



9

The Apostles Are Persecuted

Key Theme

- God uses people to accomplish His plans.

Key Passages

- Acts 4:1–4, 4:7–10, 4:16–20, 4:23–24, 5:40–42

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe why the apostles were persecuted.
- Describe how the apostles responded to persecution.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Students will practice the memory verse by completing the Memory Verse Review Sheet and reciting the verse to a friend.



Activity 1: The Apostles Are Persecuted Class Notes

Students will complete The Apostles Are Persecuted Class Notes as you study the lesson.



Studying God's Word

Soon after Pentecost, the apostles began to experience persecution because they preached the truth in the name of Jesus Christ. They were able to stand firm and even rejoice in their sufferings because they were empowered with the promised Holy Spirit.



Activity 2: Truth Be Told Review Game

Students will review the lesson by playing the Truth Be Told Review Game.

Lesson Preparation

WHAT YOU WILL DO



COME ON IN

- Print the Memory Verse Review Sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- Memory Verse Poster
- Memory Verse Review Sheet for each student



THE APOSTLES ARE PERSECUTED CLASS NOTES

- Print one The Apostles Are Persecuted Class Notes from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student. Keep the answer key for your use.

- The Apostles Are Persecuted Class Notes for each student
- The Apostles Are Persecuted Answer Key
- Pencils



STUDYING GOD'S WORD

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.

- Student Take Home Sheets



TRUTH BE TOLD REVIEW GAME

- Assemble the Truth Be Told Game Board Posters found in your curriculum kit.
- Print the Truth Be Told Game Components from the Resource DVD-ROM. Keep the Truth Be Told Question Answer Key for your use.
- Cut apart the Truth Be Told Number Cards. These will determine how many spaces to move. OR bring in dice or a game spinner to be used to move teams around the board.
- Cut apart the Truth Be Told Question Cards.
- Bring buttons or other small items to use as game pieces for each team. Bring poster putty for adhering game pieces to the game board.

- Truth Be Told Game Board
- Truth Be Told Number Cards OR use dice or a game spinner
- Truth Be Told Question Cards
- Truth Be Told Question Answer Key
- Buttons or other small items as game pieces for each team
- Poster putty



Memory Verse

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

► **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above along with this background.

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come to teach all things. But He would not come until Jesus had left the earth (John 16:7). And when He did come, He would guide believers into all truth (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit would empower the disciples and make them witnesses for Jesus and the gospel from Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

As the church began to grow, so did the opposition to the truth about Jesus. The disciples drew on the power of the Holy Spirit for wisdom, strength, and perseverance as they stood firm to proclaim the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints (1 Corinthians 2:13; Ephesians 3:16; Jude 3).

It appeared the apostles were off to a good start by the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter's sermon at Pentecost added about 3,000 souls to the church (Acts 2:41). And the Bible tells us that Peter and John were given the power to heal a lame man at the Temple in the name of Jesus Christ. This lame man got up, and all the people saw him walking and praising God (Acts 3:1–10). The people were amazed at the miracle performed by the apostles, but Peter quickly declared that it was by faith in the name of Jesus Christ—the very Man they had denied and killed—that the lame man had been healed (Acts 3:15–16).

As their fame grew, and they continued to preach the power of Jesus Christ and His Resurrection from the dead, the priests and Jewish leaders became jealous. It wasn't long before Peter and John were arrested—but not before 5,000 more believers were added to the church (Acts 4:1–4).

A familiar scene—reminiscent of Jesus's own recent illegal trial—followed their arrest as the rulers, elders, scribes, Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, and others gathered together to question the apostles. They asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" (Acts 4:5–7).

God's Word tells us that Peter, filled with the wisdom and knowledge of the Holy Spirit, stood and again proclaimed that it was by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom they had crucified and God had raised from the dead, that the man had been healed. Peter spoke boldly to his accusers in the name of Jesus,

and proclaimed that salvation could be found in NO other name given to men under heaven (Acts 4:8–12).

The Jewish council was perplexed. A notable miracle had been done, and no one could deny it. But they plotted to stop the spread of this gospel of Jesus Christ, and they threatened the apostles, commanding them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus! However, Peter and John would NOT be discouraged. And they would not back down from speaking the things they had seen and heard (Acts 4:20).

The apostles were released and went back to their friends, and together they rejoiced at God's faithfulness. As they were gathered together, they prayed that the Lord would grant them boldness to speak His Word and continue to give them the power to do signs and wonders in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 4:23–30).

