

The Holy Spirit

Week 7: The Age of Miracles: Confirming the Word -- Hebrews 2:1-4; Acts 8:14-24

Imagine being asked to believe a message that would cost you everything, your standing in the synagogue, your family's approval, maybe your life, on the word of a traveling preacher you had never met. That was the position of every first-century hearer of the gospel. No printed New Testament existed to check him against. No centuries of church history vouched for the message. A man stood up in your town and announced that a crucified carpenter had risen from the dead and now reigned over the world. Why would anyone stake a life on that? The writer of Hebrews gives the answer: this great salvation, "declared at first by the Lord," was "attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." God did not ask the world to believe an unverified report. He countersigned it, in public, with power no one could counterfeit.

That is what the age of miracles was for. Mark says the apostles "went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs" (Mark 16:20). The signs were never the show; they were the seal, God's notary stamp on new revelation, the proof that the man speaking spoke for heaven. Healing, tongues, prophecy, knowledge: every gift served the word, announcing it, delivering it, or confirming it, in the years before the New Testament stood complete.

But how did those gifts spread beyond the apostles? Acts 8 pulls back the curtain. Philip the evangelist preached Christ in Samaria with signs so unmistakable that the city believed and was baptized, and a famous magician named Simon believed with them, astonished to see real power after a career of tricks. Yet something is missing in Samaria. Philip, miracle-worker though he was, could not pass his gifts to anyone else. The apostles in Jerusalem heard, and they sent Peter and John, who prayed and "laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit." Watch that detail closely. The miraculous gifts traveled one way: through the hands of apostles. And when Simon saw it, the old salesman in him woke up, and he offered money for the franchise: "Give me this power also." Peter's answer is one of the most withering rebukes in Scripture, and one of the most instructive.

Do the arithmetic this sets up. If miraculous gifts came through apostles' hands, and the apostles have all fallen asleep in Christ, then the gifts had a built-in expiration, by design, not by failure. The scaffolding comes down when the building is finished. This week we learn what the miracles were for, how they were given, why they were always destined to cease, and what it means that we hold in our hands the very word they died confirming, "how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"

Group Discussion: Television preachers, healing crusades, and claims of modern miracles are everywhere. For many people, miracles are the main thing they associate with the Holy Spirit. Before this week's study, how would you have explained what biblical miracles were actually for? Why does the purpose of a thing determine how long it lasts?

Personal Reflection: Hebrews warns, "we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it." Drifting requires no effort at all; a boat drifts by simply doing nothing. In which direction is your attention to God's word currently drifting, toward or away? What anchor needs resetting?

Read Hebrews 2:1-4; Acts 8:14-24

Study Questions

1. According to Hebrews 2:3-4, the great salvation was "declared at first by the Lord," "attested to us by those who heard," while "God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit." What does this passage say the miracles were for, and how does Mark 16:17-20 confirm that purpose?
2. Hebrews 2:1 warns that neglecting this confirmed word leads to drifting, an unanchored, gradual slide rather than a dramatic rebellion. Where in your life has slow neglect, of the word, of prayer, of the assembly, done what no deliberate decision would have dared? What will you do this week to pay "much closer attention"?
3. In Acts 8:5-13, Philip preached Christ in Samaria with signs that even a professional magician recognized as real power. What was different about Philip's miracles compared to Simon's magic, and what did the Samaritans do when they "believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ"?
4. Simon had amazed Samaria for years, calling himself "somebody great," until something genuinely greater arrived. The hunger to be seen as somebody runs deep in all of us, in our work, our social media, even our service to God. Where do you most crave being thought "somebody great," and what does the gospel offer in place of that hunger?

5. Philip could work miracles, yet the Samaritans had to wait for Peter and John to come from Jerusalem before any of them received miraculous gifts (Acts 8:14–17). What does this account reveal about how the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were transmitted, and why could Philip, full of the Spirit though he was, not pass them on?
6. The apostles in Jerusalem sent their two most prominent men on a long journey to serve new Samaritan converts, Samaritans, whom most Jews despised. When new Christians, or Christians different from you, need help becoming established, how far out of your way are you willing to go? Name one newer or struggling member you could deliberately invest in this month.
7. When Simon offered money for the ability to confer the Spirit, Peter answered, “You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God,” and commanded him to repent and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:18–24). What does this episode teach about the difference between desiring God’s gifts and desiring God, and what does Peter’s call to repentance teach about a baptized believer who sins?
8. Simon wanted spiritual power for self-advancement, but God’s power had a purpose Simon never grasped: confirming the word so that others could believe and be saved. When you examine your own religious life, how much of it is about what you receive, blessing, comfort, reputation, and how much about what God accomplishes through you for others?
9. If miraculous gifts were conveyed through the laying on of the apostles’ hands (Acts 8:14–18; 19:6; Romans 1:11; 2 Timothy 1:6), and the miracles existed to reveal and confirm the word before the New Testament was complete (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4), what necessarily happened to the gifts when the last apostle died and the last person on whom apostolic hands were laid died? How does this built-in design prepare us to evaluate modern claims of miraculous gifts?
10. Look back across this week’s passages, God bearing witness to His word with power, and that power guarded from a man who wanted it for himself. The confirmed word now sits

complete in your hands, “such a great salvation.” Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this truth, and one concrete step you will take this week to give the confirmed word the attention it deserves.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Mark 16:17–20, the Lord working with the apostles and confirming the word with signs; John 20:30–31, signs written down so that you may believe; Acts 19:1–7, the Spirit’s gifts given through Paul’s hands at Ephesus; Acts 4:13–16, a notable miracle that even enemies could not deny; 2 Corinthians 12:12, the signs of a true apostle