

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

APRIL 12TH, 2026 // THE BOOK OF ACTS

SCATTERED (ACTS 8:1-8)

"SAUL AGREED WITH PUTTING HIM TO DEATH."

The Greek word that is used to say Saul "agreed" with the death of Stephen is better translated as "to approve of" or "to be pleased with." In Philippians 3:6, Paul admitted that in his zeal for Judaism he severely persecuted the Church.

- Saul was not a reluctant persecutor of the early Church; **instead, he took pleasure in attacking Christians.**

SAUL OF TARSUS

Many of us know Saul of Tarsus by his Roman name, Paul. He was a Jewish Pharisee who had Roman citizenship.

- Paul wrote often about how his past life plagued him. Remembering how he tried to **trap people into blaspheming** to justify killing them (Acts 26:11), his deep regret led him to feel **unworthy of being called an apostle** (1 Corinthians 15:9).

THE APOSTLE PAUL

In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul speaks of a "thorn in his flesh." Whether this "thorn" was a physical ailment, spiritual torment, or emotional affliction, Paul knew that it served a purpose to keep him humble as **he moved forward despite the pain.**

- **We cannot allow the shame of our past mistakes to keep us from moving forward.**

"PERSECUTION BROKE OUT"

Stephen's death was only the beginning of the persecution against the Church. Through the scattering of disciples, God was using persecution to send His people out to spread the gospel.

- Stephen's death abruptly ended his ministry, but it did not stop or hinder the spreading of the gospel. **"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church"** (Tertullian).

BRINGING THEM INTO HIS WILL

The Greek word that is used to describe the "scattering" of the disciples is the same word used to describe the planting or sowing of seeds. Up to this point, the disciples had not gone out of Jerusalem as commanded (Acts 1:8). God would use persecution to guide them into His will.

- **Sometimes, it takes God shaking us out of our comfort to do what He wants us to do.**

PHILIP, A LAY EVANGELIST

Philip, like Stephen, was chosen to serve during the dispute over the Hellenistic widows in Acts 6:5. He fled to Samaria during the persecution.

- Through Philip, God offered salvation through Jesus to the Samaritans (descendants of Assyrians and Jews who had intermarried). **The Jews thought the Samaritans had corrupted worship of the true God.**

FACING THEIR PREJUDICE

We see this tension between the Samaritans and Jews when James and John ask Jesus if they should "call down fire from Heaven to consume them" (Luke 9:54) and when Jesus interacts with a Samaritan woman at the well (John 4).

- An inner work of Christ had **left no room for prejudice or racism** in Philip's heart as he "proclaimed the Messiah to them."

SOMEBODY GREAT (ACTS 8:9-13)

"THIS MAN IS CALLED THE GREAT POWER OF GOD"

Philip, a lay preacher in a foreign land, comes across a man named Simon. Simon was a sorcerer (magi) who had amazed the people of Samaria for a long time with his magic.

- Whatever power Simon displayed to people of Samaria, it was not of God but of demonic sources. This shows that **not every spiritual power is of God.**

"CLAIMING TO BE SOMEBODY GREAT"

Simon himself claimed to be somebody great, but he was about to be introduced to the message of Jesus Christ, who was truly great.

- The first step in receiving the gospel is to humble ourselves, repent of our pride in thinking we are something great, and submit our lives to the only one who is truly great, Jesus Christ!

"AMAZED AS HE OBSERVED"

The Samaritans who were once amazed by Simon and his sorceries now believed Philip and his message of Christ. Even Simon believed and was baptized, and He followed Philip.

- Maybe his belief was sincere and true, and maybe it wasn't. We do not really know, but what we do know is that his "belief" would be tested by his conduct and response over time.

RECEIVE THE SPIRIT (ACTS 8:14-25)

"THEY SENT PETER AND JOHN"

This passage is meant to show unity in the early Church, not to create division in the modern one.

- We see unity in experienced, mature Christians working alongside newer, inexperienced ones. We see the Holy Spirit unifying these Hebraic Christians with the new Christians in Samaria.

"HE HAD NOT YET COME DOWN"

We must remember that the Book of Acts is a **transitional book, showing the birth of the Church and empowerment through the Holy Spirit.**

- The Apostle Paul clearly teaches that we receive the Holy Spirit **the moment we receive Christ as our Savior** (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:13-14) and that not having the Spirit means we do not belong to Christ (Romans 8:9).

CONTROVERSIAL PASSAGE

So, how is it that the Samaritan Christians did not receive the Holy Spirit when Philip shared the gospel with them?

- For reasons known only to God, the Samaritans believed and were baptized, yet they did not immediately receive the Spirit. The way the Samaritans received the Spirit **should not be viewed as normative in every case.**

"HE OFFERED THEM MONEY"

Simon shows his true heart. The belief he held was not faith for salvation. **Simon thought only of personal gain** from what he had witnessed, and he was willing to purchase it.

- There are great benefits for the Believer in following Christ, but **is our motive for following Jesus focused on what we can gain?**

"SO THAT NOTHING YOU HAVE SAID WILL HAPPEN"

Instead of repenting and turning to the Lord, Simon asked that Peter pray for him to be spared. This was not a request for intercessory prayer for salvation but a request to be spared from consequence.

- Jesus came to save us, but we cannot think that we will be spared from the consequences of sin without ever repenting and submitting to Him (2 Peter 3:9; John 3:17).

SIMON THE SORCERER

- Verse 13 says that "Even Simon himself believed. And after he was baptized, he followed Philip..."
- We see that the word *believe* does not always mean saving faith (John 2:23-25; James 2:19).
- Simon was caught up in the excitement and most likely followed Philip in hopes of learning some new tricks to regain his "power."
- Are we here for knowledge only? We should continue learning about Christ, but we can know about Him without ever truly knowing Him and being known by Him (Matthew 7:21-23).
- Are we caught in the excitement and emotion of what is happening around us?
- Are we following a person or Jesus? Only following Jesus will change and transform us.
- When we try to purchase (earn) God's gift, we are denying His grace.
- Have we humbled ourselves and repented of pridefully claiming to be somebody great?
- Have we submitted every portion of our lives to the rule and reign of Jesus Christ?
- Are we only observing what God is doing, or are we participating?