

A Prayer for Boldness

[Acts 4:23-31](#)



In our last study we saw Peter and John before the [Sanhedrin](#), which basically functioned as we would think of the Supreme Court. They were the highest authority in the nation of Israel. Peter and John had been arrested and put in jail for preaching in the Temple and the next day they were brought before the Sanhedrin. This was the first persecution that the Church had experienced.

Let me digress here for just a moment to give you some background information.

The nation Israel was a [Theocracy](#)—that is a government by the rule of God, mediated through the priests. A theocracy is a form of civil government in which God himself is recognized as the head. The laws of the commonwealth are the commandments of God, and they are promulgated and expounded by the accredited representatives of God—the priesthood.

The earliest recorded use of the term "theocracy" is found in Josephus, who apparently coins it in explaining to Gentile readers the organization of the Jewish commonwealth of his time. Contrasting this with other forms of government—monarchies, oligarchies, and republics—he adds: *"Our legislator [Moses] had no regard to any of these forms, but he ordained our government to be what by a strained expression, may be termed a theocracy, by ascribing the power and authority to God, and by persuading all the people to have a regard to him as the author of all good things"* (Against Apion, book II, 16).



The Israelites were commanded to tithe in order to support the priests. Tithing was taxation to run the government.

So the Sanhedrin made up of "the chief priests, the scribes and the elders" was the Supreme Court in the theocracy of Israel. The Sanhedrin ruled by serving as combination of judicial, legislative, and executive branches of government.

[Zondervan](#) notes that, *"In AD 6...when Judea was made a Roman province, the Sanhedrin and its president, the high priest, were granted almost exclusive control of the internal affairs of the nation...It is during the period of the Roman procurators (AD 6-66) that the Sanhedrin came to possess the greatest power and jurisdiction of its history, although the Jewish authority was always ultimately answerable to the Roman governor."* In about AD 30 the Great Sanhedrin lost its authority to inflict capital punishment. We see this taught in:

Pilate therefore said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death," (John 18:31 NASB)

At the time of Christ and the New Testament Israel as a nation was under Roman dominion. If you know the history of Israel you know that they spent most of their existence under the dominion of one Gentile nation or another.

HISTORY OF JERUSALEM

During the Biblical period of the Judges, Jerusalem was a [Jebusite](#) city, called Jebus. King David's troops captured it and he himself moved into an old fortress named "[Zion](#)". David's son, Solomon, expanded the area of the city and he built the temple (966 BC). The construction took seven years. After the death of Solomon 930 BC, the northern tribes separated from the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

In 586 BC the Babylonians, under Nebuchadnezzar, utterly destroyed the city and the temple. Most of the residents were deported to Babylonia as slaves. Fifty years later, a remnant was allowed to return to Jerusalem. The city was resettled under the protection of the Medes, who had conquered Babylon. A new, more modest temple, was completed in 516 BC (Ezra 6). A hundred years later, the city walls were rebuilt.

The city remained relatively peaceful for the next two hundred years while under Persian control. Alexander the Great (Greek) conquered the Middle East in 332 BC.

Alexander died soon after and the [Ptolemies](#) of Egypt inherited control of Israel and Palestine. Their rule was benign and the Hebrew priests developed into their own aristocracy. In the second century BC the Seleucid king Antiochus III pushed out the Ptolemies. His successor, [Antiochus IV](#) (175-164 BC), tried to eradicate the Jewish religion. He set up a statue of Zeus in the temple and forbid the reading of the Torah and circumcision.

[Judas Maccabeus](#) led a Jewish revolt in 164 BC that succeeded in returning Jerusalem to Israel's control. The temple was purified and re-dedicated. Priests ruled Jerusalem until 63 BC when [General Pompey](#) marched on Israel and captured it for the Roman Emperor, 12,000 Jews were massacred. Jerusalem remained under Rome almost continuously until the seventh century AD.

