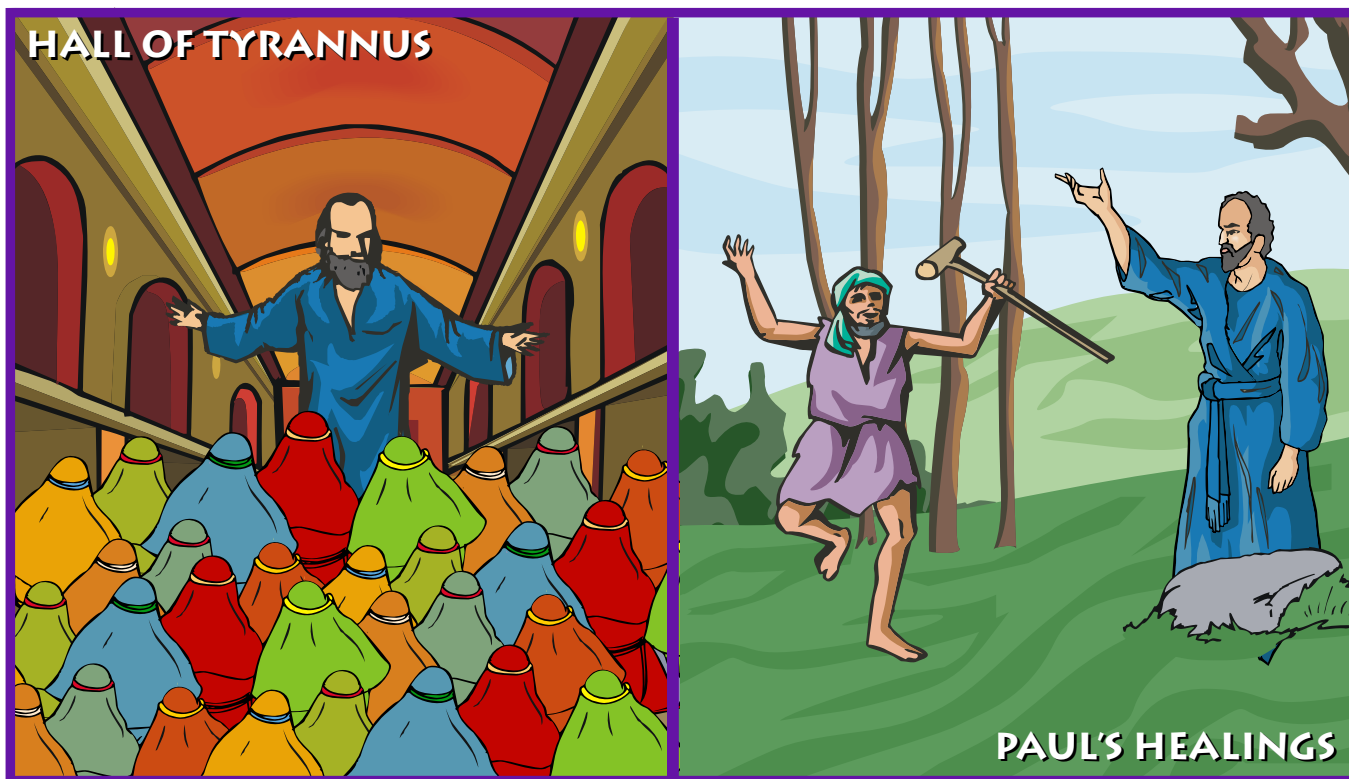


Tour of the Holy Lands - Ephesus (Part 2)



The Apostle Paul has a regular routine whenever he enters a new city. Do any of you remember what it is? He always begins by spreading the word about Jesus Christ at the local synagogue. And that's what he does here in Ephesus.

For three months, Paul speaks boldly. Using questions and answers from the Scriptures, he tries to persuade the Ephesians that Christ is the Messiah. When many of them argue and refuse to believe him, Paul finally walks out. He takes with him those who believe and sets up a meeting place elsewhere.



Paul rents the Hall of Tyrannus (ti-ran'us), which is a school in the morning and his lecture hall during the hottest part of the day – from 11:00-4:00. Both Jews and Gentiles come to listen during their afternoon rest periods. No wonder Christianity spreads all over Asia in just two years.

