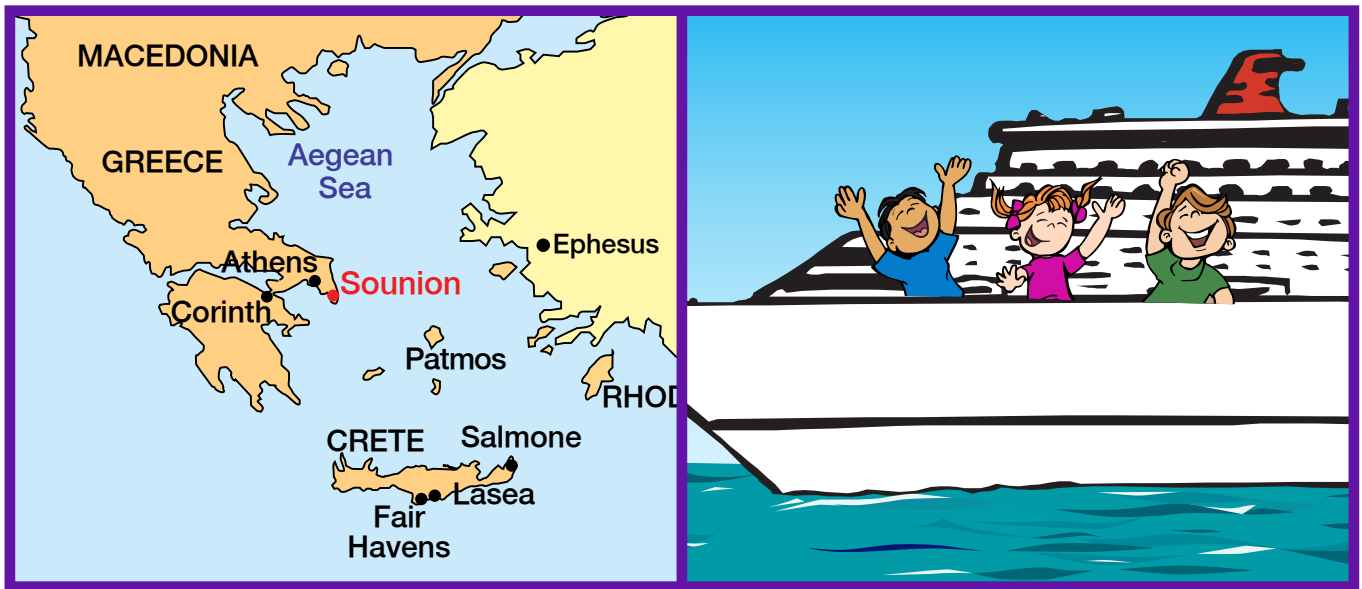


Tour of the Holy Lands - Crete



Welcome back for the last leg of our amazing tour of the Holy Lands! This is our 8th summer together! As you know, Paul traveled from one city to the next, telling anyone who would listen about the teachings of Christ Jesus and starting a Christian church almost everywhere he found an audience.

Imagine how long it took Paul to get from place to place! Sometimes he traveled on a sailboat, but often he simply walked. And walked. And walked. How far have you walked recently? Imagine covering 10-20 miles in a day!



When we ended our journey last summer, we were in Sounion. Check your map to remember where that is. We're going to start this summer onboard a cruise ship and try to meet up with Paul.

While we wait for word about him, let's do a quick review of the letter Paul wrote on how to love. We studied it last summer — it's I Corinthians 13, in the New Testament. Have you been good at loving this past school year? Have you tried to be patient, kind, and selfless? Of course you have — even if you haven't been perfect all the time. ;-) Never stop trying!





