

Restore Small Group Questions - Acts Week 12 - Clash of Kingdoms —4/6/2025

SCRIPTURES (NIV)**Acts 8:1-25**

And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. **2**Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. **3**But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. **5**Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. **6**When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. **7**For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. **8**So there was great joy in that city. Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, **10**and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, “This man is rightly called the Great Power of God.” **11**They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery. **12**But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. **13**Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw. **14**When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. **15**When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, **16**because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **17**Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. **18**When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money **19**and said, “Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” **20**Peter answered: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! **21**You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. **22**Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. **23**For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.” **24**Then Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.” **25**After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

KEY POINTS:

The Scripture text today illustrates a tremendous setback for the early Christian church but it was really a set up for Kingdom advancement.

I - The Setback - The death of Stephen was the catalyst for the onset of a great persecution against the church which caused all of the believers to scatter to Judea and Samaria except the apostles who stayed in Jerusalem. The persecution began with a public sidelining of the new church and the systematic incarceration of Christians with the end game of the church’s demise and destruction. The ultimate tipping point of strife in the new church was a racial issue; pure Jewish culture vs. cultural impurity

of the Hellenistic Jews. This is possibly the rationale for the apostles to remain in Jerusalem. Regardless of 'Why', the result was the same—people's lives were endangered and the church had a major setback. This was a time of transition for the early church....from comfortable living to pain and prison; from comfort of home to seeking asylum from persecution and from utter failure to the setback being a set up for Kingdom advancement.

II - Kingdom Clash (Light vs. Darkness) - Those who scattered preached the Word wherever they went. The catalyst for this clash was the dispersment of the Jews into the Gentile country of Samaria. The Kingdom of Light methodology in the new land was business as usual - all about Jesus the Messiah with deliverance, healing and joy. The kingdom of darkness on the contrary included dark arts and evil spirits involved in sorcery, a form of mysticism. Simon (a Gentile) was good at manipulating the natural through some apparent supernatural abilities. The clash was all about Simon vs. Jesus; Holy Spirit power vs. sorcery, magic tricks and self-centered proclamations. But, when Simon believed and was baptized, he was astonished by the great signs and miracles of Phillip (through the Holy Spirit). What was a setback was now a comeback; the Kingdom of Light was more powerful and many accepted Jesus as the Christ. God is greater than darkness and deliverance from the evil one takes a willingness to fully surrender your life to Jesus. Surrendering your life may include spiritual warfare but God is greater and offers deliverance.

III - The Clash Within - Simon's heart and subsequent actions revealed that although he may have surrendered to Jesus, he was holding out pockets of resistance within his heart. Simon was an opportunist who went with what worked the best for him... working on an angle to make it work for himself...to add the gospel to his bag of magic tricks to sway the masses and make a monetary reward. He was fueled by bitterness and slavery to sin.

Upon arrival from Jerusalem, Peter and John discerned that the new converts in Samaria had not received the Holy Spirit. They prayed for and laid hands on them that they might receive the Holy Spirit and the result was more Spirit driven disciples. Sometimes the clash of kingdoms happens within us when we leave remnants of our hearts un-surrendered and chained to bitterness and captivity to sin. Being an opportunist with Jesus is all about us, we may see the Gospel as a "get out of hell free card", get-away from life's problems, a way to work the gospel to benefit me, a way to get a reward for giving time and money and a way to hold onto bitterness while going through the motions.

Conclusion - Kingdom advancement happens OUTSIDE comfortable territory. We need to move beyond comfort by following Jesus completely, wholeheartedly and in purity...not just another life-hack or a party trick. We must surrender bitterness and sin and the remnants of sin and resistance.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS -

1. What are some possible reasons the apostles stayed in Jerusalem instead of leaving for Samaria and Judea like the rest of the disciples?
2. The scattering of the disciples was a major new step in the work of the Holy Spirit in advancing the kingdom beyond the confines of Jerusalem. The scattered disciples were out of their comfort zone, being persecuted, and in a strange non-

Jewish land yet, still preached Jesus. Discuss what it might take to move out of your comfort zone here in the greater OKC area to share Jesus. What must change to make yourself more effective?

3. How comfortable are you to stand for God in direct opposition to the kingdom of darkness? Jesus defeated Satan and his dominion at the cross, so why are we fearful? How does God help us today? Any scriptures come to mind to back this up?

4. Peter and John made it a point to ensure the new converts in Samaria received the Holy Spirit in addition to the baptism and, consequently, the evidences of the Spirit were seen and even Simon (the sorcerer) wanted to have that power too. Discuss why Peter and John wanted the new converts to receive the Holy Spirit. Why is it so important?

5. Peter scolded Simon when he told him his heart was not in the right attitude. What is the right attitude when seeking and receiving the Holy Spirit? What role does repentance play in this attitude?

6. Interestingly, Philip was a Hellenist and a layman who wonderfully preached Jesus to the samaritans with Holy Spirit sanctioned results. The Jewish apostles had no prior dealings with them. Read verse 25 and discuss the kingdom effects on Peter and John as a result of their visit to Samaria.

7. Sometimes we have to be shaken out of our comfortable state before we do what God wants us to do. The Kingdom of Light at times requires us to surrender comfort to be in harmony with His will and to live in His Joy. How can we do this on a daily basis?

8. There was deep-seated prejudice, amounting almost to hatred, standing between the Jews and the Samaritans of Jesus day. Discuss how this prejudice impacted Peter and John during their visit to Samaria. What was their real purpose for the trip? Was Philip racist? Did Jesus make it easier for Philip to preach the Gospel based on Jesus earlier trip to Samaria?

9. Have you had setbacks that looked like failure but God used them for His purpose and glory and for your benefit? What lessons were learned?

10. Talk about what being fully and wholeheartedly surrendered to Jesus looks like? Balance what you think it looks like in our today's culture versus how the members of the early church lived and died!