God works some remarkable healings through the hands of Paul, while he is here in this grand city of Ephesus. Back in Jerusalem, the other apostles are also working wonders. Healings help to confirm the truth of their teachings.



But many of the people believe it is magic that causes these miracles. In Jerusalem, they think that Peter's shadow has the power to heal. Magic is very popular in Ephesus, too. People start taking Paul's aprons and handkerchiefs that have touched his skin. They might have gotten these things at Paul's tent-making shop. People use the aprons and handkerchiefs to touch the sick, and the sick are healed.

The same thing happened to Jesus. A woman was healed simply by touching the hem of his garment. "Garment" is another word for clothing and probably refers to the tassels on the hem of clothing Jews wore. Jesus explained to this woman that it was not the garment that had healed her, but her faith.

Are you sometimes fooled by magic? Would you be fooled by magic handkerchiefs? Let's hope not!



A group of traveling exorcists (ex'or-sists) has come to Ephesus, calling themselves the "seven sons of Sceva" (see'va), while Sceva calls himself "chief of the priests." Some say that the exorcists make up their names to impress people. Exorcists claim to get rid of evil spirits by calling for help from a more powerful spirit. People pay exorcists to do this because they believe the air is filled with spirits that can attach themselves to individuals and cause many diseases.

Of course, Jesus and Paul know better than that! And you do, too. As soon as the people realize that there are no spirits in the air or anywhere, they are healed.



But the seven sons of Sceva are determined to cast out spirits as successfully as Paul seems to cast them out. So, these exorcists start to use the powerful name that Paul has been using to heal. Just listen to them chanting over that poor man beside the tree, “Jesus! Jesus! Cast out those devils!” But wait a minute. That poor man is shouting right back, “You can’t use that name. You’re not believers in Jesus. You fellows are pretenders.”



Oh, look! Now the man has turned on all seven men and is tearing their clothes. He has chased them out the gates of the city and embarrassed them. They'll never use Jesus' name again.



Great fear has come over the people. They're coming out of their houses, carrying their high-priced magic books. They're piling them in a great heap in the road and starting a huge bonfire. We can feel the heat from here. No more being fooled by magic for them, and no more hiring of exorcists. There's only one power for them now – the one Paul preaches.