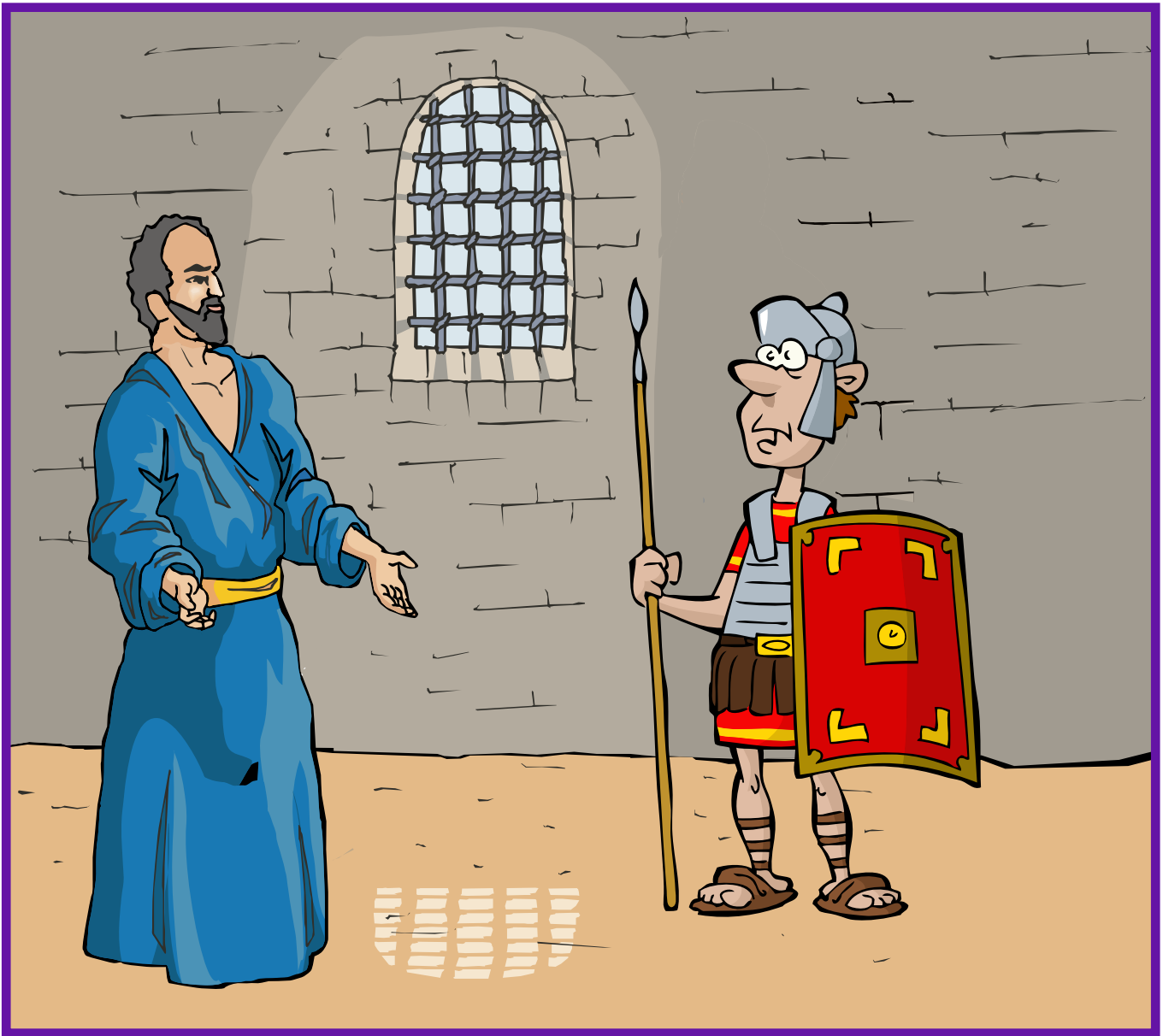
So, where, oh, where is the Apostle Paul? Oh no, he's in prison in Caesarea (quick - find it on your map!), and he's been charged with a crime he didn't commit! Now he's just sitting in prison, waiting to be sentenced — waiting to see how much longer he has to stay where he is. In fact, he's been waiting for two long years! Will he be found innocent?

We know Paul well enough to be certain that he is not wasting his time in prison feeling angry and hateful. That would go against everything he believes, everything he knows about God's love and Jesus' example of how to love one another, no matter what. Instead of whining and complaining, we can be sure that Paul is praying and trusting God to free him. His prayers always lead to a good solution. Surely this time would be no different.





Were you able to find Caesarea? We've been there -- do you remember? That's one of the first places we visited in our Holy Land tour seven years ago. Just think how many places we've visited where important Bible events happened. Let's study our maps and trace all the trips we've made in the last seven years while we wait to hear whether Paul is found guilty or not guilty.



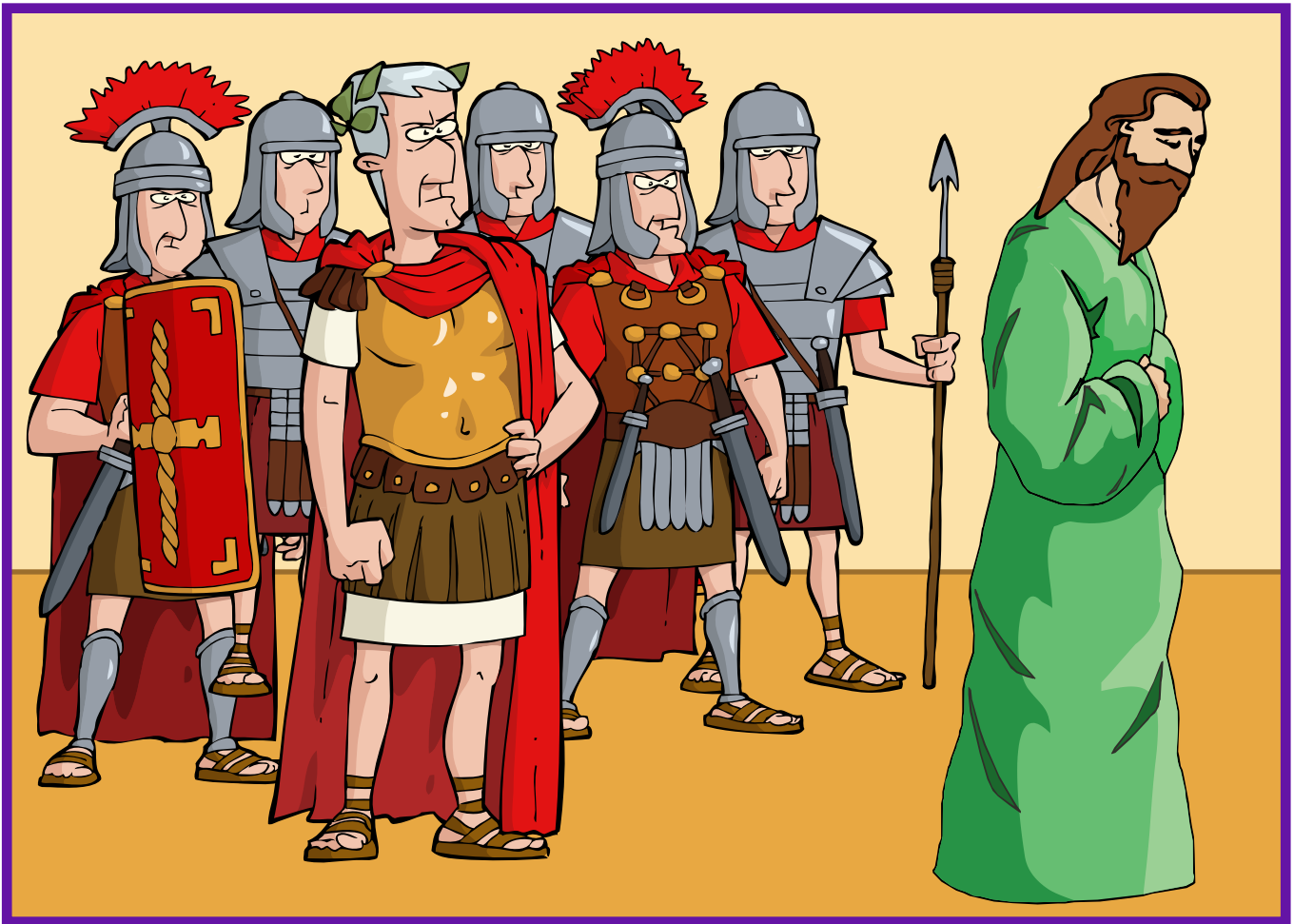
Sure enough, it is decided that Paul is innocent. He will be set free!

