

Tour of the Holy Lands - Sounion



In the early months of 52 or 53 CE, Paul realized it was time to say goodbye to his friends in Corinth. It must have been a very touching farewell. Paul had made many friends there—people he would stay in touch with for the rest of his life. Corinth is one place he would remember happily and visit again.

Paul left the city with his two close friends and partners, Aquila and Priscilla.



Together, they traveled about 10 miles east of Corinth to reach the harbor of Cenchrea (Ken-kree'a) on the Peloponnese. Here they boarded a ship to Ephesus so they could continue teaching others about God and Christ Jesus. The harbor town must have been quite large in Paul's day.

We can imagine what Cenchrea looked like from the writings of a Greek traveler and geographer named Pausanias (paw-say'nee-us), who wrote about Cenchrea in 175 CE. He tells us that there is a temple of Aphrodite (af-roh-dy'tee) in Cenchrea, and beyond the temple there is a bronze image of Poseidon (poh-sy'dun) on the sea wall that runs into the sea. At the other end of the harbor are sanctuaries of Aesculapius (es-kew-lay'pee-us), the god of medicine, and Isis, the goddess of fertility. Another philosopher described Cenchrea as the most famous town of all the Corinthians, bordering two seas—the Aegean (eh-jee'an) and the Saronic.



COIN OF CORINTH



REMAINS OF CHRISTIAN CHURCH



On the seashore nearby, there is a salt-water spring, called Helen's Bath, which also existed long ago. People thought the spring had healing properties because the water temperature was warmer than average.

Here is a Corinthian coin with a picture that represents the harbor of Cenchrea. Do you see the way the arch is shaped like the harbor?

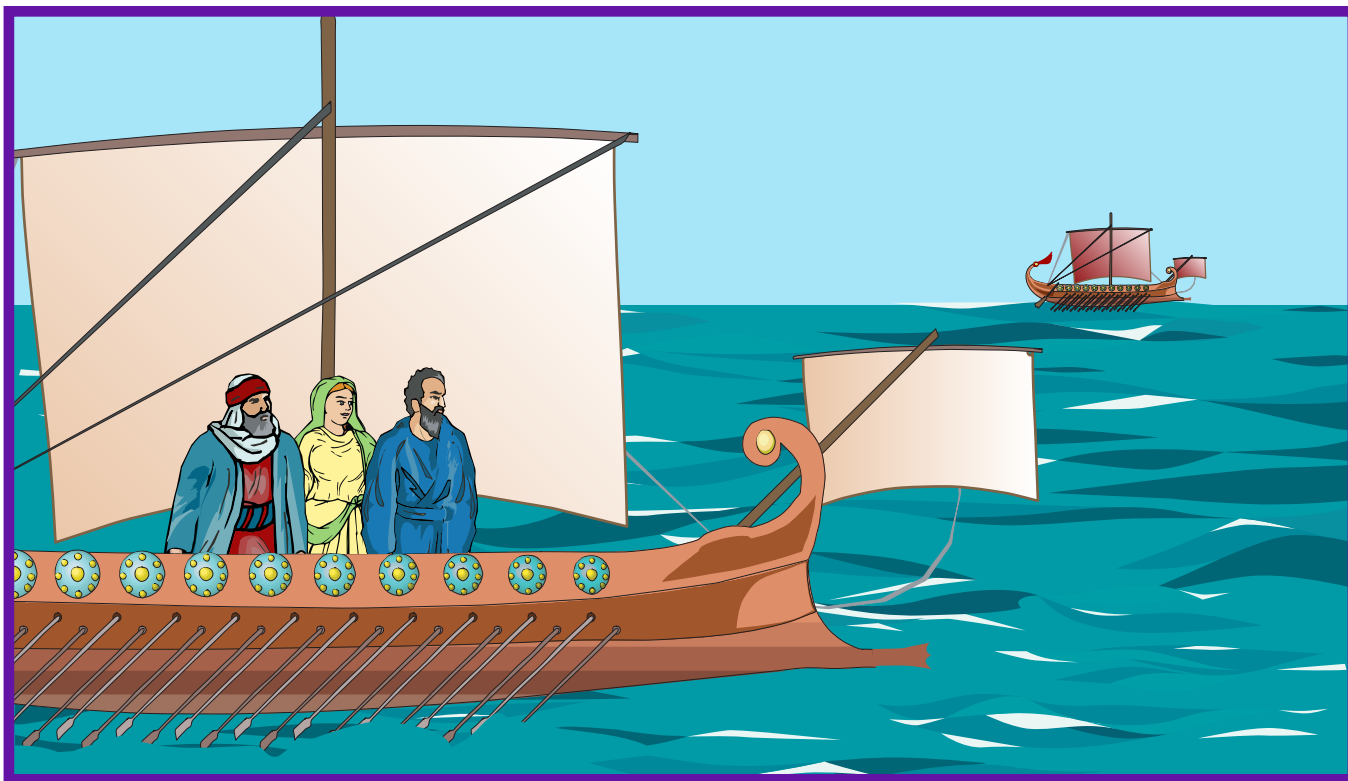
The remains of a Christian church in Cenchrea is proof that there was a very early Christian community there. It was located on the road leading to the warehouses and the western seawall. In the 6th century, this harbor town was abandoned, although a small group of Christians survived for several more centuries.



