

~ACTS~

Lesson 64- A Riot in Ephesus

Acts 19:23-20:1

We are in chapter 19 of the book of Acts looking at Paul's three-year stay in Ephesus on his 3rd journey. Paul came to Ephesus in the summer of 54ad, spent three months teaching in the synagogue, then when the Jews hardened their hearts, he turned to the Gentiles and taught for two years in the school of Tyrannus. And we learned that it was from that daily Bible study that the churches of Asia were born, and Luke tells us in Acts 19:10-*"...all who dwelt in Asia heard the Word of the Lord Jesus."* Then in verses 11-22 Luke gives us examples of God working mightily in Ephesus during these three years as God was validating His Apostle and His Word in Ephesus and notice the results... v.17... *"the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."* And v. 20 Luke says... *"the Word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed."* So it is clear that there is great fruit in Ephesus even amongst intense persecution.

Now in our text today we are going to see the final event that drives Paul out of Ephesus after being there for three years. About a year earlier, spring 56ad, Paul had a desire to travel to Macedonia, Achaia, Judea, then Rome, Acts 19:21; 1 Cor 16:5-9. But things didn't go as he had planned, and instead he visited Corinth with the sorrowful visit, and then wrote the severe letter, and instead of Paul returning to Corinth, he sent Timothy, Erastus, and Titus and Paul himself stayed in Asia for a time. This "time" in verse 22 was nine months, from Sept 56 – May 57. And during this time, Paul traveled through the churches of Asia, from house to house, Acts 20:20, edifying the saints.

Now in verse 23 Paul has returned to Ephesus in the month of May, during the feast of Artemis in Ephesus, and a riot breaks out about "the Way." Let's read verses 23-27...

19:23-27) ²³ And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. ²⁴ For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana (Artemis), brought no small profit to the craftsmen. ²⁵ He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. ²⁶ Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. ²⁷ So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana (Artemis) may be despised, and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship."

Ephesus was the place to worship the goddess Artemis. Artemis is the true name. Diana is the Roman name but should not be confused with Diana, the goddess of wild animals and the hunt. This Artemis of the Ephesians was the multi breasted goddess whose image they believe fell from Zeus and landed in Ephesus, believing to be born at that time. She was the goddess of fertility and of the nutritive powers of nature. Artemis was greatly celebrated in Ephesus because Ephesus was her supposed birthplace. And the great temple of Artemis was built to display her magnificence. This temple sat near the port at Ephesus and was one of the seven ancient wonders of the world. The temple measured 425' long x 220' wide. It was supported by 127 marble columns measuring 6' in diameter and 60' tall. The temple was 4x the size of the Parthenon in Athens and it was dedicated to this one goddess Artemis. Conybeare says that no other temple consecrated a greater amount of admiration, enthusiasm, and superstition than this temple of Artemis. Conybeare: Life of Paul pg 72 vol 2 Along with this temple, the Ephesians also dedicated an entire month (May) to celebrate her with a great festival called the Artemision festival and was accompanied by the Ephesian games, similar to the Olympics, all in dedication to the goddess Artemis.

So at this time in the month of May at this festival, there were thousands of people who would come to Ephesus from around the world to honor the great goddess Artemis. Which for the silversmiths and workers who made little trinkets of Artemis, this festival meant big money for them. However, the Truth has exposed the enemy's lies and because the Word of the Lord had gone out throughout all of Asia, v.10, people were doubting whether Artemis was real because Paul was telling them, *"they are not gods which*

are made with hands.” Acts 19:26. Remember that leading up to this event in May, Paul had just spent nine months in Asia going from house to house strengthening the churches and “*testifying repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ,*” Acts 20:21.

Therefore, because of the Truth of the One True God being spread throughout all of Asia, Demetrius, the guy in charge of the silversmith union and all things made for Artemis, he stands up and begins stirring up the workers to revolt against Paul. These **workers of similar occupation** were probably those who made terracotta images of Artemis and maybe even those who produced the books of magic that the believers had been burning and confessing their sins to the whole city.