But out of the blue, Paul asks permission for his case to be heard in the highest court in the Roman empire — in front of the Emperor, Caesar, himself. Paul has always wanted to tell the leader of Rome about Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter to him if he meets with him as a free man or a prisoner. So that's where Paul is headed now!



Now, use your finger to trace the path Paul might have taken from Caesarea to Rome. Can you find a good place for us to meet up with him? How about the island of Crete? On our way there, we're going to stop at the little island of Patmos.

It's a straight shot from Sounion to Patmos. This island is only mentioned once in the Bible—in the very last book, called Revelation.



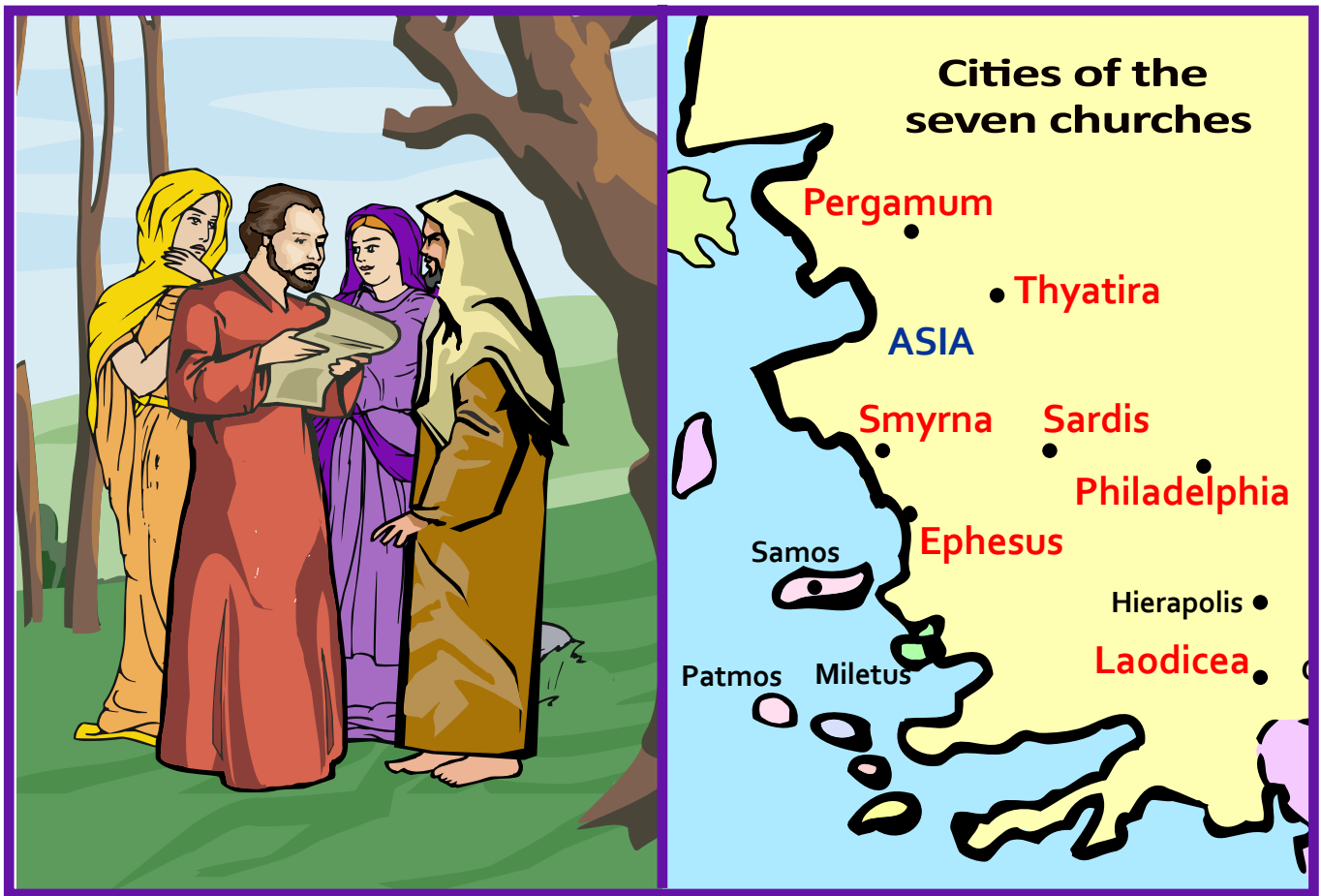
It was hard to be a Christian in those days! People were supposed to worship the Roman Emperor like a god. But Christians believed in only one God. The Roman government tried to force Christians to give up their God. Many brave Christians were severely punished for remaining faithful. One of them was John, and he was banished to an empty, rocky island where his only shelter was a cave.