Even though Paul believed in Christ Jesus, he continued to live by many of the Jewish laws. By acting like a good Jew, Paul hoped to attract other Jews to listen to his preaching. On one occasion, Paul had his head shaved before leaving on a ship. It was part of a vow he took. A vow is a solemn promise. Paul shaved his head according to a law described in the book of Numbers.

The law says that after a person is delivered from danger or has recovered from a serious illness, Jews are to make a vow of thanksgiving to God. The vow includes not eating meat or drinking wine for 30 days, and letting one's hair grow for that month. At the end of the 30 days, the hair is cut again and burned on the altar as an offering to God.

Paul must have been thinking of all God's goodness shown to him in Corinth. It's no surprise that he decided to take this vow to show his gratitude.



As Paul, Priscilla and Aquila head to Ephesus, they will pass by Cape Sounion, and that's where we're going to stop next. Paul will not be stopping with us, so let's wave goodbye and wish him a safe crossing of the Mediterranean Sea all the way to Ephesus and then to Jerusalem. There he will shave the hair that has grown since leaving Cenchrea and offer it as a sacrifice at the Temple.





Most people drive to Sounion, but we're going to arrive by boat, the way Paul would have. We could stop in any of the cities on the shore of Asia (Turkey) and even Joppa, which is the harbor for Jerusalem. Or the ship could head for any of the islands in the Mediterranean. No matter which port a boat stops in, it has to pass Cape Sounion.

So, let's board our modern ship and head to Sounion. While we're underway, we're going to read a famous letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians several years after he left Corinth.



