

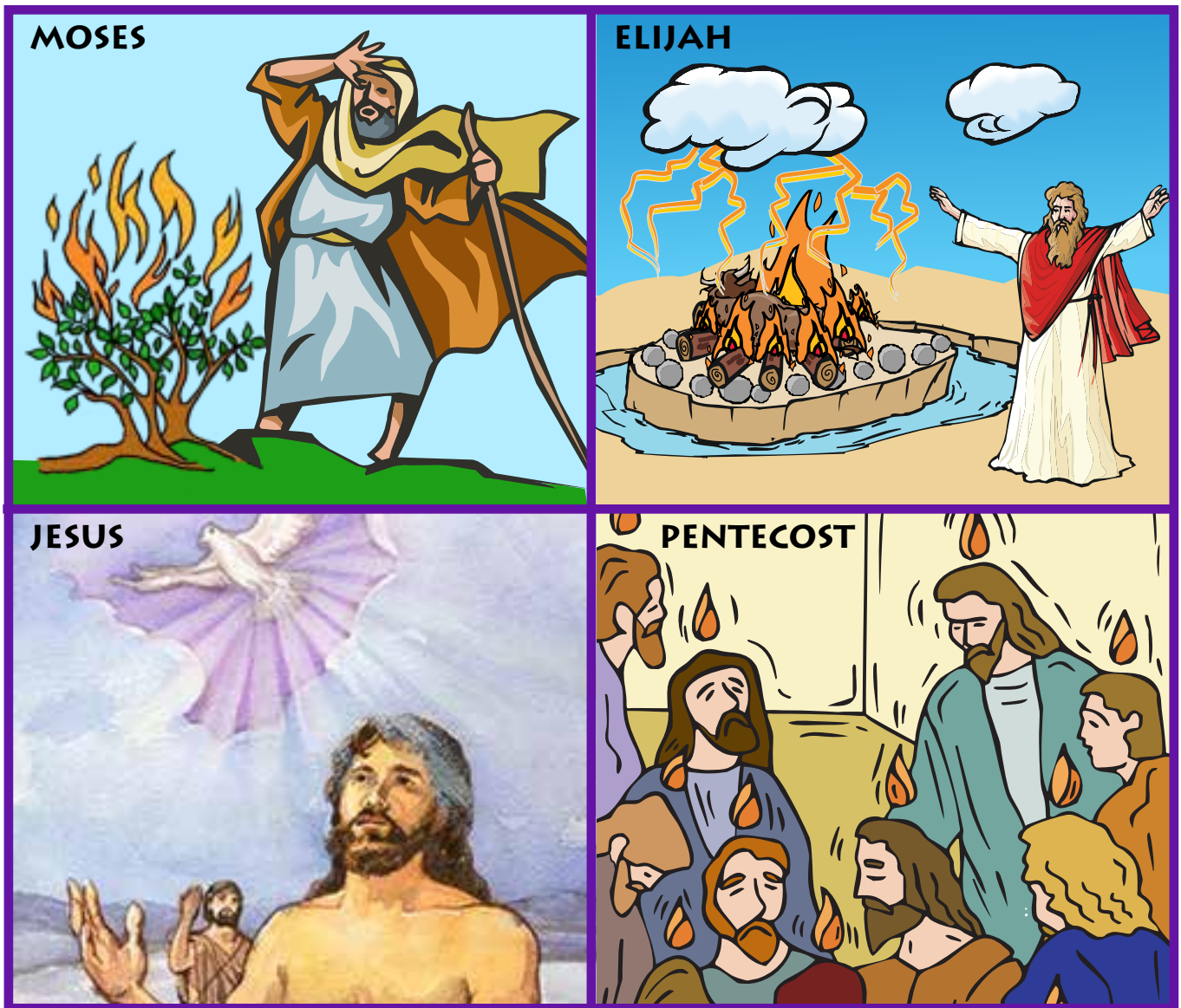
Tour of the Holy Lands

Paul's Invitation to Greece



Greetings, young travelers! How wonderful to see your bright faces again. Are you ready to begin our sixth summer of following in the footsteps of Bible friends from long ago? I hope we've learned from the previous summers how to be good listeners to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

What an excellent mapmaker the Spirit was—and is! By showing us which way to turn, what words to say, and how and when to say them, we become God's messengers in our world today, just as the great Apostle Paul was over two thousand years ago.



Jesus knew the Holy Spirit better than anyone. He called it the Comforter. Jesus wasn't the first to experience the Spirit. Moses heard and saw it at the burning bush; Elijah saw it on the mountain. It moved upon the face of the waters at the time of creation. The Spirit came in the wind that blew new life into dry bones in the desert; it was there at Jesus' baptism; it came in fiery tongues to give new believers energy and boldness. It can come in baptism, blessing any of us with new understanding. The Spirit impels people. "To impel" means to push, to persuade, to move someone to act.



Peter and others were impelled to tell Jesus' story wherever they went, and thousands of Jews were impelled to become new followers. Then Paul and his friends were impelled to tell Jesus' story wherever they went, and thousands of Gentiles were impelled to become new followers. The result was that Christianity spread across Asia Minor in a path that you and I have been following each summer.



We're going to begin our journey this summer on the west coast of Turkey. That's where we left off at the end of our last trip together. Paul's plan is to check on the new Christian churches around Ephesus. But the Holy Spirit stops him with a vision. Paul remembers the time when he experienced the powerful vision on the road to Damascus years ago. So he watches and listens closely now.



Since the Holy Spirit has blocked the way to Ephesus, Paul and his new traveling partner, Silas, go to Troas. They stand on the shore and look toward the land across the Aegean Sea. A Macedonian man stands on the opposite shore. Today, we call Macedonia "Greece." Some say the man looks like Alexander the Great, the famous Greek military leader who conquered the world a few hundred years earlier. This Macedonian is begging Paul to come across the sea to help them.