Do you know what *"banished"* means? It means to force someone to live in a far-away place forever. That's what happened to John.



How do you think John could still serve God in such a harsh place? Just like Paul, John began to write letters. And like Paul, he had visions – messages from the Christ. He wrote about these visions in his letters, and then he sent the letters to seven churches in western Asia. In them, he explained how these churches could protect themselves against persecution.

There's another big word, but it's one we've learned before. Do you remember? "*Persecution*" means bullying people because their beliefs are different from the bully's beliefs.

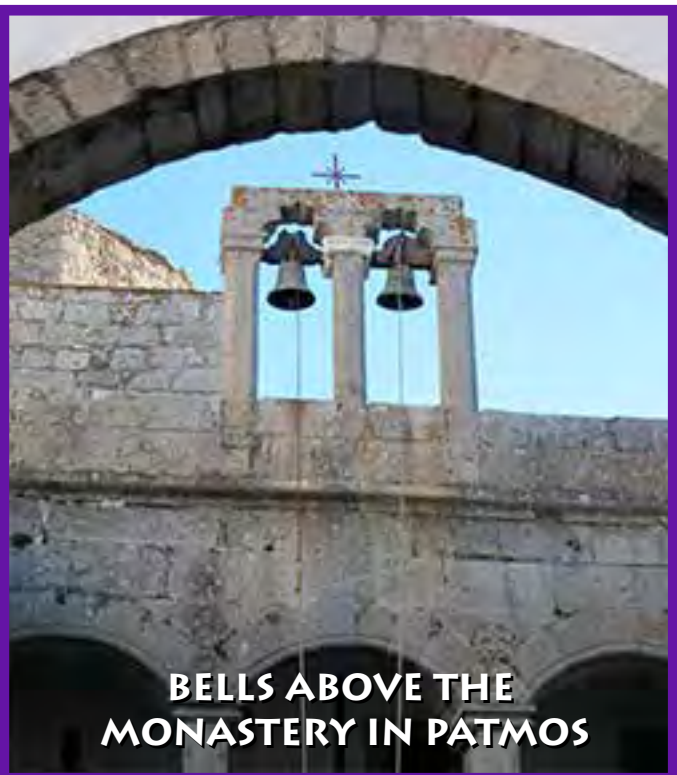
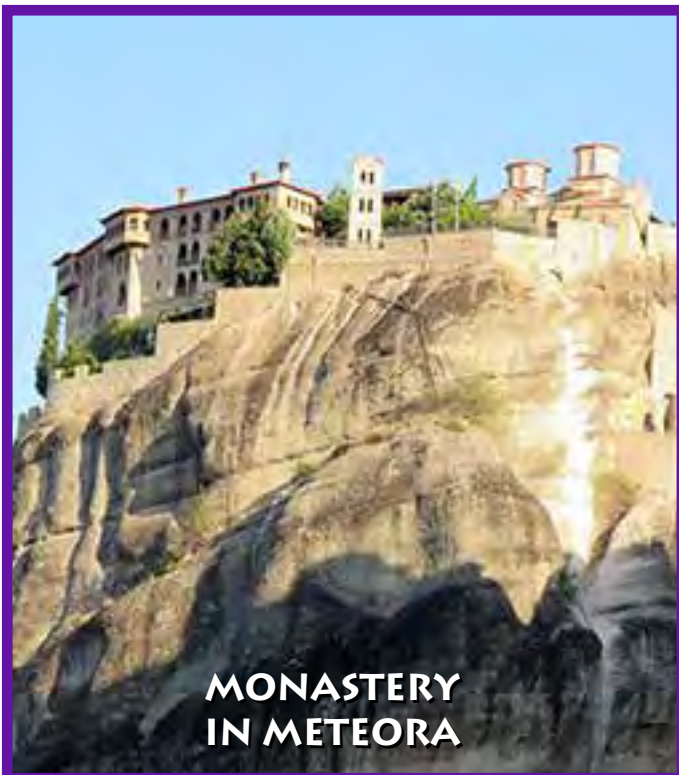


Back to the story: The church members read John's letters just as Paul's letters were read by other Christian churches. A couple of summer's ago, you and I visited the places where these seven churches once stood. Can you spot them on your map?



Oh, look up from your maps and see where we are! It's the island of Patmos. But it doesn't look rocky and empty any more. What do you think happened over the last 2000 years? People have come and built homes and planted flowers and vegetables and trees, like the pretty vine climbing the side of the house in the picture above. And the wind and rain have pounded the rocky shore, slowly but surely breaking off bits and pieces of rock until they aren't as tall or pointy.