This would not be the end of their troubles, however. They were again imprisoned but miraculously freed by an angel of the Lord who opened the prison doors. The apostles went back to the Temple and began preaching again (Acts 5:17–21). Again they were arrested and told to STOP preaching in the name of Jesus Christ! And yet, the apostles boldly proclaimed that they were to obey God rather than men and would not stop preaching (Acts 5:29).

The persecution of the church and the apostles would only continue to grow worse. But even in spite of beatings and imprisonment, the apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:40–41).

Later on, the Apostle Paul also suffered many trials as he was persecuted for his faith in Jesus Christ. It was Paul who penned what has come to be a cry of confidence and victory in the gospel. We read it in Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

As Christians we, too, should boldly proclaim that we will not be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For it was through its truth that we were saved and through its power that others will be saved to eternal life.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

In our Western world, Christians know very little of persecution. As Americans we enjoy religious freedom, freedom of assembly, and freedom of speech. There are more than 450,000 churches across the United

States where we can worship without government interference. Some of these are mega-churches with coffee bars, fitness centers, bookstores, and more. When we complain of being persecuted, it may be because someone called us a name, or we were denied a promotion at our job due to our evangelistic fervor. But compared to the early church, and much of the church today around the world, we live in very peaceful and accommodating circumstances.

The history of the church is one of persecution and martyrdom. It has been customary for church historians to count ten major periods of severe persecution in the early church, beginning with the persecution under Emperor Nero in AD 64 and ending with Emperor Diocletian in AD 305. Christians were thrown to the lions, forced into gladiatorial battles, burned alive, and crucified. In fact, all of the original apostles, except John, died unnatural deaths because of their faith. And John died while exiled to the island of Patmos. In the second century, one Christian apologist wrote the following:

Though beheaded, and crucified, and thrown to wild beasts, and chains, and fire, and all other kinds of torture, we do not give up our confession; but, the more such things happen, the more do others in larger numbers become faithful (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*).

And while we may be tempted to think that severe persecution is a thing of the past, the reality is that more Christians died for their faith in the twentieth century than in all of the previous centuries combined. By some counts, around 100,000 Christians are martyred for their faith each year, and there are currently over 100 million Christians being persecuted worldwide.

Indeed, the history of the church demonstrates triumph in the face of persecution and martyrdom. In many places around the world, as the persecution increased, the church grew. Under Chairman Mao and Chinese Communism, for example, professing Christians in China grew from 1.5 million in 1970 to 65 million in just twenty years, even though foreign missionaries were severely restricted.

When we survey the Bible, we quickly see that persecution is a stark reality of the Christian life. The Apostle Paul warned Timothy that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12). Jesus told His disciples to expect persecution from the world because, since they hated Him, they will hate His followers also. He said that if they persecuted Him, they would persecute His followers (John 15:18–20). Since the world is driven by the love of sin and self, it is no wonder they hate Christians

who are called to be different and separate from the world. It is this very separation from the world and the world system that provokes hatred toward us.

As Christians, we must learn to recognize the spiritual value persecution offers and even to rejoice in it. Persecution allows us to share in a unique fellowship with our Lord. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, listed a number of things he surrendered for the cause of Christ. Such losses, however, he viewed as “rubbish” (Philippians 3:8) that he might share in the “fellowship of [Christ’s] sufferings” (Philippians 3:10). Peter wrote that the church should not think it strange to come upon trials, but they should rejoice that they can partake in Christ’s sufferings. And, when the time comes for His glory to be revealed, those who suffered for His sake may also be glad with exceeding joy (1 Peter 4:13).

Persecution is good for our spiritual growth, whether we like to think of it that way or not. James instructs us to count it all joy when we fall into trials, knowing that the testing of our faith produces patience, endurance, and maturity (James 1:2–4). Jesus also addressed this topic during His famous Sermon on the Mount when He said that His followers would be blessed when people insult and persecute them. In fact, He said we should rejoice at persecution, for our reward will be great in heaven (Matthew 5:11–12).

It is hard to say just when we will fall into life-threatening trials for the sake of the gospel. But when it happens, we can be confident that if we are truly saved and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, His power in us will enable us to stand firm for our faith.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Praise your name, Lord Jesus! Thank you for the examples you give us in Scripture of apostles who boldly proclaimed your Word. The persecution they suffered because of your name did not deter them. Help all Christians to follow their example. Please keep those who profess the name of Jesus from the fear of man. Give us strength to look to you and your Word for wisdom and courage that we may always be ready to defend the reason for the hope that we have. Holy Spirit, bring boldness. Move in the hearts of my students to believe the gospel. Change them into new creations who long to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.



COME ON IN

As students arrive ...