Paul recognizes the call. It is one he's heard before from the Holy Spirit. Why is the Holy Spirit calling to Paul?



If Paul obeys the vision and goes to Macedonia, it will be the most important step he will ever take. He will be taking Christianity beyond Asia Minor, where it began, into Europe. Paul knows what he must do. Immediately, he begins to look for a ship sailing to Macedonia. He sees one in the distance. A lantern guides the ship to shore.



We flew into Greece yesterday and spent the night in Thessalonica (Thes-sa-lon'i-ka). Now, we're up early and ready to climb aboard our tour bus. Don't forget your backpack! You'll want to bring some sunscreen, a lightweight jacket, a journal for sketching and writing, and a camera. Ready to go? Let's head to Neapolis where we'll meet Paul's ship. We have a lot to look forward to. As our bus stops for gas, look what's coming along the road. It's a man traveling the old-fashioned way -- by donkey.

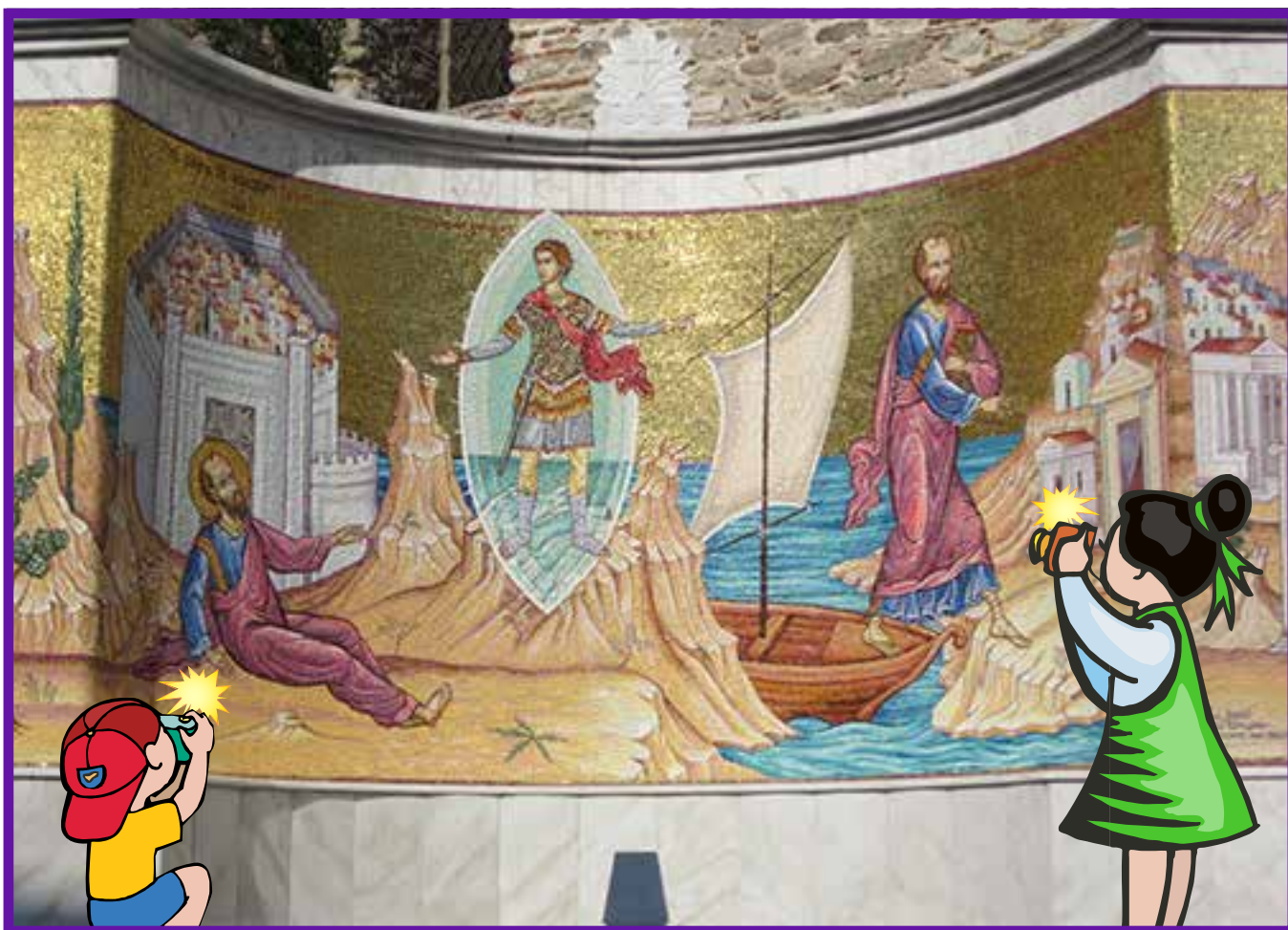




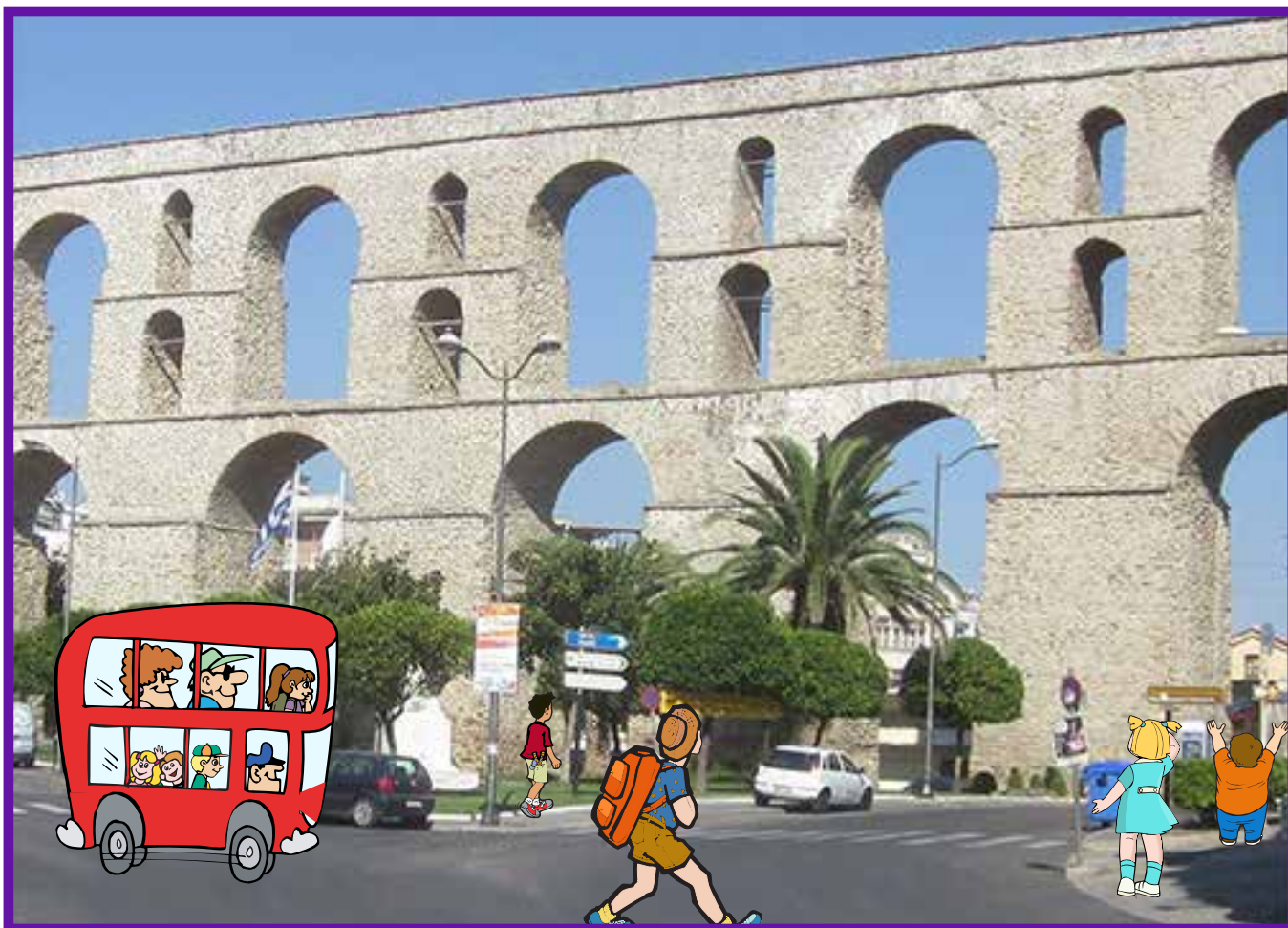
We've arrived in Neapolis just in time. Do you see Paul's ship coming in over there? It took them two days to cross the Aegean Sea. While Paul leaves the ship and waits for further orders from the Holy Spirit, let's enjoy a walk around the city.



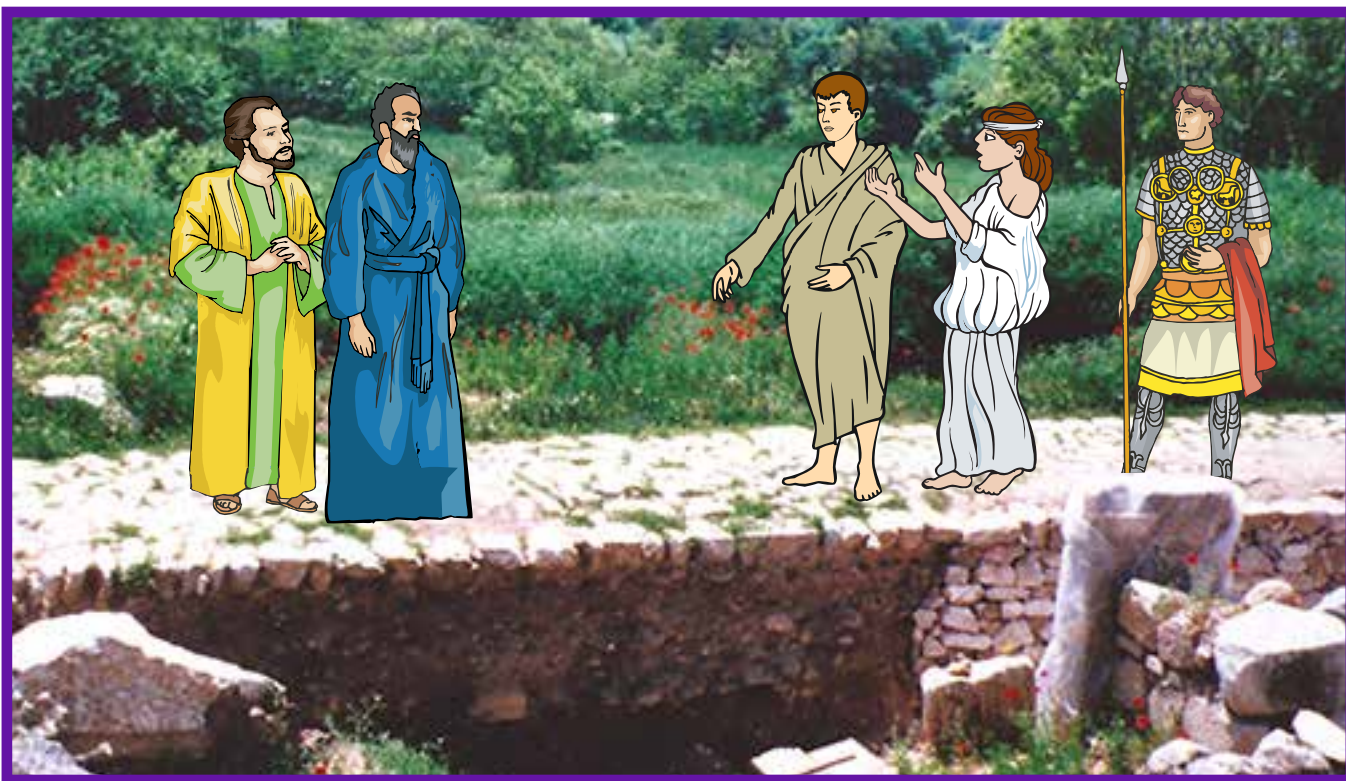
Check out the little fishing boats docked side by side. Their colorful nets are piled up along side their colorful boats. The fishermen sell their fish to the restaurants across the street.