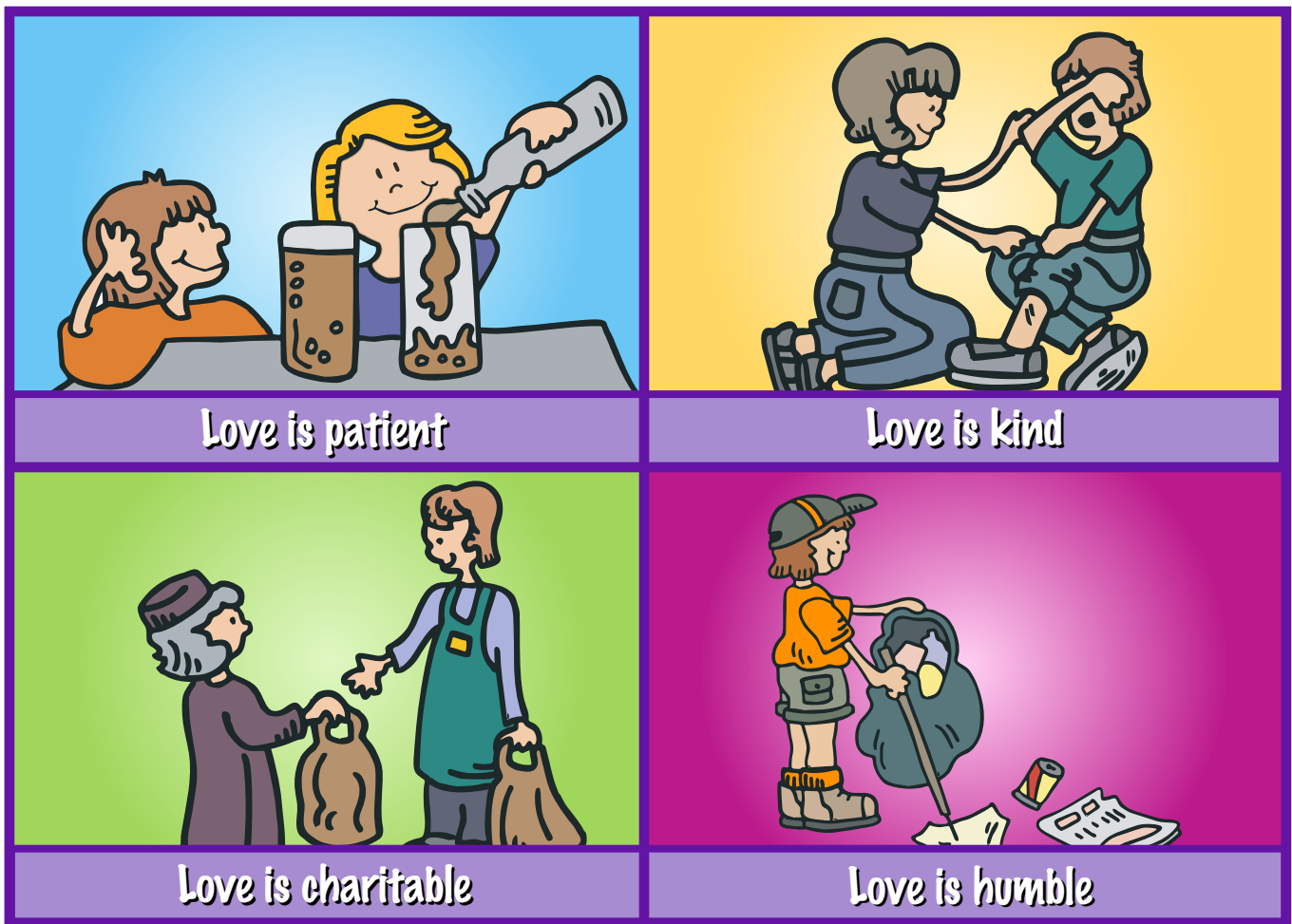
The churches in Corinth continued to grow, but some church members still enjoyed their old lifestyle, which wasn't based on loving God, or on loving one another, or on living a good and selfless life. Paul wasn't sure how to teach them to live and love the way Jesus did. He finally decided to explain love to them, using a new word: "agape" (ah-gah'pay). To do this, Paul wrote a poem — a song or hymn — about how to love others the way God loves us. It has become the favorite Bible passage of many Christians and non-Christians, alike. Turn to I Corinthians 13 to read it. Make sure your Bible translates "agape" as "love" rather than "charity" because "love" is the more accurate translation.



