

### The Volunteer

There's an old piece of advice for those in the army: "Never volunteer for anything." Nathan Hale apparently never took that advice. Hale was a young officer in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. When the British threatened to capture New York, General Washington asked for volunteers to go behind enemy lines and report on the enemy's activities. Nathan Hale stepped forward becoming one of America's first spies.

He wasn't very good at it. Though supposedly undercover, Hale carried his identification in his shoe. He contacted people familiar with his revolutionary activities, some of whom Hale must have known to be British loyalists, and there is no record that he ever sent a single report back to headquarters.

Nathan Hale was betrayed soon after entering enemy territory. When the British captured him, they naturally searched his clothes. The papers hidden in his shoe revealed that he was not the itinerant Dutch schoolteacher he claimed to be, but an American. He never denied it; instead, admitting his devotion to independence. Only 21 years old and sentenced to death without a trial, he spoke from the gallows one of the most famous lines in American history: "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

It is rare to find people who are willing to put their lives on the line for what they believe in. In this week's lesson, we'll look at some of the rare ones who considered their faith worthy of their lives.

#### Monday – Seized and believed

1. Please read Acts 4:1-4 (if you need to, go back and read Acts 3 for a reminder of the day's events). What were the religious leaders upset about? What did they do to Peter and John?

**Text insight:** Sadducees and Pharisees were the two main religious groups in Jesus' time. Sadducees came from the upper class and were more politically minded than religiously motivated. A big difference between these two groups was that the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead while Pharisees did.

2. Apparently, Peter and John were still speaking to the crowd when they got arrested. How would you have felt if you were one of those listening to their teaching? According to verse 4, how did many respond?
3. How do you think Peter and John felt about their arrest following their healing of the crippled man?

#### Tuesday – By what name?

*"I search in vain in history to find the similar to Jesus Christ, or anything which can approach the gospel. Neither history, nor humanity, nor the ages, nor nature, offer me anything with which I am able to compare it or explain it. Here everything is extraordinary." Napoleon*

1. Read Acts 4:5-12. What was the first thing the priests asked Peter and John? Why do you think they started with this question?
2. How did Peter respond to the question? Turn back to Matthew 26:69-75, and compare his readiness to acknowledge Jesus with what he did before. How would you explain the change in Peter? What role did the Holy Spirit have in the "new" Peter?
3. Peter did not stop with an explanation of the healing. What did he say in verse 12 as he finished his answer? What do you think of his bold conclusion? Do you agree with him or disagree? Why?

#### Wednesday – Trying to put God in a box

1. The Sanhedrin was the Jewish ruling council; made up primarily of Pharisees and Sadducees. Acts 4:13-17 shows the Sanhedrin retiring to deliberate like a jury in a court of law. What did they discuss? What verdict did they reach? What do you think they hoped to accomplish when they made this decision?
2. In Acts 4:18-22, the Sanhedrin delivered its judgment. How did Peter and John react? How would you have reacted?
3. According to the first part of verse 21, the rulers persisted in trying to keep the apostles from teaching about Jesus. The second half of verse 21 shows how successful they were. What was the crowd doing?

**Making it Personal** - Acts 4:22 tells us the healed man's age. Often we think we are too old or too weak to change, just as we would not expect someone crippled from birth to get any better after 40 years. Is there something you need God to change in you? It's not too late to ask.

#### Thursday – God's will, God's power

1. Please read Acts 4:23-31. Where did the apostles go immediately after their release? How did the other believers react to the report Peter and John gave after spending the night in jail and being put on trial?
2. What does the first part of the prayer, verses 24-27, cover? After describing God's authority over all things and how people rebel against him, a startling insight is reached in verse 28. What is it? What do you think about that? Does the sovereignty of God noted in verse 24 help you understand the truth of verse 28?
3. In Acts 4:29-30, the believers end their prayer with a request. What was it? How did God answer their prayer in verse 31?

#### Friday – Like Father, like Son

1. Peter and John were following an example they knew well. Read John 5:16-20, a passage which illuminates the attitude the religious leaders had toward Jesus. To whom did Jesus point them in verse 17? According to verses 19-20, why did Jesus do the things he did?
2. 1 Kings 22:1-28 shows the lead up to a major battle; pitting the kings of Israel and Judah against the King of Aram (a neighboring country). What did Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, ask in verse 5? The prophets summoned by Ahab, King of Israel, belonged to the false god Baal, and not to the true God, Yahweh. How did Jehoshaphat respond in verse 7? Who did King Ahab finally summon?
3. Now take a close look at verses 13 and 14, and compare Micaiah's response to Peter's in Acts 4:19-20. Do you desire to be so bold? Ask God for the boldness to tell others what he has done in your life.

**For the Weekend:** Re-read 1 Kings 22:1-28 and put yourself in Micaiah's shoes: 400 prophets of Baal saying one thing, while you say the exact opposite. Is there any similarity in how you fit in with today's society? If not, perhaps you are not truly standing out for God, and if so, you must surely understand your need for the Holy Spirit. Either way, spend some time in prayer asking God to use you to stand up for him.