Paul's arrival in Europe for the very first time is such an important day that an artist has decorated a street corner over there with a large sparkling mosaic of gold to represent the big event. From left to right, first we see Paul dreaming, then we see his vision of the Macedonian man looking like Alexander the Great, and finally we see Paul crossing the sea and landing in Greece. Grab your cameras to capture this special moment!



It's time to go now. We'll follow the team of missionaries as they head out of town toward the main city of Philippi, which is a 10-mile walk uphill. They are walking next to a very high wall, called an aqueduct, which used to carry fresh water from place to place. This one was built by the Romans and has survived for a long, long time – perhaps two thousand years! We'll follow Paul and Silas in our bus.



Paul and Silas walk into Philippi on a Roman road. Look how well it's constructed—all by hand, one stone at a time! They are greeted by the sight of grand Roman buildings with tall columns, Roman citizens in togas, retired Roman soldiers, and everyone chattering in the Roman language—Latin!

Imagine what it must look like to Paul. We could describe it as magnificent. In fact, Philippi is often considered to be a small version of Rome.



In Paul's travels, he always preaches to the Jews first because they are such a good audience. They believe in one invisible God and they are expecting a Savior, called the Messiah. Paul is probably asking, "Where are the Jews? Where is the synagogue? Where do we go from here?"



Being the Sabbath, he searches out a synagogue, but there is none. This means that there are fewer than 10 Jewish men in the city. It is against the law for Jews to worship publicly in the city so Paul walks out of the city to the riverside. There he finds a group of women praying. Paul recognizes these women as new followers of the Jewish religion. Paul has found his audience! He begins to teach them about Jesus Christ.



The new friends introduce one another. One of the most important women is Lydia from Thyatira (Thie-a-tie'ra) in Asia Minor, a seller of purple dye. Lydia had left idolatry and become a believer in God, but she has not, as yet, learned of Jesus Christ. Paul's teachings open her heart to Christ. After she and her family and servants are baptized in the river, she says to Paul, "If you truly believe that I am a sincere Christian, will you come and stay at my house?"

If Paul and his friends stay with her, they can answer all her questions. Soon her house becomes the center of Christian worship in Philippi.



Oh, no—here comes trouble! There is another kind of woman in this city – a slave girl. The city believes she is possessed by a spirit and can tell fortunes. Her owners make lots of money using her. But Paul knows that Jesus freed people who were said to be possessed by spirits. One day, as Paul and his friends and Lydia and her friends are all going down to the riverside to pray, the slave girl begins to run after them. She shouts, "You are servants of the most high God." Paul doesn't want people to hear that because "most high God" means Zeus! He could get into trouble for his teaching.

