyway.

Closing Prayer

Leader: *Lord God, You sent Peter and John down the road to Samaria because You give Your Spirit through the Church, not around her. Thank You for hands: Moses' hands on Joshua, the apostles' hands in Samaria, every hand You have ever blessed through since. Prepare these candidates for hands that will one day be laid on them, and make all of us a Church worth being joined to. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Scripture Memory Verse

"Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit." (Acts 8:17)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 8, in order of use. RSV2CE.

- **Acts 8:1-17** (read at home this week; verses 4-8 and 12-17 aloud in session)
- **Acts 2:38** (recalled: baptism and the gift of the Spirit)
- **Acts 8:18-24** (Build, Scene Two: live discovery, Simon the magician)
- **Ezekiel 37:8-10; John 20:22 with Acts 1:4-5** (recalled: the two-stage pattern)
- **Acts 10:44-48** (Push-Back: Cornelius, presented by us)
- **Deuteronomy 34:9; Numbers 27:18-23** (Dig Deeper: Moses' hands on Joshua)
- **Acts 19:1-2** (One Last Glimpse: Paul's question at Ephesus)

Catechism: CCC 1288, 1315 (and 1289 as leader's knowledge only).

Voices: St. Cyprian of Carthage (Letter to Jubaianus); Tertullian of Carthage (On Baptism); St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Acts).

Distribute at the door: Take-Home 8, one per household.