Notice how emphatic Demetrius is when he says, “**Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people.**” This was an amazing testimony of God’s work in Asia coming from the enemy. It was undeniable what God had done through Paul as He was validating His Word through signs and wonders in Ephesus, **v.11-20**. This is why Demetrius says **you see and hear...** *θεωρεῖτε καὶ ἀκούετε...* You look on with amazement and hear. Demetrius is probably in the Agora marketplace just below the theater and you can just picture him pointing to Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s fellow-workers, v.29, while he is saying these derogatory things. But Paul’s message wasn’t attacking Artemis specifically, v.37, but rather he preached Christ and Him crucified. He preached the Gospel. That Jesus is the only True God and that there are no other gods made with human hands. Much like he said in Athens, **Acts 17:29**.

Demetrius gives three reasons for this revolt, but the real motive has to do with money. The other two reasons are to guilt them into this riot, verse 27... 1) **So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute,** 2) **but also the temple of the great goddess Diana (Artemis) may be despised,** 3) **and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.** Who knows if Demetrius was even a worshipper of Artemis, but he uses this as a way of guilting the workers into a revolt, probably pointing at the temple from the Agora. Notice the result in verses 28-29...

19:28-29) ²⁸ **Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!”** ²⁹ **So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul’s travel companions.**

The workers had gathered in the marketplace, Demetrius got them riled up and they started chanting “**Great is Diana (Artemis) of the Ephesians!**” This then started stirring up the rest of the people in the city and it grew out of control, and everyone rushed into the theater. And as the mob moves into the theater, the workers grab Gaius and Aristarchus knowing they were Paul’s travel companions. Gaius and Aristarchus are Macedonians who probably traveled with Paul from Macedonia on his 2nd journey, or possibly came back with Timothy after he delivered the “previous letter” to Corinth and returned later from Macedonia, 1 Cor 16:10-11. We don’t know much about Gaius. This is a different Gaius than Gaius of Derbe, Acts 20:4; or Gaius of Corinth, Romans 16:23; 1 Cor 1:14; or Gaius of 3 John. But it is very likely the same Aristarchus the Thessalonian from Acts 20:4 and Acts 27:2; Philemon 24; Colossians 4:10.

19:30-32) ³⁰ **And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples** (Tychicus, Trophimus, Apollos and Aquila and Priscilla) **would not allow him.** ³¹ **Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater.** ³² **Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together.**

This is typical mob mentality. Luke says **the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together.** The whole city has rushed into the theater confused. This is the second time Luke tells us the city is confused, v.29 and 32. The theater in Ephesus was a major gathering place that could hold up to 25,000 people. The city was already full and busy because of the Artemision festival and the Ephesian games, and now a riot has ensued. Paul evidently wasn’t in the Agora with Gaius and

Aristarchus, but he hears about the riot and wants to go into the theater. His disciples won't allow Paul to go in, but notice who else is pleading with Paul... **some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends**. These officials of Asia are called Asiarchs, Ἀσιάρχης- leaders of Asia. These Asiarchs were high ranking, wealthy citizens of Asia who were brought in to preside over the festival and games during this time. They were elected celebrity types used to promote the festival and add a certain amount of pomp and charm. The Asiarchs loved this because it promoted themselves and gave them an avenue to boast and brought in more wealth and prestige to the city. But it is interesting to note that Luke makes special mention that these Asiarchs were Paul's friends. We don't know if they were Christians, but these high ranking people favored Paul and allowed him in the city. This was that "open door" that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 16:9. God's favor with the leaders of the city. We saw that same favor with Gallio, the proconsul of Corinth which allowed Paul to stay in Corinth for 1-1/2 years. This is also Luke painting the picture that Paul was a friend of Rome. Remember, the book of Acts was written as trial documents for Paul's appeal to Caesar and we always see that Rome is portrayed as the good guys and that Christianity is not hostile to the Roman government.

The majority of Paul's persecution came from the unbelieving Jews, but this time, because of the affect the Gospel had on the buying of pagan idols, the pagans rise in revolt. But notice how the Jews make a distinct effort to separate themselves from Christianity.