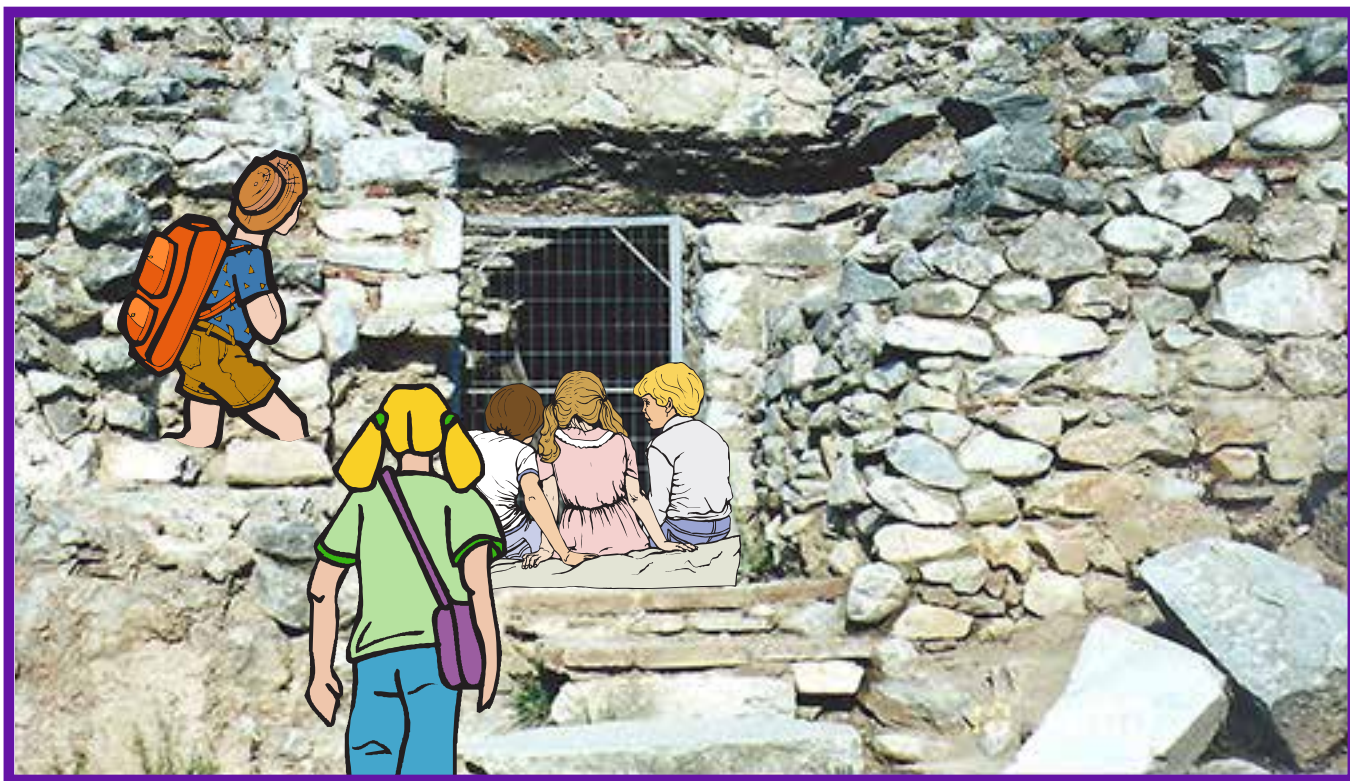


After several days of this shouting by the slave girl, Paul decides to free her of the annoying spirit. He says, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." Immediately, the slave girl is healed and in her right mind. In fact, she is now listening to Paul—quietly!



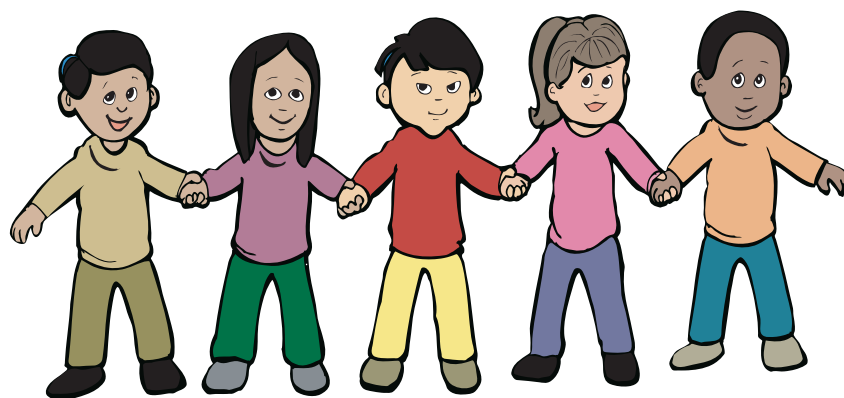
But what about the owners of the slave girl? She can no longer tell fortunes or make money for them. The angry owners catch Paul and Silas, and drag them into the marketplace where the judges sit. The owners accuse them of being Jews*, of disturbing the peace and of worshiping other gods, all of which are lies. They take Paul and Silas, tear up their clothes, beat them with rods, throw them into the dungeon, and lock their feet in stocks.

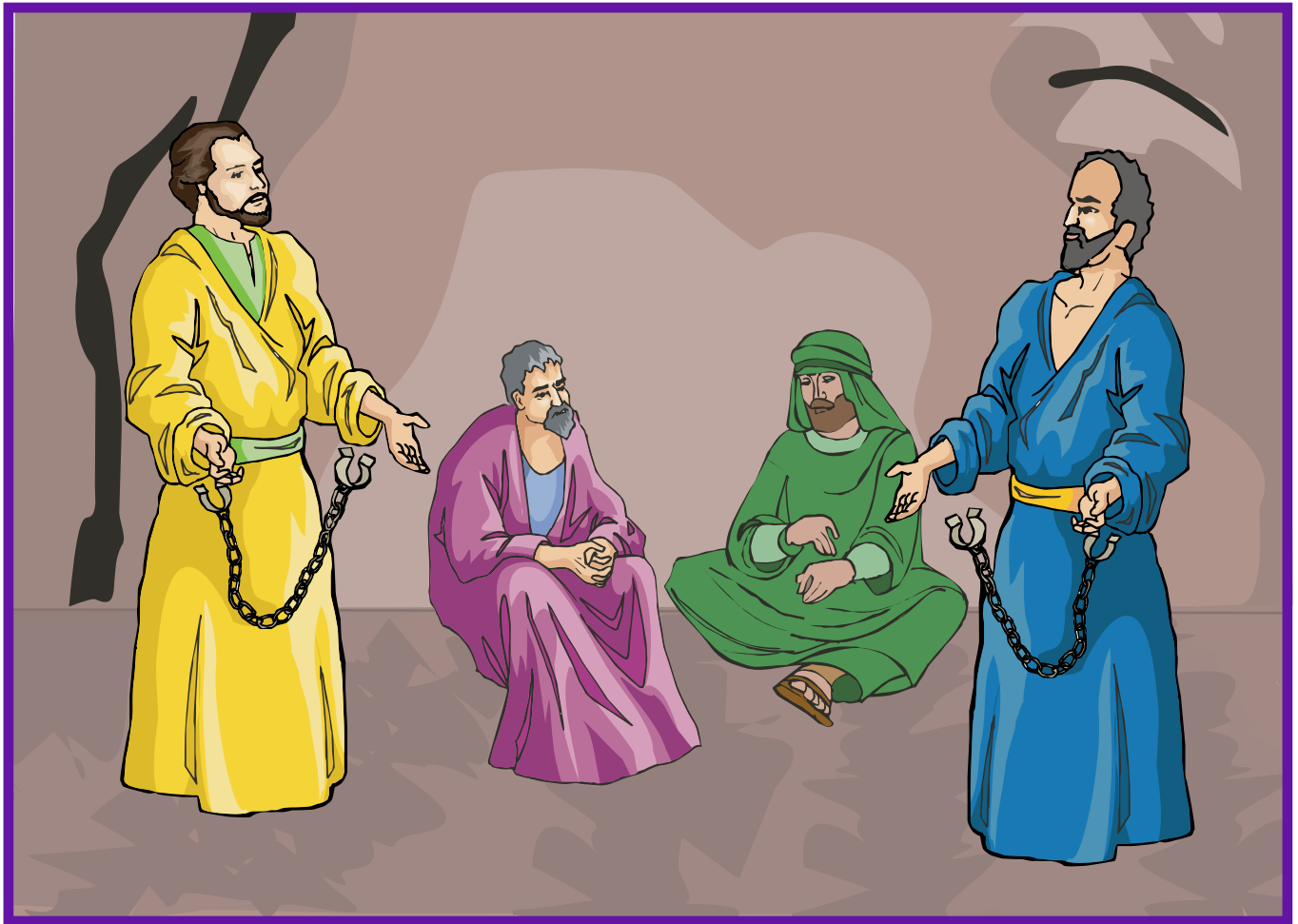
* It was true that Paul and Silas were Jews.



