

Acts #19
The Keys to the Kingdom
Acts 8:14-17

In our last study we looked at the entire 8th chapter of Acts as we studied about Phillip the evangelist. In that study we looked at the fact that the pattern for soul winning that was established in Phillip's ministry is still needed today. (1) There must be a willing vessel; (2) There must be a drawing of the Holy Spirit; (3) There must be a revelation of the Word of God concerning Jesus Christ.

Acts 1:8 says that the order in which the Gospel was to be preached after the day of Pentecost was first in Jerusalem and all Judaea; then in Samaria, and then unto the uttermost part of the earth.

The book of Acts is the record of the carrying out of this program. Stage number one, first to the Jews in Jerusalem and Judaea, begins in Acts 1 and closes with the stoning of Stephen in Acts 3. Then follows step number two, and Phillip is chosen to bring the message to Samaria. After the persecution following Stephen's death the believers were scattered abroad and the message goes beyond Judaea, and for the first time the ministry of the Word moved from Jewish territory.

Look with me at this important section as the Gospel goes to Samaria. Acts 8:14-17 says, "Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, 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.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."

This is the first time the apostles had left Jerusalem. Up until now the Gospel was preached only to Israel and the ministry was confined to Jews only. But now it had gone beyond Judaea to Samaria, and so Peter and John were sent to these believers in Samaria. We ask the question, "Why was Peter sent to Samaria? Why couldn't Phillip lay hands on these believers so they could also receive the Holy Spirit which was poured out at Pentecost on the Jerusalem company?"

If we misunderstand the reason for Peter going down to Samaria, we will be left utterly confused in our understanding of the Word of God here in Acts 8.

This was not a second outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritans. The Holy Spirit had been poured out “once and for all” at Pentecost on the body of believers. Now the Samaritans were also to be received into that body and made to share in the Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Spirit. **When Peter and John laid hands on these Samaritans, they did not experience the “baptism” of the Holy Spirit, but they “received” the Holy Spirit.** They were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, which had already fallen, upon the Church in Jerusalem.

But, why did Peter have to come to bring this about? The answer lies in the commission Jesus had given Peter as the bearer of the keys of the Kingdom. Therefore, look with me at the keys to the Kingdom.

To see this truth we will go back to Matthew 16:13-20, “When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.”

What were these keys? Did Peter have the power to save people or to forgive sins? Would we dare trust our salvation to a stumbling, fallible, individual such as Peter? God pity those who do.

The keys that Christ gave to Peter were three in number: (1) One to open the door of the Gospel to the Jews in Jerusalem; (2) one to open the door of the Gospel to the Samaritans in Samaria; (3) and one to open the door of the Gospel to the Gentiles, as seen in the house of Cornelius.

All of this was in perfect accord with the program that Christ had commanded in three stages: first, Jerusalem; second, Samaria; third, to the Gentiles. In each case it resulted in their receiving the Holy Spirit.

Notice the progression of the receiving of the Holy Spirit: The Jews had to be baptized to receive the Spirit; the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands; the Gentiles opened the order for today: they heard the Word, believed, received the Holy Spirit, and were baptized.

Not only is there a progression in receiving the Holy Spirit, there is a progression in the evidences of the Holy Spirit. In the case at Jerusalem the Holy Spirit was accompanied by the sound of a mighty rushing wind, tongues of fire, and speaking in the various languages of the world. When the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit there is no mention of sound or fire or any speaking in tongues. **In the case of Cornelius, there is speaking in tongues, but no sound or fire.** Three different manifestations of the same outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is in error for someone to claim the same experience for today, for the outward manifestations were all different.

To better understand the three stages of Pentecost, we must try to better understand Pentecost as it relates to the Scriptures. The first mention of Pentecost is found in Leviticus 23, and it will give us the key to interpretation of the book of Acts, as seen in verses 15-16, “And you shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath (beginning the first day of the week - Sunday)...Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall you number fifty days; and you shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord.”

Pentecost was the fourth feast in order, following (1) the Passover; (2) Unleavened Bread; and (3) Firstfruits. The Passover was a type of the death of Christ; the unleavened bread typifies His burial; and the firstfruits His resurrection. Fifty days after the firstfruits (resurrection) came Pentecost.

In Deuteronomy 16, Pentecost is also referred to as a feast of weeks, and the time of harvest. Pentecost began the harvest season, and the Lord gave definite instructions concerning this harvest in three separate stages. A careful study of Leviticus 23:22 will show us God’s command for the observance of Pentecost, “And when you reap the harvest of your land (beginning at Pentecost), thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the Lord your God.”

Notice carefully, there are three parts to this reaping: (1) The main body of the harvest; (2) the corners of the field; (3) the gleaning of the harvest. And these three parts of the harvest festival were for three classes of people: first, for the owners of the land; then next, for the poor; and finally, for the strangers within their gates.

The owners and first partakers are Israel; next comes the poor, who are the Samaritans; and finally the strangers, who are the Gentiles. But all three parts and all three classes were included in the one harvest of Pentecost. And likewise, there was one Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all three classes of people: the Jews, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles.

I repeat there is a wide difference in the manifestations of the receiving of the Holy Spirit in these three different stages. Which of these three patterns shall we follow if we insist on another outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Shall we follow the pattern of the Jews in Jerusalem, the Samaritans in Samaria, or the Gentiles in Caesarea?

I confess to you that our present day problem is not what pattern we are going to follow, but are we willing to even allow the Holy Spirit to guide our lives at all? Are we willing to be the vessel through which the Holy Spirit can flow and use? Are we willing to accept our responsibility as Christians and follow through on those commitments? Or, are we simply giving God a lot of lip service with no service at all?

If you are not saved, why not come tonight?