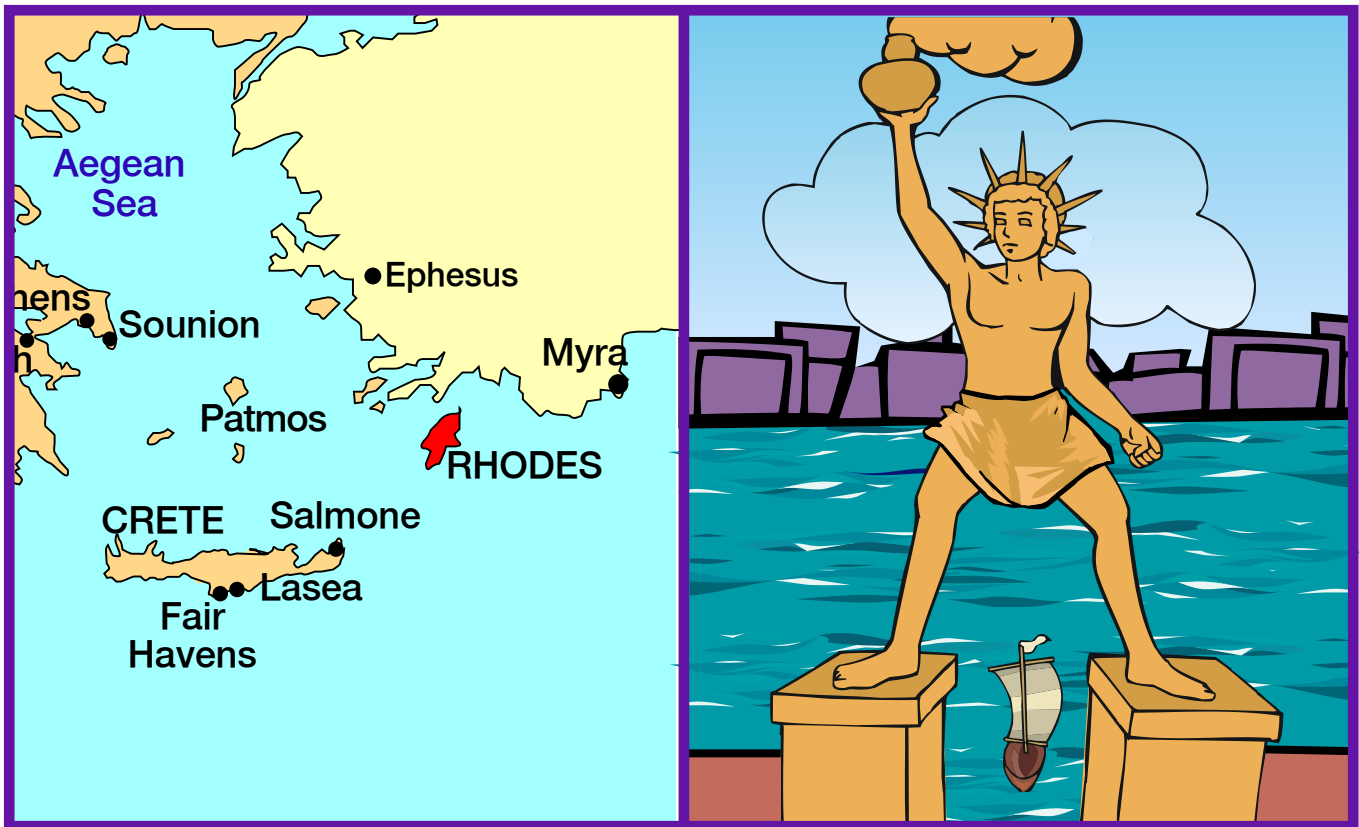
Let's hike to John's cave where he lived and wrote his letters. Do you see the man sitting at the desk in the cave? He is a scribe — a writer. The Apostle John is standing and telling his scribe what to write while the invisible risen Christ is telling an angel to tell John what to write.



We'll also see a couple of special places where very religious people can pray and live a quiet life of worship. This kind of place is called a monastery. Remember the monasteries we visited in Meteora two summers ago? There are still monasteries scattered around the world today.



It won't take us long to see everything because Patmos is so small!
Come on – let's get some exercise!



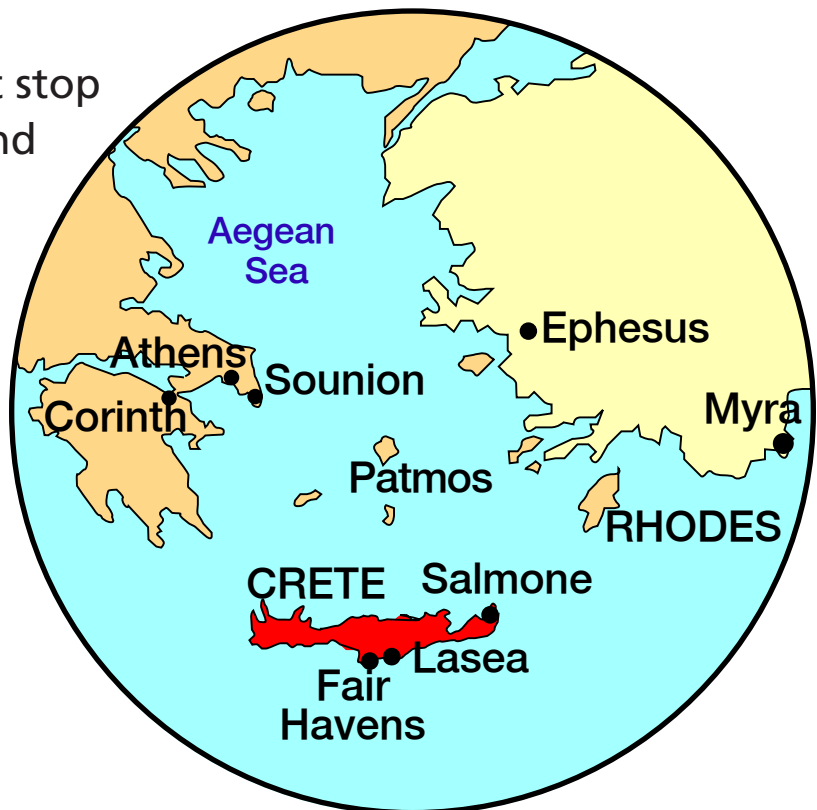
Now that we're back on board the ship, let's find our next stop on our maps – the island of Rhodes. It's further along the coastline of Turkey, and it's a much bigger island than Patmos. Do you see it?