It's sad to see friends suffer. But Paul and Silas feel God's loving presence with them, leading, protecting and healing each one as they carry Christianity from place to place.

Now, what are we going to do next? Everyone hold hands. We're going to cross this busy street. Stay close. Just ahead is the dungeon where they took the prisoners. Stick your head inside. Listen! Do you hear Paul or Silas complaining after that beating? No. In fact, at midnight they begin to pray and sing praises to God.





There is nothing God cannot do. The other prisoners wake up at the sound of singing. Suddenly there is a great earthquake! Hold on to each other! It's shaking all the doors open and loosening the bands of every prisoner in the dungeon. They are stunned—they can't believe what's happening!



The jailer wakes up and knows he is in trouble. He will be blamed for the escaped prisoners and will pay with his life. But just as the jailer pulls out his sword to kill himself, Paul shouts, "Don't hurt yourself. We're all here." When the jailer hears Paul shout, he runs to the prisoners and finds them sitting calmly. The jailer begins to tremble. He has never seen such a thing. He falls down before Paul and Silas. He is in the presence of a higher power. He had given these prisoners quite a beating, yet here they are, saving his life. The jailer asks the two men how he can become a Christian, too. Even though it's dark and cold and Paul and Silas are sleepy, they begin then and there to tell the jailer about Jesus Christ.



Pretty soon the jailer's whole family arrives to hear the story of Jesus. It's getting very late, but the jailer takes Paul and Silas for a good wash, and Paul turns around and baptizes the jailer's family, perhaps at the same fountain. Then, the jailer prepares a table filled with hearty food at his home.



As morning comes, so does good news from the police. "Let those men go," they order. You would think Paul and Silas would waste no time in leaving town. Not so! Paul has something to say. "We've been beaten in the town square and thrown into jail without a trial. No one even asked if we were Roman citizens, who are excused from such treatment. Let the rulers come themselves and apologize for all they've done and declare us innocent." And the rulers came and became fearful when they heard they were Romans.

There is a grand farewell with Lydia. Christianity is now legal in Philippi, and some of Paul's friends stay behind to help it grow. Lydia's house church will become one of Paul's favorite churches. The 11th book in the New Testament, called Philippians, is a thank you letter from Paul for this church's generosity.



Paul and Silas must say farewell to the beautiful city of Philippi. We see how much they love it here and how sad they are to leave—and we don't blame them! But they are obedient to the Holy Spirit, which is always leading them to new places where there will be new listeners. They only stop at important cities. Paul knows that if Christianity is established in these cities, it will spread all through the Roman Empire.



Now, let's get back on our bus so we can follow Paul and Silas as they travel 100 miles west of Philippi on a road called the Via Egnatia. It's a Roman road that runs from Constantinople all the way to the Adriatic Sea. One of the cities along the route is Thessalonica, the largest city of Macedonia, and that's our next stop.



Just as Philippi is home to the Philippians, Thessalonica is home to the Thessalonians. Philippi is named after Alexander's father and Thessalonica is named after Alexander's sister. Go ahead and get out your Bibles from your backpacks and see if you can find First and Second Thessalonians. (Hint: They're in the New Testament.)

We've arrived! This is Thessalonica. Let's go visit the largest church in Greece, built around 450 AD. It's very close by.



The church is named "St. Demetrius" after one of the famous local early Christians (208 AD - 303 AD)*. When he was young, he was secretly baptized and became a Christian. When he grew up, he became a Roman soldier who defended this city against its enemies. But the Roman Emperor ordered Demetrius to chase and kill the Christians in Thessalonica. Demetrius refused! And so, he was arrested, punished and martyred (mar'terd). "Martyred" means that he was put to death because of his Christian beliefs. Years later, Demetrius was made the patron saint of Thessalonica. As we go inside the church, look for his picture. He's dressed as a soldier. Be sure to look all the way to the front of the church because it gives you a good idea of a typical Greek Orthodox Church.

* Editor's note: Demetrius lived from 270 AD to 306 AD.