- They will complete the Memory Verse Review Sheet. If time allows, have the students recite the verse together, to each other, or to you.

This time at the beginning of class should be used to review the memory verse. We have provided an activity sheet on the Resource DVD-ROM for you to use. You may have other ideas and ways to encourage your students to memorize the verse.



After all the students arrive, pray with them before beginning the lesson.



REVIEW

Using the Lesson Theme Posters provided with each lesson, quickly review the previous lesson(s) with your students. Take 5 to 10 minutes to reinforce the important truths the students have heard so far in your class.

Ask the children questions about the previous lessons as you display the Lesson Theme Posters. Reflect briefly on the passages you read, bringing the objectives and themes back into focus. This will refresh the truths in your students' minds and maintain continuity as you teach through the lessons.



The Apostles Are Persecuted Class Notes

MATERIALS

- The Apostles Are Persecuted Class Notes for each student
- The Apostles Are Persecuted Class Notes Answer Key
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

Print the class notes for each student. Pass them out at the beginning of class. Have students fill in the blanks as you study the lesson.

We will be completing these class notes as we study the Bible passages. Do not work ahead. We will finish them together during the lesson.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

As we complete the class notes today, we will see what the apostles did when they faced persecution for preaching the gospel.



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

Refer to Lesson 8 Lesson Theme Poster. Jesus had promised that the Father would send the Holy Spirit as a helper to His followers. The Holy Spirit would guide believers into all truth and give strength and courage to fulfill the Great Commission—to make disciples for Jesus Christ in all the nations. It was at the Jewish holiday Pentecost that the Holy Spirit came to Jesus's followers. They were changed by His strength and given courage to speak boldly for Jesus.

- Use the New Testament History Poster included with your teacher kit as you teach the lesson to point out the events you are discussing.

Acts 4:1–4

They soon realized they would need the power and courage from the Holy Spirit. Not everyone who heard them speak of Christ was happy about it. And the disciples soon began to experience persecution.

We are going to read about that today. Let's start with Acts 4:1–4. Turn there in your Bibles. This tells us about some of the persecution the disciples faced. *Acts 4:1–4. Choose students to read the verses.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Let's answer a few questions about those verses, so we can understand them better.

Observe the Text

- ?
We read that the apostles, Peter and John, were speaking to the people. What do you think they were speaking about? *Acts 4:1. Allow discussion.*
They were speaking of the power of Jesus Christ and the truth of His gospel!
- ?
Who came up to them as they spoke? *Acts 4:1. The captains of the Temple, the Sadducees.*
They were in the Temple speaking, and the Temple leaders came to them.
- ?
Acts 4:2 tells us these Temple leaders were disturbed or upset about something. Why were they upset? *The apostles were teaching the people and preaching Jesus and His Resurrection from the dead.*
- ?
They were upset about what Peter and John were teaching, so what did these leaders do to the apostles? Look in Acts 4:3. *They laid hands on them and put them in custody!*
- ?
Peter and John were taken to jail! But what happened to the people who had heard them preach? The answer is in Acts 4:4. *Many who heard believed.*
- ?
What was it these people were believing? *Allow discussion.*
They were believing the truth about Jesus Christ. They were becoming believers.
- ?
And how many believers were added to the church? *Acts 4:4. 5,000.*
The power of the Holy Spirit was with the apostles. They were boldly preaching about Jesus Christ—His life, His death, and His Resurrection from the grave. And the religious leaders did not like it. The apostles were becoming popular. People were listening to them. The church was growing.
- ?
Let's complete some of the class notes. Will someone read #1 there? What is the answer? *Assign a reader. Holy Spirit. Have students complete #1 on the class notes.*
- ?
Ok. And #2? What was happening to the church? *Assign a reader. Growing. Have students complete #2 on the class notes.*

- ? Will someone read #3? How will you complete that sentence? Assign a reader.
Leaders, jail. Have students complete #3 on the class notes.

Do you wonder why these religious leaders were so angry? One reason was they noticed that the apostles had very special powers. They could even heal the sick in the name of Jesus.

- ? Where did this special power come from? *The Holy Spirit.*

Yes! The Bible tells us that Peter and John were on their way into the Temple when a man who was lame—or crippled—called out to them. He wanted to be healed. He wanted to walk again! Well, the apostles DID heal the man! And everyone who saw it was astonished!