Here's a modern paraphrase of Paul's poem-letter:

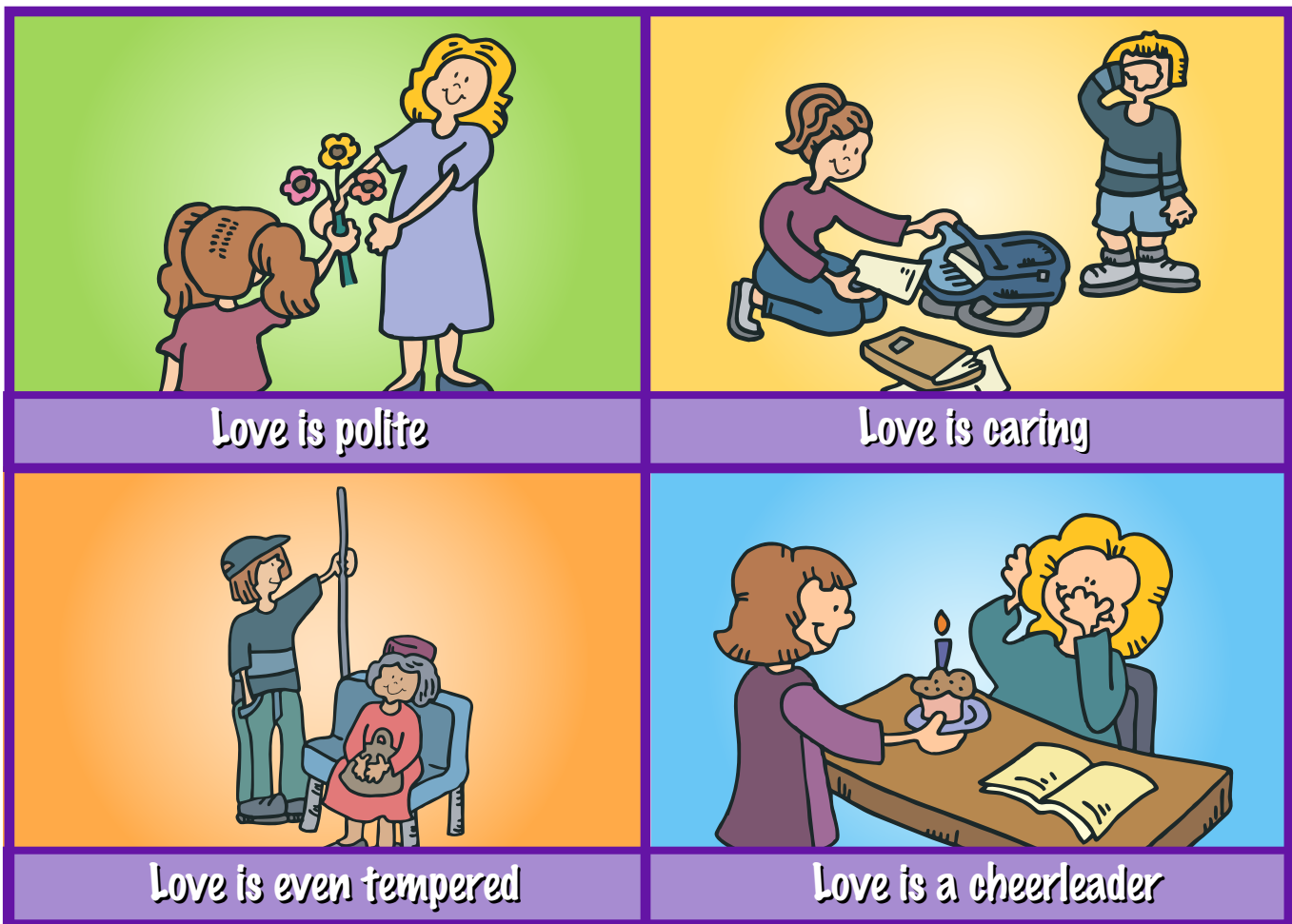
What if I speak in all the languages of the world and have the tongue of angels? It means nothing if I don't speak with love. Without love I'm just as noisy as a space shuttle launch or a fireworks display. And what if I have the ability to tell you the mysteries of tomorrow or if I know all the secrets of God and everything about Him? I can brag that I have enough faith to move mountains, but what does it mean without love? I am absolutely nothing at all.