Back to Acts; So, Peter and John went before the Sanhedrin with great boldness. They preached to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The court deliberated in closed session and commanded them to no longer speak in Jesus name. To which Peter and John promised civil disobedience. The court threatened them and let them go because of the people. That is where we pick it up this morning. Peter and John have just left the court:

And when they had been released, they went to their own companions, and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. (Acts 4:23 NASB)

Peter and John returned to a group referred to as "***their own companions.***" We do not know who all was included in this number. It may here mean the twelve, or it may mean the earlier group of 1:13, both of which could meet in a house, or it may signify that they went to a larger group who were together praying in the Temple.

The two reported all that had happened to them and all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. We can just picture Peter and John saying, "We got to preach to the Sanhedrin." They commanded us not to tell others about Jesus!

These threats, coming as they did from the highest civil authority, had the force of law. Obedience to Christ would from here on be costly. But Peter and John didn't return to their fellow Christians in a state of mental depression. They came back rejoicing! They had preached the resurrected Jesus to the very Sanhedrin that had Him crucified.

We see here that Peter and John were committed to community. They had a corporate mindset. Their first instinct was to

HISTORY OF JERUSALEM

- 966 BC Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem
- 586 BC the Babylonians destroyed the city & temple.
- 516 BC a new temple, was completed (Ezra 6).
- 164 BC Judas Maccabeus revolt.
- 63 BC General Pompey captured Israel for Rome
- 63 BC to about 700 AD Jerusalem is under Rome

share with other believers what had happened and this led to corporate prayer,

And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is Thou who DIDST MAKE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, (Acts 4:24 NASB)

The first response of this group of believers was to turn to God in Prayer. Is prayer your first response in difficult situations? Do you understand the importance of prayer?

[Asahel Nettleton](#), one of the great leaders and preachers during the 2nd Great Awakening, began a sermon with this statement: ***"There is no duty in Christianity, the practice of which Christ and the Apostles press upon us more frequently than prayer. Amidst all the absurdities and heresies which have sprung up in the Christian world, we know of none who have dared to deny the duty of prayer"*** [Asahel Nettleton: Sermons from the Second Great Awakening, 205].

Prayer is so important that Paul exhorted the believers at Thessalonica to:

pray without ceasing; (1 Thessalonians 5:17 NASB)

Prayer is a fundamental discipline of the Christian life, along with Bible study, fellowship, and witnessing. These are the basic disciplines that a Christian should be involved in to promote spiritual growth.

Prayer is not something we don't understand, I think everybody knows that prayer is talking to God. We know what it is, we just don't do it. Why is it that we, as God's children, spend so little time in prayer with our heavenly Father? Why is there so much prayerlessness in American Christianity? I think we spend so little time in prayer because we don't really believe that prayer actually works. Since we don't believe that it works, we spend our time doing other things.

Why is it that we don't believe that it works? Although we all know what prayer is, I think very few know what its purpose is. Probably, most folks would say that the purpose of prayer is to get God to do something. We view it as a kind of a spiritual nagging. Like if we keep bugging God about something, He'll do it for us. Does that describe your view of prayer?

If that is your view of prayer, it is little wonder why you don't spend time praying. Just what is the purpose of prayer? Let me give you a definition of prayer that changed my prayer life; **Prayer is a declaration of our dependence.** Every time I pray, I am saying, "God I need you!" We ask God's forgiveness because we know we are dependant upon Him to forgive. We thank Him in prayer because we know that what ever we are or have has come from Him. We petition Him because only He can give us what we need. We know that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble, and prayer is humility in action. It is saying, "God I can't do this, so I come to you acknowledging my need."

While prayer is something we are to do throughout our day, it is also something which we will do very little of if we fail to plan to pray. Prayer is so important, so vital to the life of the Christian, that he must set apart time to pray.

So when faced with persecution the early church turned to God. Our text says, ***"they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said"***—It isn't that they all prayed, speaking at the same time. One person prayed, and all agreed with that one, so that they were really praying with one voice. The word "voice" here is in the singular.

They are going to God in prayer because He has commanded them to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all the world and their rulers, the Sanhedrin, had commanded them not to ever preach Jesus. They had told the court that they would not obey them and they all knew that this was going to get ugly. So they go to God in prayer.