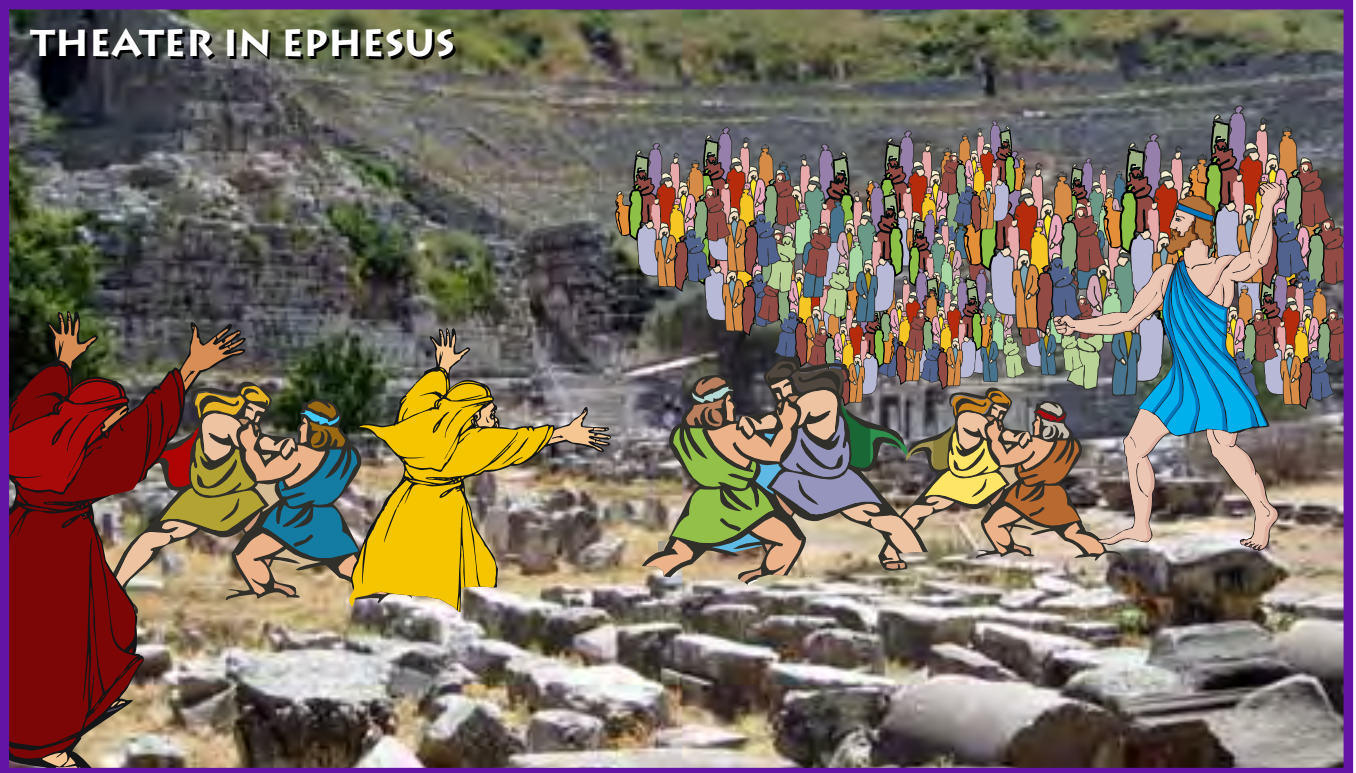


Each time we turn around here in Ephesus, we see another challenge Paul and his church had to face. He is really asking for trouble when he preaches over and over that gods made with hands have no power. Has he forgotten that Ephesus is the home of the great goddess, Artemis?

Her temple in the middle of town is one of the Great Wonders of the World, and it attracts thousands and thousands of tourists every year. Instead of mortar between the marble blocks, the temple builders used gold. Today there is only one column left standing. Every tourist shops for a small silver statue of Artemis, the goddess of fertility, which is famous in Ephesus. But many tourists don't believe in Artemis anymore. Instead, they're listening to the words of Paul, who says that gods and goddesses have no power and that the invisible Lord God of Israel is the only power. Silversmiths, who make the statues, will soon have to close their stores.



