

# The Believers' Prayer

## Ice-Breaker

What bold move are you contemplating: Dating someone new? Singing a solo? Leading a group? Starting a new career?

## Scripture Passage

Acts 4:23-31

23On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

"Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
26The kings of the earth take their stand  
and the rulers gather together  
against the Lord  
and against his Anointed One.<sup>a,b</sup>

27Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people<sup>c</sup> of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

31After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

a [26] That is, Christ or Messiah

b [26] Psalm 2:1,2

c [27] The Greek is plural.

## Bible Study

1. How does the Sanhedrin (4:15-17) and the disciples each view themselves and God?
2. Why would the disciples begin the prayer by recalling God's sovereignty (vv. 24-28)?
3. Did God allow, direct or anticipate Jesus' crucifixion (see 2:23; 3:17-18)?
4. How might 1:8 be shaping the disciples' prayer in verses 29-30?
5. What is one purpose of the Holy Spirit (see 2:4; 4:8,31)?

## Reference Notes

**4:23 to their own people.** That is, the other believers who were perhaps gathered at Mark's mother's house as in 12:12. **chief priests and elders.** These people were largely drawn from the Sadducees.

**4:24 Sovereign Lord.** This title is used elsewhere to describe the Father (Revelation 6:10) and Jesus (2 Peter 2:1). It indicates one who has absolute power. you made the heaven. Another way of acknowledging God's absolute authority over all things (see Psalm 146:6; Isaiah 37:16).

**4:25-26** The opposition of the Sanhedrin is seen as simply part of a long-ago predicted opposition against God's Messiah. Psalm 2, a coronation song for a king, was widely viewed as messianic.

**4:27 Herod.** While officially a tetrarch, he was sometimes (perhaps sarcastically) referred to as "king" since he coveted that title from Rome. **Pilate.** A ruler. the Gentiles. The Roman soldiers who carried out the execution. **the people of Israel.** The tragic irony was that the action of the Sanhedrin against Jesus and now against his disciples shows that Israel is among those nations that fights against her own Messiah! **your holy servant.** The early Christians clearly identified the kingly figure of Psalm 2 with the Servant of Isaiah, a connection they had never made prior to the Crucifixion and Resurrection and which had no precedence in Jewish thought. This connection is reflected in the baptism of Jesus (Luke 3:21-22) where phrases from Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42 (the first of Isaiah's "servant songs") are combined.

**4:28 They did what your power and will had decided.** The interplay between God's will and human responsibility is once again asserted (Psalm 76:10; Acts 3:17-18). The death of Jesus was no accident, but part of God's eternal plan to bring salvation to the world. your power. Literally, "Your hand": a common Old Testament expression of God at work in human affairs (Exodus 3:20; 13:3).

**4:29 consider their threats.** See Isaiah 37:17. A veiled request for God to frustrate their intentions as he did those of the Assyrians so long ago. **enable your servants to speak your word.** The major request of the disciples is for courage to keep on preaching in the face of opposition. Jesus already warned them that they would face such encounters (Luke 21:12; John 15:18-20); what was needed was not a review of whether God's game plan was working, but the courage to press on in obedience to his command (Acts 1:8).

**4:30 Stretch out your hand.** The miracles were not just acts in themselves, but pointers to the truth that Jesus was still present in their midst (Hebrews 2:4).

**4:31 the place ... was shaken.** Earthquakes were a common sign in the Old Testament of God's presence (Exodus 19:18; Psalm 114:7; Isaiah 6:4; Ezekiel 38:19). Thus, the disciples were assured that their prayer was heard.

## Caring Time

1. How are your prayers in crises like and unlike this prayer (vv. 24-30)? Why would it be beneficial to recall God's character and actions in history?

2. How is your Christian life characterized by boldness?