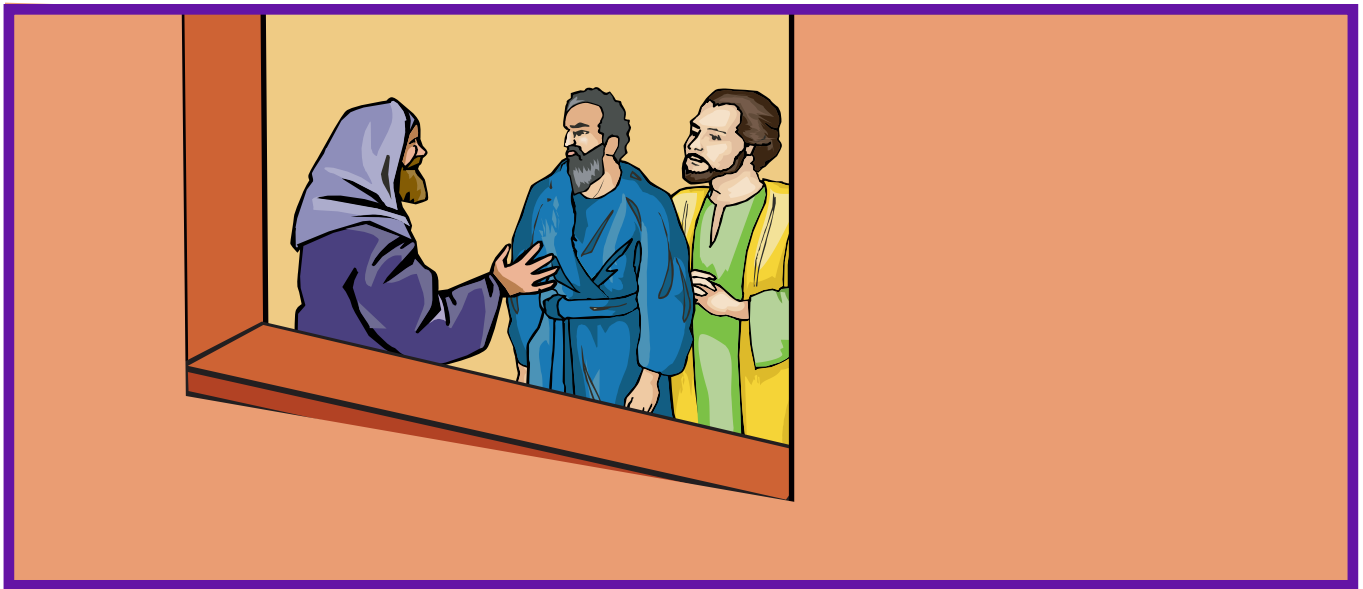


It takes Paul and Silas four days to reach Thessalonica. They are eager to begin to preach. Everywhere Paul and Silas go, they tell those who believe to put the message of Jesus Christ into practice because that's how it grows. Paul's voice rings out, "You are the message!"

Today is Saturday, the Sabbath. Paul finds a synagogue and accepts an invitation to speak. The Jews enjoy his message so much that he speaks for three Sabbaths in a row. On each Sabbath, Paul reasons with the Jews, explaining how it was necessary for Jesus Christ, their Messiah, to suffer and die and rise from the dead. It takes a lot of explaining. After teaching the Jews, Paul then invites the Gentiles to hear the same message. Paul calls Gentiles, "Greeks."



Paul and Silas spend three or four months teaching in Thessalonica. Paul stays so long that he has to get a job in the evenings making and selling tents in order to pay for his room and meals.



A few of the Jews become believers, a large number of Greeks give up their idols and believe, and several of the important women of the city believe. But some of the Jews are jealous when so many Greeks become Christians. They think the Christian Greeks should have joined their synagogue. They are so angry that they put together a gang of bad guys from the streets of Thessalonica to look for Paul and Silas. Meanwhile, Paul and Silas are hiding in the home of a new Christian named Jason. When the gang misses catching Paul and Silas at Jason's house, they drag Jason and his friends outside and charge them with disturbing the peace. It's hard to see good people arrested for a good idea, isn't it? Instead of following Jason and his friends to prison, let's go to a place where we can always feel at peace.





Check out this beautiful church here—it's called St. Sophia. Inside, they say, is a rostrum—an ancient Roman platform—where Paul once stood and preached.

The word "rostrum" means "bird's beak." When the Romans captured an enemy warship, they cut off the front of the ship, which resembled a bird's beak. They took it to Rome and lined it up beside other rostrums in the Roman Forum. Speakers were free to stand on them to give public speeches. Now we'll head back outside and walk along the bay.



See if you can spot three of Greece's heroes in bronze. They are either riding a horse, standing, or sitting.

- Alexander the Great riding his horse
- Philip II of Macedonia—Alexander's Father
- Aristotle—Alexander's famous teacher

Do you see how shiny Aristotle's toe is? That's from fingers touching it over hundreds of years.



Now, let's get back to Paul and Silas, who are still in hiding. Although Jason and his friends have been arrested, Paul is the one who is really wanted. He and Silas are accused of turning the world upside down, which means stirring up trouble. The rulers of the city believe one of the lies they are hearing about Paul and Silas—that the Christians want to replace Caesar with another king. Who might that be? Jesus Christ—you're right. But the Christians would be guilty of treason if they did this. You don't believe that lie, do you?



After paying a fine, Jason and his friends are finally set free. Right away they fetch Paul and Silas, and send them off in the dark to safety in a town 50 miles away. The town is called Berea. In the Greek language, the letter "B" is pronounced "V." Sometimes, the town is written or pronounced "Verea." Now you know why!

Paul is sad to leave Thessalonica. He wants to return. There is still work to be done there. But it's too dangerous. Paul doesn't want to be captured.