Notice how they prayed, ***"O Lord, it is Thou who DIDST MAKE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM"***. Isn't that interesting? They don't cry out, God help us, protect us from the Sanhedrin. They begin their prayer by affirming God as the sovereign Creator of all things.

"O Lord"— normally the word "Lord" is translated from the word [kurios](#), [koo'-ree-os] but here it is the Greek word [despotes](#), [des-pot'-ace]. From which we get our word despot. This is not a common title for God in Scripture; this divine

title emphasizes the complete ownership God exercises over his servants. It was a common ascription in Jewish prayers according to Josephus. ([Jewish War 7:323](#))

The use of this word shows us that the apostles saw themselves as God's slaves.

The idea of seeing ourselves as God's slaves is important if we face persecution or trials, because slaves do not expect to receive wonderful treatment. Slaves had no rights. The owner could command the slave to do unreasonable things without giving a reason for his commands. If carrying out the command resulted in the slave's death—that was too bad. The slave had to obey without question or complaint.

These Christians were acknowledging, "God, You are the master; we are the slaves." That was their way of saying, "We will submit to your sovereign will no matter what it may be.

In their prayer they acknowledge God as the sovereign Creator. The truth that God is the Creator of all is a theme frequently found throughout the Bible, in both Testaments.

In Deuteronomy chapter 4 God's promises both to judge His people Israel, and to restore them, are supported by the reminder that the God who promises these things is the God who made the heavens and the earth ([Deuteronomy 4:32-35](#)). In response to Assyria's threat to besiege Jerusalem and to take Israel captive, Hezekiah prayed to the Lord for deliverance from the kingdoms of men. His prayer began,

And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, who art enthroned above the cherubim, Thou art the God, Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. Thou hast made heaven and earth. (2 Kings 19:15 NASB)

Jeremiah chapter 32 contains a striking parallel to our text. Here Jeremiah is thrown into jail by Zedekiah, king of Judah, for prophesying that Jerusalem and Israel would fall to the Babylonians. The people of Israel were instructed not to resist this ([Jer 32:1-6](#)). In response to all that happened, Jeremiah prayed, beginning with these words:

'Ah Lord GOD! Behold, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee, (Jeremiah 32:17 NASB)

The key phrase, based on the fact that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth is this: ***"Nothing is too difficult for Thee."*** To Jeremiah and to the other First Testament saints who found assurance in the fact that God is the Creator, the bottom line was simply that He who could create all things could also control them. Here he was predicting the downfall of Jerusalem, just as the apostles would do centuries later. And just as the king was persecuting Jeremiah, so the political and religious authorities were persecuting the apostles. And just as Jeremiah prayed to the Creator of the heavens and the earth, so did the early church.

Please notice this; we have seen in our study of Acts that when the Apostles preached they preached the text—their message came from Scripture. Now we also see that the not only preached the text but they prayed the text—their prayers came from Scripture also. These first Christians were deeply immersed in the text of Scripture. And I believe that if we are going to walk with God we too must immerse ourselves in the Text.

The prophets taught this theme of God as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and so did the Apostles. Paul also taught this:

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him.¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:16-17 NASB)

The church found comfort in the fact that the God to whom they prayed was the Creator of heaven and earth, He was the Sovereign God, who was totally in control. They know that if God created everything in earth, sea, and heaven, then these

elders and priests are his property and he can do with them as he pleases. Confessing the truth about God's relationship to our circumstances brings encouragement, especially when we are aware of danger and feel out of control.

These early Christians recognized that God had even predicted the very opposition they faced. They quoted the second Psalm in support of it. They had clearly been doing what Christians ought to do under pressure: They had gone to the Scriptures. They had found in the second Psalm the prediction of the actual opposition they were facing:

who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Thy servant, didst say, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS?'²⁶ 'THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD, AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.' (Acts 4:25-26 NASB)

The one leading in this prayer knew Psalm 2 well enough to quote verses 1 & 2 by memory. He affirms his belief that the Holy Spirit inspired David to write these words. Then he applies this psalm to the current situation. Let look at this Psalm:

Why are the nations in an uproar, and the peoples devising a vain thing?² The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed:³ "Let us tear their fetters apart, and cast away their cords from us!" (Psalms 2:1-3 NASB)

This Psalm relates to Jesus Christ, and predicts the vain attempts made by Jewish and heathen powers to suppress Christianity. Notice the Lord's reaction to these men:

He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them.⁵ Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury:⁶ "But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain." (Psalms 2:4-6 NASB)

God laughs at their futile attempt to stop His plan. They reject the Corner stone but God makes Him the foundation of the New Temple. They kill the Messiah but God raised Him from the dead. God laughs at them. Notice verse 6, God's plan went forward, Christ was installed as King upon Zion.