Think about it: if I give everything I own to the poor and homeless, even if I give up my life for God, but don't love, I have accomplished nothing.

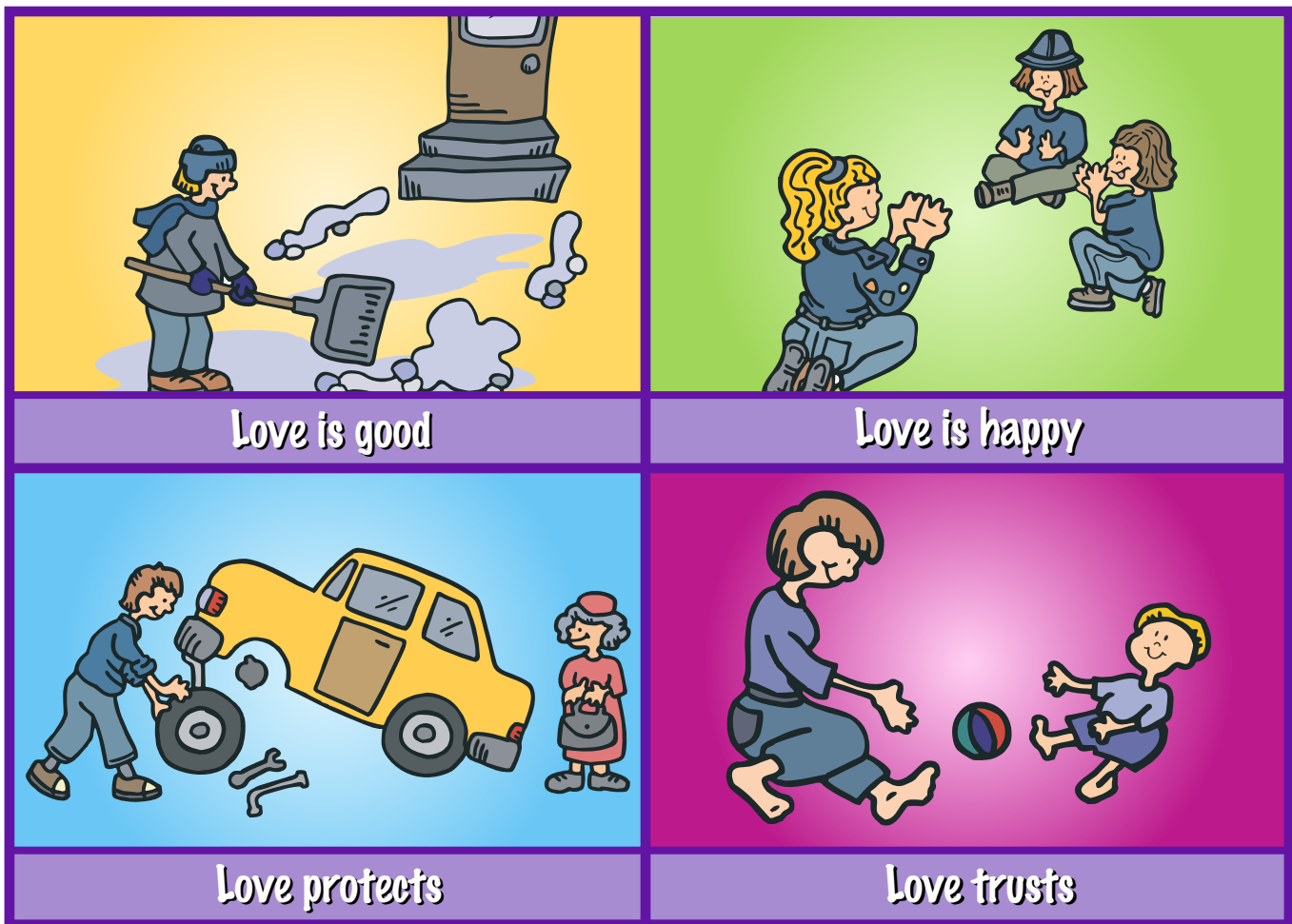


So just what is love?

