

SEEKING SOCRATES

CHORUS 3: ATHENS UNDER SIEGE



Pericles strategy was simple. Yet bold somehow. Since Athens could not hope to beat Sparta in armed combat on land, this must be avoided at all cost.

He proposed long walls be built, 4 miles from the city to the sea. Then, all of Attica--the farming region around Athens—could take shelter behind them, and get all its supplies from allies by ship. So it was done. As expected, the Spartans burned villages and fields. But the people, now inside, remained safe. Until...

The unexpected struck. Plague. Forced to live in crowded conditions, many away from their homes, the population was vulnerable to disease. Day by day, illness ravished Athens. Children lost parents. Adults lost husbands and wives. Tens of thousands died.

The city, once so civilized and tolerant, soon gave in to panic. When its sufferings were not eased by prayer to the gods, lawlessness broke out. Rumors spread. The Oracle, it was said, had foretold victory for Sparta. The great sun god—Apollo—was angry with Athens and had sworn himself an enemy to its cause. Fully one out of five in the city fell dead. Not the least of whom was the man who had led them for three decades, and the architect of this tragic battle plan—the symbol of the Golden Age—Pericles himself.