What is "Zion"? The name "Zion" was mentioned first in the account of David's conquest of Jerusalem ([2 Sam. 5:6-10](#); [1 Chron. 11:4-9](#)). After David captured Zion, he resided there and changed its name to the "City of David." Zion was used by biblical writers in a variety of ways. Many of the psalmists used the term to refer to the Temple built by Solomon—which was a type ([Psalms 2:6](#); [48:2](#); [84:7](#); [132:13](#)). The most common usage of Zion was to refer to the city of God in the new age ([Isa. 1:27](#); [33:5](#)).

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed." (Isaiah 28:16 NASB)

The Corner stone is laid in Zion. Zion refers to the heavenly Jerusalem. Speaking to the church the writer of Hebrews says:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, (Hebrews 12:22 NASB)

The word "and" ought to be rendered: "even" or "that is". Mt. Zion is the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem. So, Mount Zion, heavenly Jerusalem, city of the living God, the church, and in verse 28, the kingdom ALL refer to those redeemed in the body of Christ, New Covenant believers.

Let's go back to Psalm 2:

"I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee.'⁸ 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Thy possession.'⁹ 'Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt shatter them like earthenware.'"¹⁰ Now

therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth.¹¹ Worship the LORD with reverence, And rejoice with trembling.¹² Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him! (Psalms 2:7-12 NASB)

It was from this Psalm that the words spoken at Jesus baptism were taken **“You are My Son”**. Thus they saw it as quite clear from the Psalm that all the raging against the Name of Jesus would come to nothing. Jesus was God’s Anointed, and nothing could therefore stand in the way of His victory.

How futile was the effort of the rulers of this world to attempt to resist the establishment of God’s kingdom. The apostles and the early church saw the persecution they were facing as an on-going resistance to Christ and to His kingdom. And in the light of this psalm, they saw such resistance as futile and foolish. The kingdom of God could not be stopped, and thus, they could not be silenced.

They quote Psalm 2 and then show that the psalm was fulfilled in the way God was in control when evil men killed Jesus:

"For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,²⁸ to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur. (Acts 4:27-28 NASB)

“In this city”—which is a reference to Jerusalem; these different powers are leagued together against God’s Anointed, and are determined to prevent the accomplishment of His purpose.

When they hear Psalm 2 they said to themselves, “That’s exactly what has happened.” Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the others, the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, have set themselves against the Lord Jesus. We saw it happen right in this very city. It’s not surprising, not unexpected; it’s exactly what God said would happen. They found great encouragement in the fact that this event was not beyond divine control; the opposition they were facing was anticipated for no human event gets out of hand, as far as God is concerned.

Notice verse 28; what does it teach us? There were no [Arminians](#) in the early Church—they all knew that God was sovereign over everything—even the death of His Son. These evil men were only doing what God’s hand and council had foreordained.

The Greek word translated “predestined” here is [proorizo](#), [pro-or-id'-zo]; it is the word from which we get our English word horizon. This Greek word could be literally translated pre-horizon. The horizon is the great boundary between the earth and the sky, and the Greek word [horizo](#) means to establish boundaries. And to set the boundaries, to draw the lines, to establish the limits, is to determine what will be. And to do that ahead of time, in eternity past, is what predestined means. God predestines all things, even the evil deed of crucifying His anointed one, Jesus.

And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31 NASB)

The suffering and death of Christ was a divine necessity, it was predestined.

If you believe, as most teach, that evil events occur outside of God’s sovereign will, then you have great cause for fear and no cause for comfort when evil things happen to you or your loved ones.