- *Love is patient, not cranky or demanding.*
- *Love is kind, not snarky or ill-tempered.*
- *Love is charitable, not greedy.*
- *Love is humble, not proud and conceited.*



- *Love is polite, well-mannered, not rude and obnoxious.*
- *Love is caring, not selfish, only looking out for oneself.*
- *Love is even tempered, not easily tricked into anger and rage.*
- *Love is a cheerleader and doesn't keep score of other people's mistakes.*



- *Love is good and isn't happy with evil.*
- *Love is happy with the truth, not lies.*
- *Love protects, doesn't endanger or destroy.*
- *Love trusts.*



Remember when you were a baby, you cried a lot, you babbled and cooed? But as you matured, you were able to sound out words and understand their meanings. You gave up diapers and baby bottles and pacifiers. You put away baby things.

Right now we only see a part of what life really is. But someday we will see all of life clearly because we will understand our oneness with God. Someday I will know God as He knows me.

The three most important things to have are faith, hope and love. And the greatest of them all is love. So live it.

Paul's words touched the Corinthians deeply—and still touch the world today.



Now, you can see that we're getting closer to the Cape Sounion shore. Notice the slopes covered with pine trees, small vacation houses called bungalows, camping sites, swimming beaches and water-sports. Hundreds of years ago, the inhabitants harbored runaway slaves and then set them free. One author called the area "a haunt of pirates." The poet, William Falconer, wrote about this area in his famous poem, "The Shipwreck" (1762).



Look ahead! You can't miss the temple of Poseidon in the distance. It was a landmark to ancient Greek sailors because its dazzling white columns were visible for miles and miles. Today, all that still stands on the promontory (the piece of land jutting out into the sea) are a few columns.

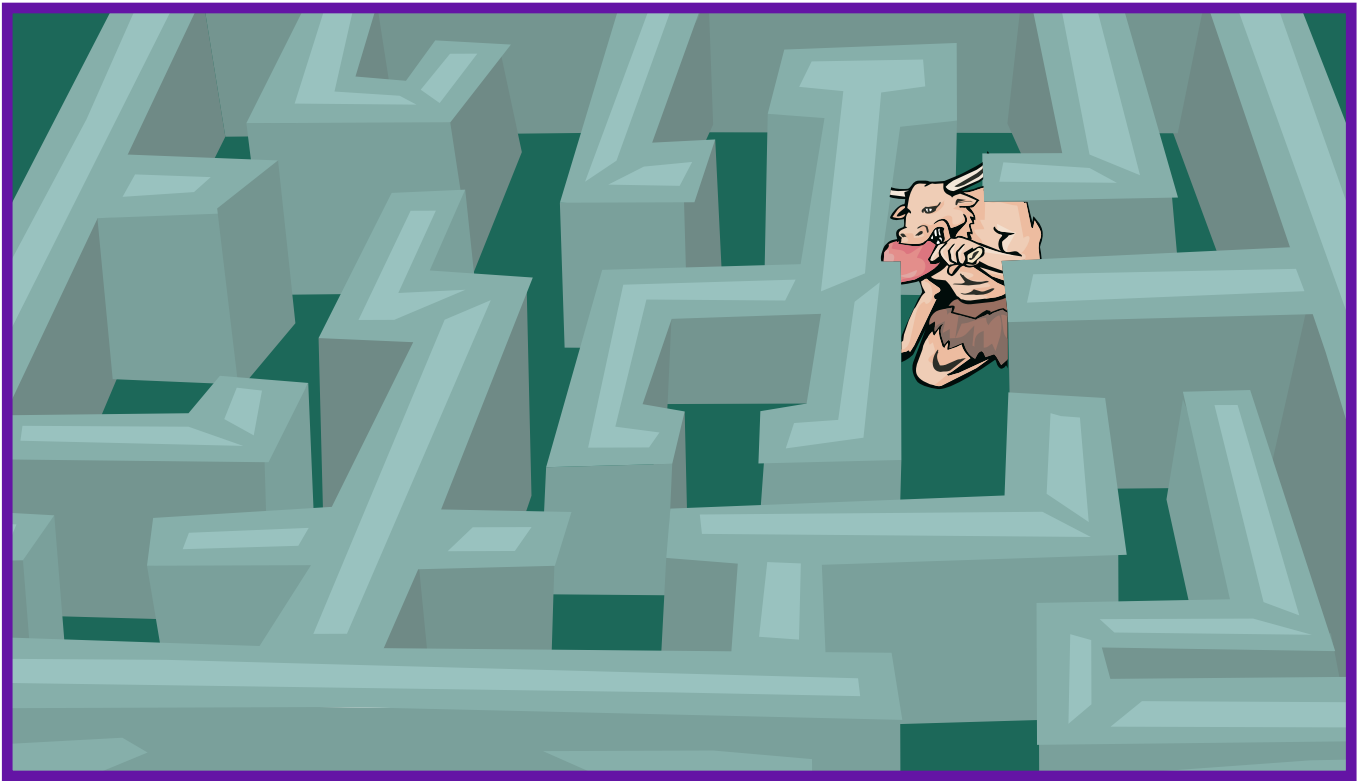
The temple is our goal. We'll take smaller boats to reach land.