We are going to read what happened to Peter and John after the religious leaders saw them heal the man! This is what they said to Jesus's apostles. Turn to Acts 4:7–10. Let's read those verses. *Acts 4:7–10. Choose students to read.*

Acts 4:7–10

- ? So what did the religious leaders ask the apostles after they healed the man in the Temple? *Acts 4:7. By what power or by what name have you done this?*
- ? Peter answered. What does the Bible tell us Peter was filled with? Look at Acts 4:8. *The Holy Spirit.*

Yes! Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. He needed the courage of the Holy Spirit now. Refer to Lesson 3 Lesson Theme Poster. Remember, Peter had denied even knowing Jesus before. But he wasn't going to do that again!

- ? He spoke boldly to the people this time. And what did he tell them? Whose name was he teaching and healing the people in? Look at Acts 4:10. *The name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.*
- ? Take a look at your class notes again. Who can read #4 for us? How will you complete that based on what we have just read? *Acts 4:7. Assign a reader.* Power, name. Have students complete #4 on the class notes.

The leaders were furious. But they didn't know what to do! They knew the man had been healed! And they knew that many people were beginning to follow the apostles. But they wanted to stop them! Well, the leaders had brought the apostles in, had put them in jail, had asked them questions, and now we will see what decision they made! Skip ahead to Acts 4:16–18. *Acts 4:16–18. Choose students to read.*

Acts 4:16–18

- ? What did the religious leaders ask themselves? *Acts 4:16. What shall we do with these men?*
- ? What had happened in Jerusalem that they could not deny or cover up? *Acts 4:16. A miracle.*

They knew that many had seen the miracle. The lame man was healed! They knew they couldn't cover it up.

Acts 4:19–20

?

So, what did they decide to do? Look at Acts 4:17. They would threaten the apostles to keep them from speaking about Jesus.

That is what they did. The Bible says they commanded the apostles not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus! These religious leaders did not want the truth to spread any further to the people.

I wonder if the threats and commands worked with the apostles. Let's read Acts 4:19–20, and we will find out. *Acts 4:19–20. Choose students to read the verses.*

?

Good. Now look at Acts 4:19–20 again. Who were Peter and John going to listen to? *Acts 4:19–20. God.*

That's right! They were not going to deny the truth about Jesus. In fact, they knew that they had to continue to speak of the things they had heard and seen in Jesus Christ.

?

Whose name were they preaching, teaching, and healing in? Someone read #5 on the class notes for us. *Assign a reader. Jesus Christ. Have students complete #5 on the class notes.*

?

How did the religious leaders try to stop the apostles? Who can read #6? How will you finish that? *Threatened, warned. Have students complete #6 on the class notes.*

Discover the Truth

This was just the beginning of the persecution that would surround the apostles as they preached the truth about Jesus. It began soon after Pentecost. They were taken to jail and commanded NOT to speak in the name of Jesus Christ. Yet they knew in their hearts that they must speak of His name. He IS the truth! And they would not stop telling the people about Jesus. They could not stop because they knew that Jesus is the only way anyone could have forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven.



READ THE WORD

Acts 4:23–24

Were the apostles discouraged? Were they afraid? How did they react to this persecution? We are going to read something that happened after they were let go from jail. Let's read Acts 4:23–24. *Acts 4:23–24. Choose students to read.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

You should be ready to answer more questions about the apostle's persecution.

Observe the Text

?

Where did they go after their imprisonment and trial? *Acts 4:23. Back to their companions.*

They went back to their friends and told them what had happened. They had been arrested and told to stop preaching Jesus Christ and His truth!

- ? What did the apostles and their friends do about the situation? *Acts 4:24.*
They praised God and prayed!

The apostles continued to glorify God! And then later they prayed that God would bring them the wisdom and the courage to speak even more boldly about Jesus.

- ? Where would that wisdom and courage come from? Who was helping the believers? *The Holy Spirit.*

Yes. The Holy Spirit was certainly helping them. The apostles and the other followers of Jesus continued to teach what Jesus had done and that He was raised from the dead for the forgiveness and salvation of sinners who would believe. And they continued to be persecuted, mistreated, and put in jail because of their faith in Jesus.

Remember, many people believed and were following them. The church was growing. It was the powerful, Jewish religious leaders who wanted to stop them. Turn to Acts 5:40–42. This tells us more about what was happening to the followers of Jesus. Let's read it. *Acts 5:40–42. Choose students to read.*

