

Acts 19:1 and 8-41; 20:1

Aim of lesson

To show how Paul taught people about Jesus and explained to them the error of their pagan beliefs.

Background study

Deuteronomy 5:6-10; Psalm 115:1-8; Matthew 4:10; Acts 20:17-38. Study historical and geographical details of ancient Ephesus, with particular reference to the worship of Artemis (Diana, AV).

Suggested outline of lesson

Geographical Background

Begin by discussing with the children the excitement felt when arriving in a strange city, with its new sights and sounds, unfamiliar market, buildings and shops. The novelty is especially marked in a foreign place, with its different customs and language. Help the children to imagine, on the other hand, how lonely this could be and how glad one would be to meet someone there whom one knew. Go on to explain that, on his journeys abroad to spread the message about Jesus, Paul arrived during his third missionary journey at Ephesus, the most important city of the Roman province of Asia. The use of maps and pictures will help to illustrate the wide colonnaded streets, splendid stone and marble buildings and impressive temples. Being a port (long since silted up) and the centre of trade and commerce, the place would have been bustling with activity and interest, and is said to have accommodated a population of a third of a million.

Summarize Paul's activities in Ephesus during his two years' stay; his preaching to the Jews in the synagogue, his miracles of healing, his condemnation of the "magic arts", and his success in making known the gospel and converting many, so that a thriving Christian church was established.

Religious practice in Ephesus

In introducing the incident with Demetrius, talk about the present-day practice of selling souvenirs. The children will probably all have seen trinkets symbolizing local features, which are sold to tourists as mementoes of their visit. Give examples, and go on to explain that this trade also existed on a grand scale in ancient Ephesus. The people worshipped a statue housed in a fine temple, and superstitiously believed that it had fallen out of heaven and was a goddess. Emphasize the fact that it was just a man-made figure which had no power and which could neither speak nor move; yet many called themselves priests of this goddess and thousands flocked to the temple to worship it. On market stalls there were replicas of the idol for sale. Many of these were made of silver and were the work of silversmiths who had made themselves rich with this trade.

Consequences of Paul's preaching

Because of Paul's effective preaching about the worship of the one true God who had given Paul the power to do miracles, many had now recognized the worthlessness of their old beliefs, rejected the worship of idols and were no longer interested in buying the miniatures. Trade in them declined sharply and Demetrius' livelihood was threatened.

Ask the children how they think Demetrius and others like him would have reacted to this change in their fortunes. Vividly describe what followed, conveying the way in which Demetrius incited his fellows to action, beginning with an impassioned speech that touched on their feelings about money and religion. He led them, stirred by repetitive chanting, to rise up in anger against the Christians.

Relevance to the children's lives

In this story, a selfish and angry crowd got out of control. What problems can you see in joining this sort of crowd? What might it lead to? If your friends decide to have a demonstration or to organize a protest, would it be right to join in? Remember that people who love Jesus do not act in anger; they are never violent, in word or deed.

Talk about how frightening it would have been for the apostles, as an hysterical mob bore down on them and dragged two of Paul's companions away. Describe the earnest reasoning that was required to prevent Paul from putting himself at risk, and the confusion that reigned throughout the city as the ever-growing mob continued their chanting for two hours. At last, when they realized how explosive and potentially dangerous the situation had become, the city authorities were forced to take action. Reference could be made to a present-day riot of which children may have heard. It says much for the authority of the town clerk that his intervention succeeded in quietening the crowd, and made the people see reason. Paul was not deterred by this experience but moved on to other cities, confident that he was doing what God had sent him to do.

Worksheets

The solution to the code is 'Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong'

Prayer

Dear Lord God, show us the way of peace, and help us to control any angry or violent feelings we may have. Amen.

Memory verse

"Live in harmony with one another ... Live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:16 and 18).