Then we'll climb the steep hill and get as close to the temple as possible. Can you find the name of the British poet, Lord Byron (1788-1824), where he carved it on the column? That's something we wouldn't dare do today! Byron lived in Greece for a while, fighting in the Greek army. In fact, he became a Greek hero.

Years later, he wrote about this magnificent view, saying:
 "Sunium's marbled steep,
 Where nothing save the waves and I
 may hear our mutual murmurs sweep,"
 (Sounion was spelled differently in Lord Byron's day.)





Cape Sounion has been the subject of several myths. According to mythology, there was on the island of Crete a monster—half man, half bull—known as the Minotaur (min'a-tor). He was owned by the King of Crete, King Minos (My'nus), and he lived in the middle of a labyrinth (lab'a-rinth)—a gigantic maze.



The people of Athens were regularly forced to send seven young men and seven young women to Crete to be fed to the monster. One year, the King of Athens, whose name was King Aegeus (a-jee'us), sent his son, Theseus (thes'ee-us), to Crete as one of the seven young men. Theseus promised his father that if he was successful in slaying the beast, he would sail by Cape Sounion with a white sail, instead of his normal black sail. Meanwhile, the daughter of King Minos became friends with Theseus and gave him a spool of red thread to help him escape the labyrinth after slaying the monster.



And so, Theseus succeeded! But he forgot his promise to his father and sailed home with the black sail instead of the white one. As he went by Cape Sounion where his father was anxiously waiting, King Aegeus saw the sail and thought his son had been killed by the Minotaur! He was so sad that he dove into the sea, never to be seen again. After his death, the sea was named the Aegean Sea.

Let's not forget that myths are not true stories.



Well, we have reached the end of our travels for this summer. Can you believe how fast the days flew by? We've seen some wonderful sites and we're now ready for the Olympic Games to begin in Brazil. We've watched Paul build a solid group of Christians in Corinth, and we joined his friends to say goodbye as he left Cenchrea with Aquila and Priscilla.

Next summer, we're going to meet back here in Sounion and take a ship to visit some islands on our way to Crete where we'll meet up with Paul again. We'll follow Paul to Malta, and finally, to Rome. That will be our very last stop on the Kids' Tour of the Holy Land.

But that's a long way away! Have a good flight back home and a good year in school. We sure hope to see you again next summer for our last journey together with the Apostle Paul!