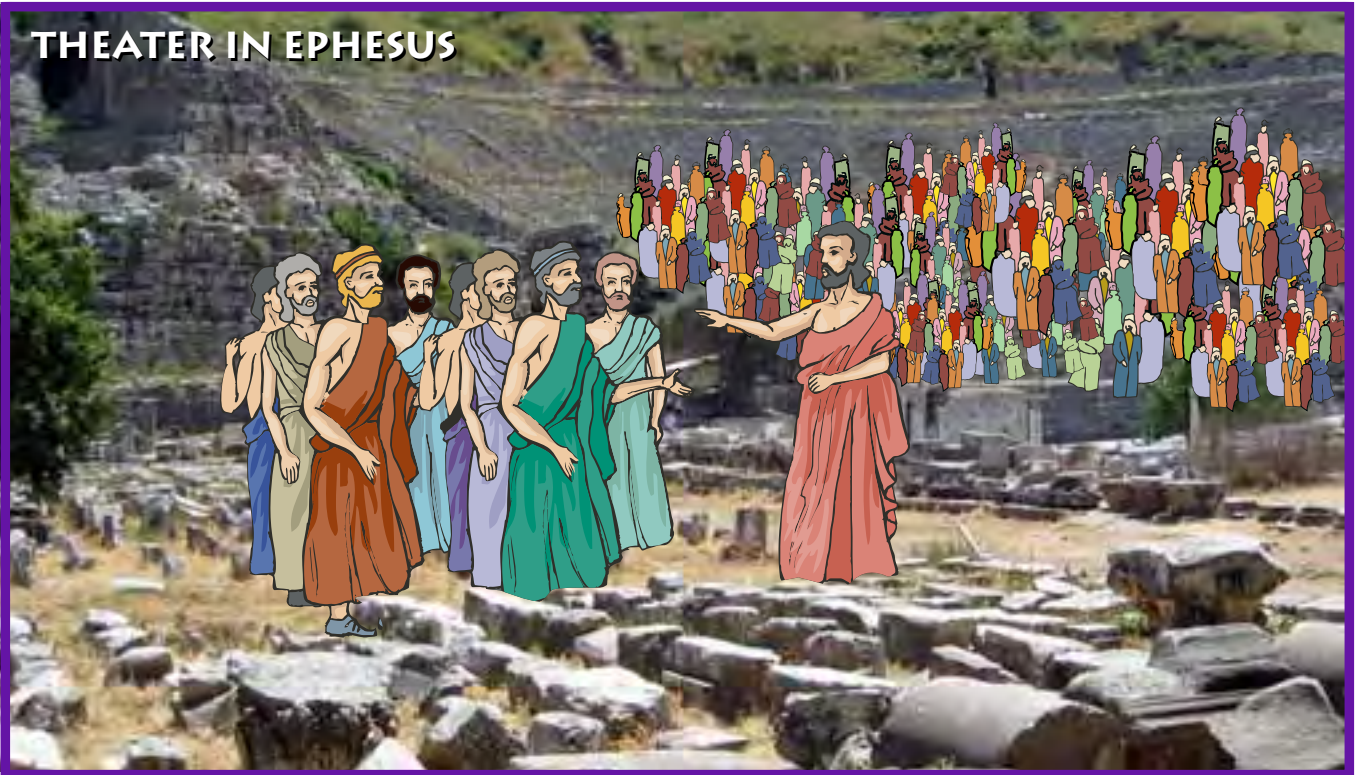
THEATER IN EPHESUS



The silversmiths are gathering today for a meeting called by another worker in silver, named Demetrius, to decide what to do about Paul, the trouble-maker. Demetrius says that if Paul continues to tell people that Artemis is worthless, their temple will end up to be a pile of blocks.

Look! Do you hear them? The silversmiths are running into the streets crying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" This has been going on for two hours. The crowds are growing larger, shouting without knowing why. They're dragging Christians into the huge theater down the street. It can hold 20,000 people. Others are rushing inside. Paul's friends hold Paul back from the crowd.

THEATER IN EPHESUS



Now, listen! I hear another voice, not so loud. It's the town clerk speaking in the theater. He knows how to stop a riot. He says, "No one wants Rome to come down and fire those of us who can't control this city."

The clerk is calling out to the citizens. He says, "Hey, remember when the sacred stone fell from the sky? Artemis could not have been made with hands. We can handle this calmly. Those men you dragged in here aren't going to harm our temple or our goddess. Demetrius can bring his case to the town meeting, and you can all go home."

This has been quite an exciting adventure for us today -- one that we certainly won't forget!



Today is our last day in this beautiful city, and we have one more discovery to make before we leave. Let's work together to try to figure out what the Apostle John meant when he wrote to the Ephesian church members that they appeared to have left their "first love." What could their "first love" be?

Bible scholars have come to the conclusion that an individual who has left his first love is one who was once on fire with love for Christ and has lost that feeling. They compare this love to the way a bride feels – or to the way a new church is in love with Christ.



In his letter, John points out that the church members' love has slowly cooled, until now the general attitude seems to be cold and lifeless obedience to church laws. The Christly spirit of John's letter might remind the church members of the prodigal son, who suddenly remembers the way he felt in the early days and feels ashamed and restores his first love.



John's letter tells the church members to show their love by letting their works prove that the Christ now guides them again.

Then comes a warning in the letter. If the church members don't turn their lives around, the Christ will take away their church and move it somewhere else. John couldn't possibly be talking about moving a building of bricks. Actually, he describes all seven churches as seven golden candlesticks, which were holders for oil lamps in those days. The Ephesian candlestick would be taken away from Ephesus to a place where it would truly shine with love for others.

Let's hope the Ephesian church members pay attention to this letter. They will discover that the more they listen to the Christ as their first love, the brighter their lamps will burn, enriching their own church as well as bringing light to the people of this land.