Acts 5:40–42

- ? They wanted the apostles to stop! What were they doing to get them to stop? *Acts 5:40. Beating them.*
- ? They were beating the followers of Jesus. And what did they command the apostles to do? *Acts 5:40. Stop speaking in the name of the Lord!*
- Yes! Again they were warned to stop speaking in the name of Jesus.
- ? And after they had been beaten for their faith, what did they do? Look in *Acts 5:41. They left rejoicing that they could suffer shame for His name.*
- ? Whose name were they suffering for? *Acts 5:41. The name of Jesus.*
- Let's look at the class notes again. We are on #7. Who will read that? What is the answer there? *Assign a reader. Stop, beating. Have students complete #7.*
- And will someone read #8 for us. What is the answer? *Assign a reader. Gospel, persecuted. Have students complete #8.*
- What about #9. How did the apostles act after they were persecuted? What is the answer there? *Assign a reader. A, B, C, and D are correct. Have students complete #9.*

Discover the Truth

The truth of Jesus Christ—His life, His death, and His Resurrection—was spreading across the whole country! Many people were believing the truth about Jesus. The religious leaders were jealous and wanted to stop them! They continued to put the apostles in jail, warned them to stop, and beat them. But the apostles could not stop preaching the name of Jesus Christ. In fact, they were so filled with joy and the Holy Spirit that they continued to praise God, pray to God, rejoice at their sufferings, and preach the gospel. They were not afraid and would not stop!

► If time allows, assign students to re-read the points on the class notes as a review and briefly discuss them.





Truth Be Told Review Game

MATERIALS

- Truth Be Told Game Board
- Truth Be Told Question Cards
- Truth Be Told Question Answer Key
- Truth Be Told Number Cards (or dice or game spinner)
- Buttons or other small items as game pieces for each team
- Poster putty

INSTRUCTIONS

Divide your class into teams. Teams will take turns drawing a Truth Be Told Question Card. Team members will take turns answering the questions. They will quickly determine an answer and give it. If they are correct, they will draw a Truth Be Told Number Card and move that number of spaces on the game board. As play proceeds, follow the directions on the game board. Alternate between teams as long as time permits.

We are going to review now by playing "Truth Be Told." I'll put you into teams. Teams will take turns picking a question card and answering the question. If the answer is correct, you will draw a number card and move your game piece that many spaces. All directions on the board must be followed. Place used cards underneath the stacks.

Answers to the questions are provided on the Truth Be Told Question Answer Key on the Resource DVD-ROM.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Soon after Pentecost, the apostles began to experience persecution because of their faith in Jesus. But they were empowered with the promised Holy Spirit and were able to stand firm and even rejoice in their suffering.



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

Refer to Lesson 9 Lesson Theme Poster. The apostles were persecuted because they were preaching and doing miracles in the name of Jesus. They were boldly proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah and that He was crucified and risen from the dead. And the Jewish leaders didn't like that at all!

So they arrested the apostles, beat them, and threatened them. But that didn't stop the apostles from proclaiming the name of their Lord. In fact, Peter and John said they would not obey men, but God.

Remember, the apostles had run away from the authorities when Jesus was arrested and crucified. But now they proclaimed the gospel with boldness and courage. They weren't discouraged by the threats or physical beatings. Instead, when they were persecuted, the apostles prayed, glorified God, and continued to speak the Word of God with boldness.

They rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ. It was the Holy Spirit, who had been poured out on Pentecost, dwelling within them that made all the difference. He gave them the courage and boldness to keep proclaiming the Word of God!

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? Do you think believers today need the Holy Spirit? *Allow discussion.*

Of course they do! And Jesus promised that all believers would have the Holy Spirit—the Helper. The gospel of Christ must be preached! And in every generation, believers need courage and boldness to obey Jesus's command to make disciples of all nations. Believers cannot be afraid to tell people how to have eternal life through Jesus Christ.

- ? Refer to Memory Verse Poster. Will someone read the memory verse we are working on? Assign a reader. *Romans 1:16.*
- ? We should not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Why is that? What does Romans 1:16 tell us about the gospel? *It is the power of God for salvation.*

The gospel is truly good news. And Jesus commanded all believers to share the good news with others. It is a matter of eternal life! It is only through Jesus Christ that anyone can have his sins forgiven and be given the hope of heaven forever with God!

You may not think you can do what Peter and John and the other disciples did. You may think you would never have the courage to face prison, beatings, and even death for your faith. But remember, God didn't tell you to proclaim the gospel all alone. If you're a believer, the Holy Spirit is in you, and He will empower you, give you strength, and help you to tell others who Jesus is and what He has done. Don't be ashamed of the gospel.



► Pass out the Student Take Home Sheets and remind students to practice the memory verse this week.



MEMORY VERSE

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

- Praise God because through Jesus, He provided the way to have eternal life.
- Thank God for the Holy Spirit who promises to help believers stand for their faith.
- Ask God to open the hearts of your students to desire eternal life, believe the gospel, and live a life as new creations, unashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Notes