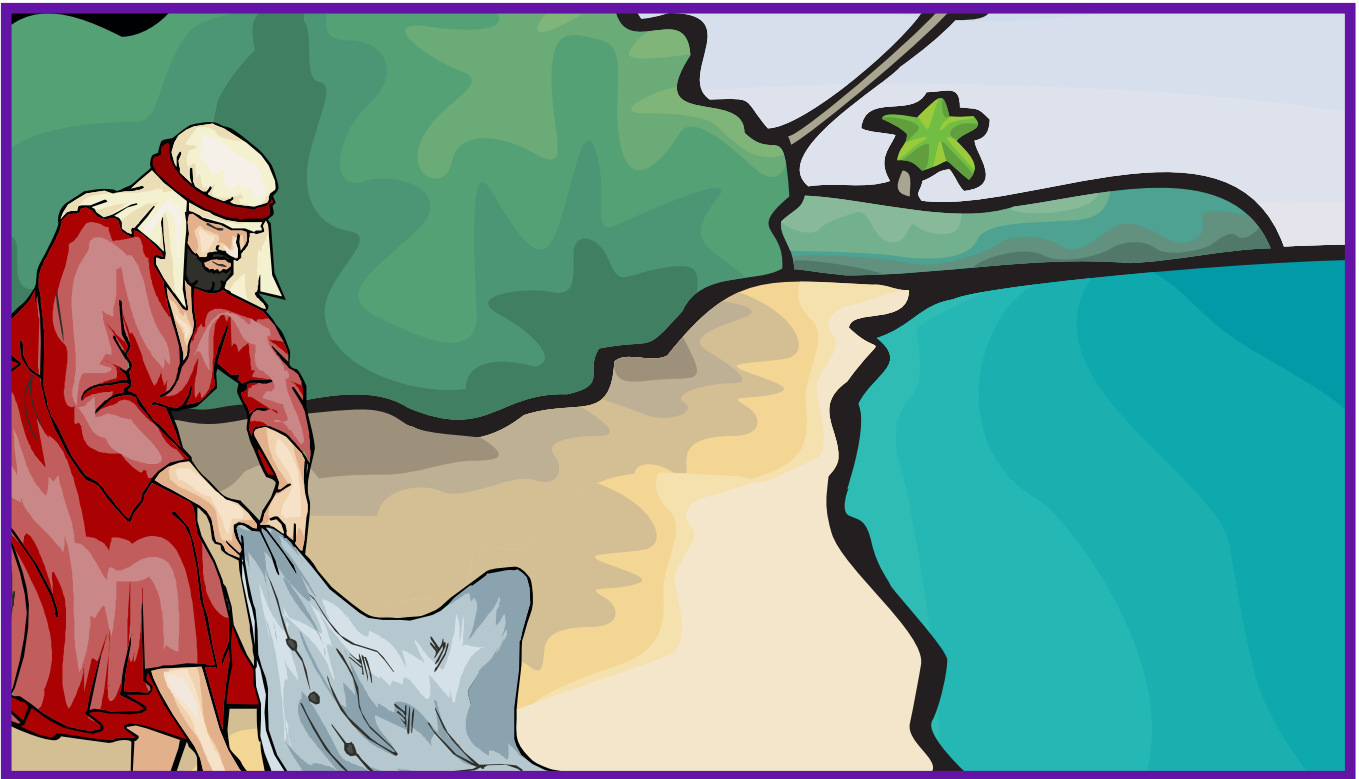
If we were really living in Bible times, we could probably see Rhodes from our ship very soon! Even though it's many miles away, there used to be a giant statue guarding the entrance to the island. The statue was so big that it was called the Colossus of Rhodes ("*colossal*" means HUGE), and it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In fact, we would reach land by sailing between the statue's legs!



On Rhodes, we'll get to see castles and lots of cobblestones. Aren't the buildings beautiful? We have time to walk around and take pictures. We'll share them with each other when we get back to the ship.

Onward we go! Our next stop is Crete – the largest island in Greece. It's below Patmos and Rhodes. Can you find it on your map?



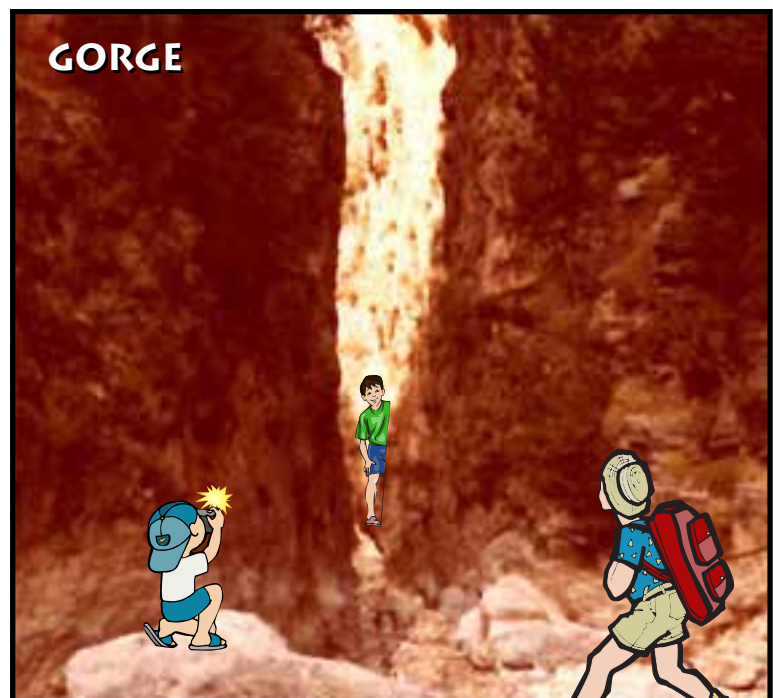


We'll be landing at Fair Havens on the south side of the island. This is where Paul's ship will land, but not while we are here. Keep your eye on the harbor as we land and imagine what it might have looked like when Paul arrived. Instead of shops and tourists, there was probably an open-air market and maybe some fishermen fixing their nets. Would there have been as many houses as there are today? Would there have been as much color in ancient times? We'll figure out the answer as we look around Crete.



