

~THEATER (141)

[Greek, *the'a-tron*]

- A structure, referred to by the **Greeks** as *the'a-tron*, where dramatic performances, tragedies, comedies, dances, musical presentations, and spectacles were staged. The theater was often the scene of immoral presentations, shunned by faithful Christians.
- Let fornication and uncleanness of every sort or greediness not even be mentioned among you, just as it befits holy people. (**Ephesians 5:3**)
- Neither shameful conduct nor foolish talking nor obscene jesting, things which are not becoming, but rather the giving of thanks. (**Ephesians 5:4**)
- For you know this, recognizing it for yourselves, that no fornicator or unclean person or greedy person, which means being an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of the Christ and of God. (**Ephesians 5:5**)
- But it also served as a place of public assembly for other purposes.
- It was to the **theater** in Ephesus that Paul's traveling companions were brought when Demetrius the silversmith stirred up a riot against these Christian missionaries.
- Though the apostle was willing to go before the people assembled in the theater, the disciples and some friendly commissioners of festivals and games dissuaded him.
- At that particular time there arose no little disturbance concerning The Way. (**Acts of Apostles 19:23**)
- For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, by making silver shrines of Artemis furnished the craftsmen no little gain. (**Acts of Apostles 19:24**)
- And he gathered them and those who worked at such things and said; Men, you well know that from this business we have our prosperity. (**Acts of Apostles 19:25**)

- Also, you behold and hear how not only in Ephesus but in nearly all the district of Asia this Paul has persuaded a considerable crowd and turned them to another opinion, saying that the ones that are made by hands are not gods. ([Acts of Apostles 19:26](#))
- Moreover, the danger exists not only that this occupation of ours will come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be esteemed as nothing and even her magnificence which the whole district of Asia and the inhabited earth worships is about to be brought down to nothing. ([Acts of Apostles 19:27](#))
- Hearing this and becoming full of anger, the men began crying out, saying; Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! ([Acts of Apostles 19:28](#))
- So the city became filled with confusion, and with one accord they rushed into the **theater**, taking forcibly along with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, traveling companions of Paul. ([Acts of Apostles 19:29](#))
- For his part, Paul was willing to go inside to the people, but the disciples would not permit him. ([Acts of Apostles 19:30](#))
- Even some of the commissioners of festivals and games, who were friendly to him, sent to him and began pleading for him not to risk himself in the **theater**. ([Acts of Apostles 19:31](#))
- **Theaters** were constructed in Greece from about the **Fifth Century B.C.E.** onward, and in time they were built in various principal cities. Most Greek **theaters** were constructed in semicircular fashion on a hillside of concave formation.
- The seats might have been made of wood or stone. Aisles separated them into sections, and they were lined up in tiers on the hills gradual incline. At the center was the *or-khe'stra*, a dancing or chorus area, behind which there was a raised stage backed by a *ske-ne'*, or background.
- Ruins of **theaters** have been found in such places as Ephesus, Athens, and Corinth. The large **theater** excavated at Ephesus had 66 rows of seats and could hold an audience of about 25,000 persons. The

acoustics were, and still are, so good that even a low voice from the stage can be heard in the topmost row with ease.

- The Romans frequently constructed **theaters** as individual buildings dependent upon no natural sloping ground formation. Sometimes their **theaters** had a roof over the stage and a portion of the seating area.

- Another type, the Roman **amphitheater**, was a roofless circular or oval structure that enclosed a large center space or arena, from which the seats radiated in tiers.

- The partially standing Colosseum in Rome, finished in **80 C.E.**, is a noted Roman **amphitheater**. Herod the Great constructed **theaters** in various cities, including Damascus and Caesarea.

- Josephus said that Herod **built a theatre in Jerusalem, and after that a very large amphitheatre in the plain.** [*Jewish Antiquities*, XV, 268, viii, 1]

- The **Greek** word *the'a-tron* can denote either the place where a show is presented or the **theatrical spectacle** itself. Paul wrote,

- For it seems to me that God has put us the apostles last on exhibition as men appointed to death, because we have become a **theatrical spectacle** to the world, and to angels, and to men. (**1 Corinthians 4:9**)

- Paul thus alluded to the customary closing event of Roman gladiatorial contests in the **amphitheater** arena when certain participants were brought out unclad and defenseless, being subjected to butchery and certain death.

- The Greeks and Romans customarily led criminals condemned to death through the **theater**, where they were subjected to ridicule by the assembled throngs.

- Paul wrote to the Hebrew Christians, apparently referring to this practice. Though there is no record to the effect that these Christians had been subjected to that treatment, they had endured sufferings that were comparable.

- The apostle urged them,

- **However, keep on remembering the former days in which, after you were enlightened, you endured a great contest under sufferings. ([Hebrews 10:32](#))**
- **Sometimes while you were being exposed as in a **theater** both to reproaches and tribulations, and sometimes while you became sharers with those who were having such an experience. ([Hebrews 10:33](#))**