God mightily and sovereignly ordains everything that happens, and He orders it all according to His wise purpose. If wicked men persecute His church, God predestined it to occur for His purpose and glory, and we can submit to it, knowing that He is in control.

Now after five verse of proclaiming the glories and sovereignty of God we have two verses of petition:

"And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence, 30 while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus." (Acts 4:29-30 NASB)

The believers pray, ***"Now, Lord, take note of their threats."*** In other words, Peter and John had told them about the threats mentioned in verses 18 and 21. In verse 18 the priests and elders demanded that Peter and John ***"not speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus."*** In verse 21 they threaten them further.

"Grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence"— The Greek word for “confidence” here is [*parrhesia*](#), [pa-rhay-see'-ah] which means: ***“free and fearless confidence, cheerful courage, boldness, assurance.”*** This is the third time this Greek word is used in our text. This text is about boldness. They have it and they pray for more of it. They understood that persecution would naturally incline men to draw back, to soften up on the message which they preached. Thus, the prayer for boldness and confidence was an admission of the fallibility of Christians.

When is the last time you prayed for boldness? They did not ask to be delivered from persecution. They did not even ask that God judge or punish their opponents. They were more concerned about their mission than their comfort. Believers, we can learn something from this! Do you live with a consciousness of the mission our Lord has given to each of us as ambassadors for Christ to a lost world? These were simple people who were given the responsibility to carry the gospel into the world—the same responsibility which each one of us has received from the Lord, as well. I believe all of us can join with these brethren in praying for "boldness" in speaking the gospel.

Have you ever been in a prayer meeting where all the requests seem to focus on everyone’s health problems? But if that is the main focus of the prayer time, it reveals that we’re too focused on ourselves, not enough on God’s kingdom.

They didn’t pray, “God, make sure that nobody else threatens us; make sure that nobody persecutes us.” They understood this was going to cost them. They just said, “God, give us the confidence; give us the boldness to step it up and to accomplish the mission.”

Are you frustrated with God's response to your prayers? Why not evaluate the motive and content of your requests? Are they so that God's purpose can be advanced and so that people can be influenced by Jesus Christ—or are they primarily for your safety and comfort? Try asking God to give you opportunities and boldness to mix it up with people about the gospel. Try asking God to empower you to be more genuinely loving toward a difficult person.

while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus." (Acts 4:30 NASB)

The whole purpose of their praying for healing, signs, and wonders was to arrest the attention of the masses with the power of God so that they might proclaim the gospel with clarity. They had just come off this miracle, where because of the miracle they were given a platform to boldly proclaim the gospel, and thousands of people came to faith. And that is what they were asking: God, You continue to show Yourself. Give us a platform; give us the boldness to declare the message.

Their prayer was to be abundantly answered. From [Acts 5.12-16](#) we learn of the amazing miracles that constantly occurred, reaching out far beyond Jerusalem, as those who were sick flocked to Jerusalem in order to find healing.

And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:31 NASB)

This shaking of the place is God's symbolic answer to these disciples' prayer. He is saying to them, in this figurative way, that he would shake Jerusalem and the world by the message these disciples were proclaiming. Less than forty years after this event the city of Jerusalem was surrounded by Roman armies; the authority of the priests was broken in the city; and finally the entire nation, the religious theocracy of Israel was shaken and the people were dispersed throughout the nations of the world.

Their prayer was answered; they spoke the Word with boldness. Their boldness was a gift from God, received through prayer. It was not something that they tried to work up in themselves. They were dependant upon God to give them the power to do what He had commanded them to do.

How often do you pray about your boldness in proclaiming the gospel of Christ? Most of us are so consumed by desiring "things" that we give little attention to praying for opportunities, boldness, clarity, passion in presenting Christ to a lost world. Brethren, we must pray, each one of us, about our own mission of spreading the gospel! We all need boldness.

This message was preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on August 24, 2008. Media #428.



Berean Bible Church provides this material free of charge for the edification of the Body of Christ.

You can help further this work by your prayer and by sending a contribution to:

[Berean Bible Church](#)
2000 Centerville Turnpike
Chesapeake, VA 23322