We're going to take a tour bus to the other side of the island to visit the Royal Palace. Look out your windows at the beautiful mountains. Do you see the small canyons with high walls on either side? Those are called gorges (gor'juz). When you shout into a gorge, your voice echoes!

You will never guess how many Greek islands there are. 6,000!





Here we are at the Royal Palace of King Minos! Do you remember that name? We heard a myth about him when we were on Cape Sounion.

See the unusual red columns on the porch? What do you notice that's different about them compared to the other columns we have seen on ancient temples? The other columns have flutes, or grooves, running up and down each column, and the columns have a bulge in the middle. But these columns are actually upside-down cypress trees painted red or blue. The trees are placed upside down so that they don't sprout new branches!

As we tour the palace, look at all the frescoes on the walls. A fresco is a watercolor painting on a plaster wall; the paint sinks into the plaster and lasts forever. Each fresco is beautiful – it's hard to choose a favorite!

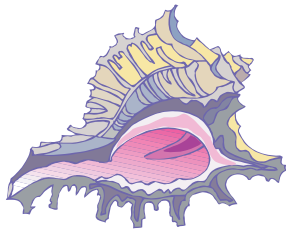


Now that we've seen the palace and frescoes and statues, let's see if we can decide whether there was as much color in Bible times as there is today.

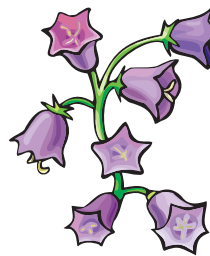
The statues we saw, like the statues above from our Athens tour, are only the color of the clay or the marble — and that's not very colorful. But, did anyone notice little flecks of paint on the statues? Actually, there were a lot of different colors, but they've been rubbed off over hundreds of years.



Speaking of color, do you remember Lydia? Her job was selling the color purple to wealthy people. The purple dye came from a rare seashell. Imagine color coming from a shell! The madder root is a climbing vine with a tap root that provides red dye for wool, cotton, leather and other fabrics.