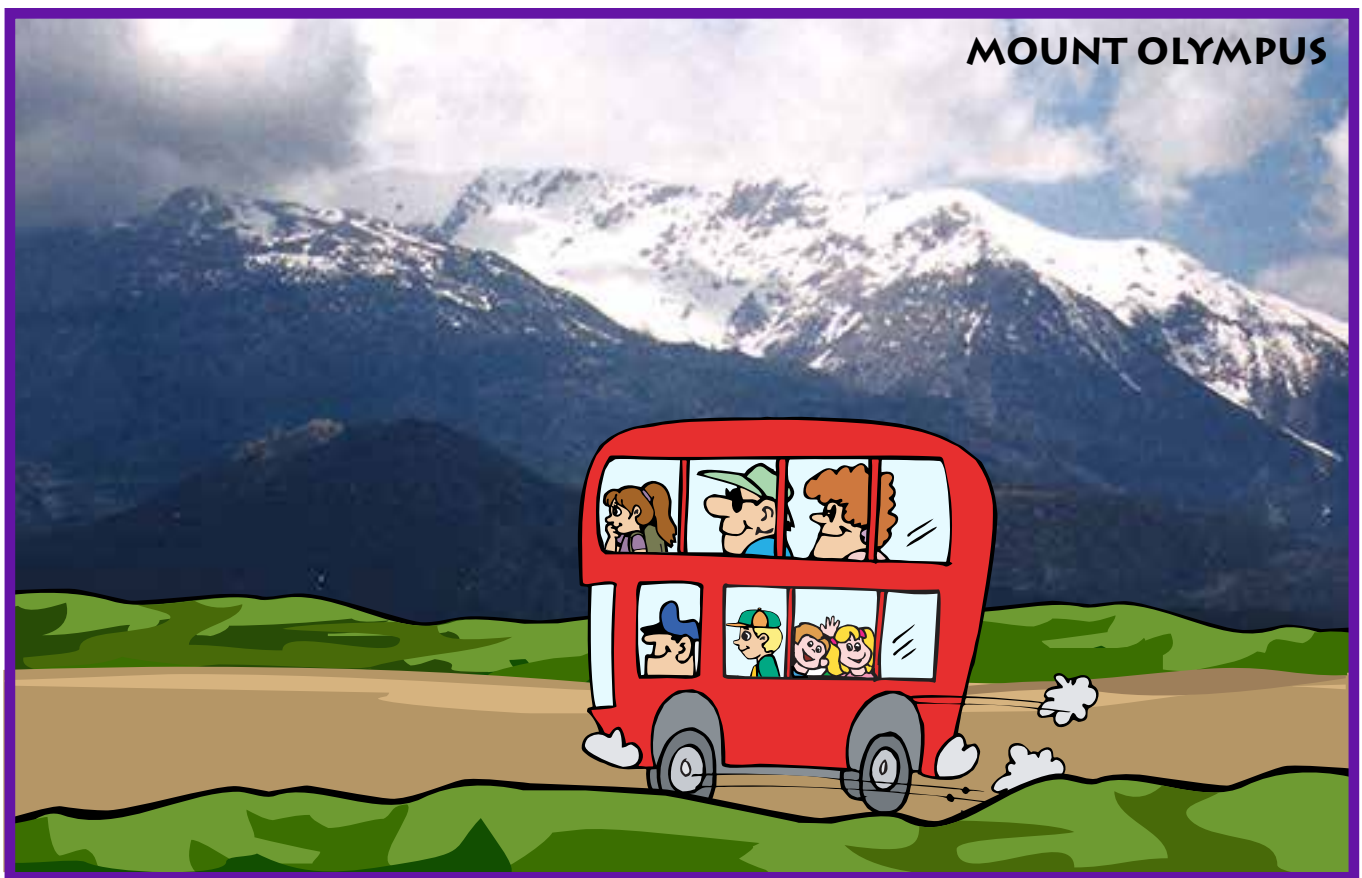
I bet you know where Paul and Silas go as soon as they reach Berea! To the synagogue, of course. Paul is pleasantly surprised by the way he is received. He is treated a lot better here than he was in Thessalonica. The people listen to the gospel eagerly. They understand the meaning of it. They don't quarrel over it. And, they do something that makes them different from other communities. After their daily lessons, they turn to their Scriptures (to what we call the Old Testament) to see if the new lessons Paul is teaching match the old promises in the Bible. And they find the gospel to be true.



Many of the Jews become believers. Many of the rich Greek women also believe, and they persuade their husbands to join them. We can see the scene over there in a large colorful mosaic. First, on the left is the Macedonian man. Next, on the right is Paul and his audience—men, women and even a soldier holding a copy of the Scriptures. Then, in the middle is the actual bema (bee'ma), or step, on which Paul stands to preach. Let's stand on the same bema for a group photo!



Paul's stay in Berea is successful, but the angry Jews in Thessalonica have not forgotten him. As soon as they find out he is still preaching, this time in Berea, they chase him, trying to put out the gospel fire. But each time they get close, they cause it to spread even further. Paul's friends are able to get him out of Berea and far away to the grand city of Athens. How they got to Athens is so secret, we don't even know it today. He travels either by land or by sea. His friends stay behind to support each of the churches that Paul started. He planted three churches in three important centers in Greece and from these, Christianity spread to regions close by. He was driven from each church by persecution. Later, his friends would find him and report on the progress of these new churches. Most men would abandon such a difficult mission, but the idea of turning back never occurs to Paul.



As Paul is whisked off to safety from persecution in Athens, we can enjoy some other famous parts of Greece. We'll catch up with him again later.

We're off now to Mt. Olympus, home of the gods and goddesses of mythology. One of the girls on our bus is eager to tell us about them. She won the Athena Gold Medal Award for the 5th Grade National Mythology Exam in June of 2014. The Gold Medal award means she scored 100% on the national exam! Let's all get out our journals so we can keep track of their Greek and Roman names.