MUREX SHELL



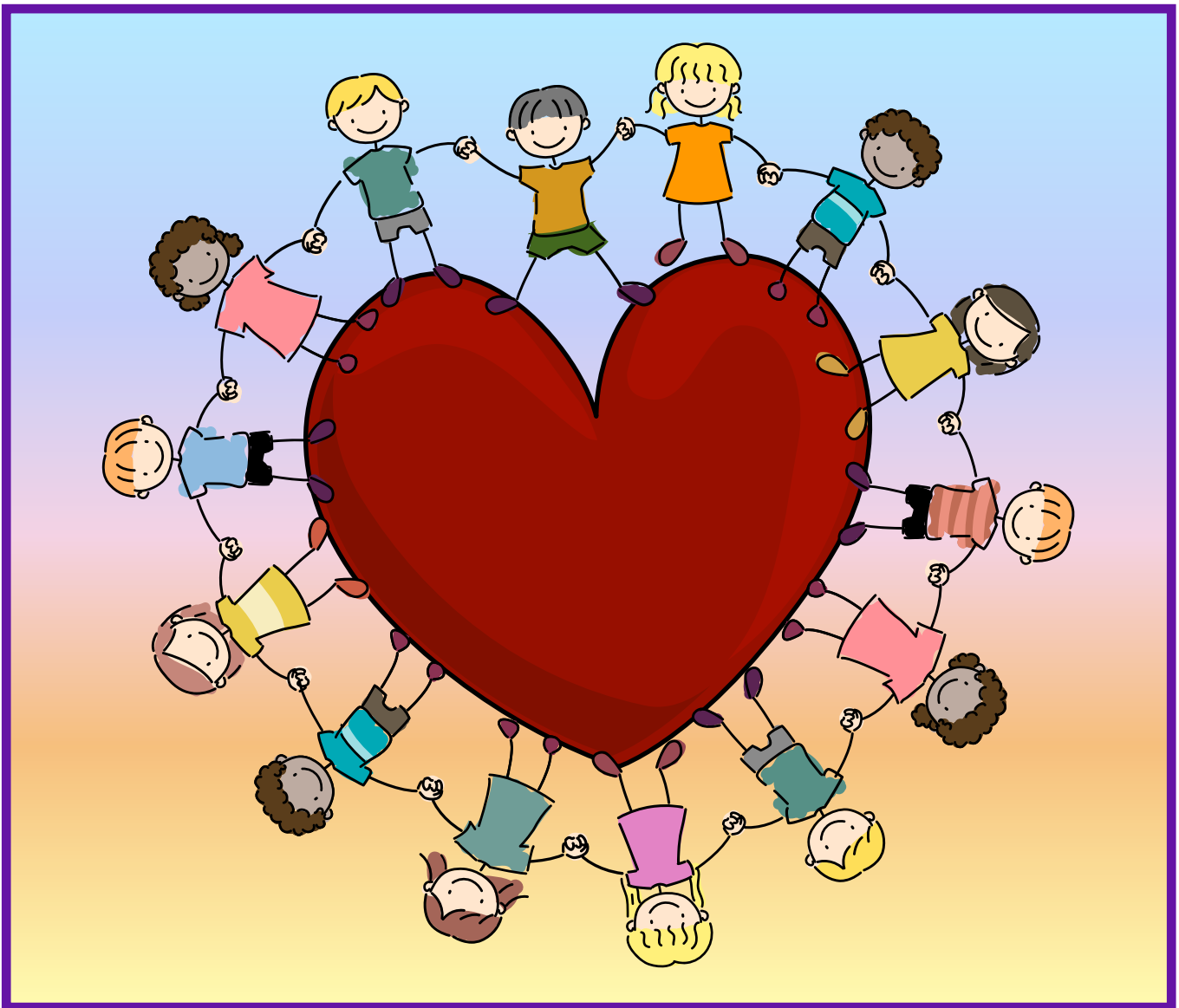
MADDER ROOT



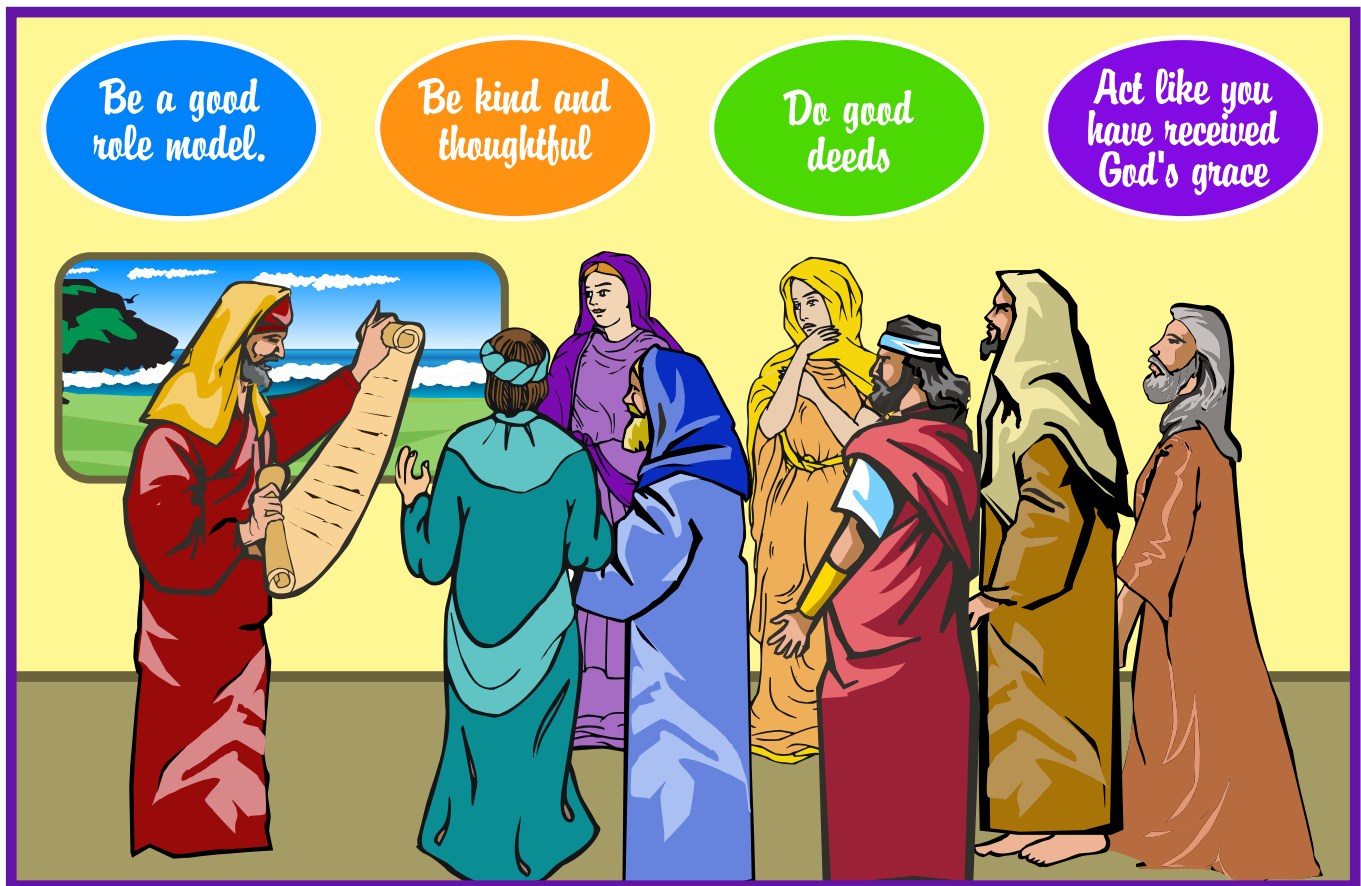
Most early churches were house churches — they weren't in church buildings. That's because the early Christians didn't want to draw attention to themselves and get in trouble with the Roman government. So they held church services in one another's homes. House churches were made of mud brick, which is not very colorful. Their clothing may have been colorful, but not their houses.



Paul lived on Crete for two years—in 63 and 64 CE. He and his trusted helper, Titus, started churches here, but it was hard to lead the new church members. They were brand new believers, and they didn't always get along with each other. Plus, they didn't fully understand what it meant to follow Jesus Christ – to be a Christian.



What does being a Christian mean to you? Do you think it's hard to be one today? One thing is for sure: we can always do a better job of being Christian by loving one another more! That's what Paul taught us to do in I Corinthians 13, right?



One day, just when Titus was feeling a little frustrated with the new churches he and Paul were setting up, he received an encouraging letter. It was from one of Paul's helpers, instructing Titus to preach the gospel in a way that helps develop spiritual growth and proper behavior. The letter talks about the responsibilities of men and women, and of boys and girls of all ages. It's a good reminder that everyone is responsible for being kind and thoughtful, and for doing good deeds—and that everyone should act in a Christian way because all of us have received God's grace to do so.

The letter ends by asking Titus to please read the letter to all the churches on Crete. Titus is the 17th book of the New Testament. Its message was clear and encouraging to those early Christians, and it's just as helpful to us today!