19:33-34) ³³ **And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. ³⁴ But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great is Diana (Artemis) of the Ephesians!"**

Notice that the Jews are mixed up in this crowd, and evidently the mob was starting to come down on the Jews as well. So the Jews put Alexander in front of the pagans to make a defense and show they were on their side. This just shows the hatred the Jews had for Christians. That they would side with the pagans instead of the Christians. It is possible that the reason the Jews chose Alexander is because this may have been Alexander the coppersmith from **1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 4:14**. Alexander was a coppersmith who was from Ephesus, (same place as this riot, and could have been a metalworker with Demetrius), but Alexander despised Paul for putting him out of the church. And instead of repenting, Alexander did much harm the Apostle Paul. But the pagans in Ephesus didn't make the distinction between Judaism and Christianity so they wouldn't listen to Alexander and instead Luke says **all with one voice cried out** φωνὴ ἐγένετο μία ἐκ πάντων literally, "a voice became one out from all." And the mob began chanting the same thing for two hours, "**Great is Diana (Artemis) of the Ephesians!**"

But there was one person who was able to silence the crowd... the city clerk...

19:35-40) ³⁵ **And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus? ³⁶ Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. ³⁷ For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. ³⁸ Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. ³⁹ But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly. ⁴⁰ For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering." ⁴¹ And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.**

Who is this city clerk that he would have such an affect on the mob? This word city clerk is γραμματεὺς- usually translated as a scribe, but in this case he is ὁ γραμματεὺς, or The Scribe or a better translation

might be how Luther describes in his German Bible as The Chancellor. He was a magistrate of great authority, and he pulled a lot of weight in the city of Ephesus.

Published in The Numismatic Chronicle in 1847 shows an ancient coin with an inscription Cusinius of Ephesus. According to ancient history, Cusinius was at one time ὁ γραμματεὺς... the scribe of Ephesus. Proving that ὁ γραμματεὺς held a high position as prince of the city so much that their image was pressed into these coins. Plus the fact that the violent mob actually listened to him shows his importance as a leader of the city. Time and time again we see the exactness and the details of Luke confirmed, proving the infallibility of the Scriptures.



Cusinius, Scribe of Ephesus

Ephesus was a free city, with the authority to rule of its own accord, but if an uproar occurred, especially one that is made of a disorderly gathering, the Chancellor of the city reminds them they are in danger of being charged with rebellion and insurrection by Rome. And tells them that there is a certain lawful way to go about these disagreements... **open courts and proconsuls**. No doubt Demetrius was being targeted as the main culprit who instigated this riot. Which again alludes to the favor of Rome toward Paul and the Christians. So with this said, the assembly or this “violent mob” was dismissed.

19:41) And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

With the threat of the strong arm of Rome in favor of the Christians, the Chancellor along with the favor of God was able to disperse the crowd. Which then leads to Paul's departure from the city of Ephesus after being there for three years. After this, Ephesus becomes the major hub of Christianity for many years.

20:1) After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia.

This concludes his three year stay in Ephesus, which we can with much confidence pinpoint to be from the summer of 54ad to May 57ad. Now finally Paul continues on his journey that he had planned roughly a year ago when he wrote 1 Corinthians in the spring of 56ad concluding he wanted to travel from Ephesus to Macedonia, then Achaia, then Jerusalem, then Rome, 1 Cor 16:5. Now according to God's perfect timing, Paul embarks from Ephesus and travels to Macedonia, but before he gets to Macedonia, he travels to Troas to find Titus, 2 Cor 2:12-13, then after not finding Titus in Troas, he travels to Macedonia and finds Timothy and Erastus. Then sometime later while still in Macedonia, Titus meets up with Paul and Paul is greatly comforted to hear the good report about the Corinthian church, 2 Cor 7:5-7, 13. This good report prompts Paul to write what we know as 2 Corinthians and sends this letter with Titus urging the Corinthian church to gather the contribution for the saints at Jerusalem, 2 Cor 8:6, 16-18; 12:18.

So because we are studying the life of Paul along with the book of Acts, and it is here in Macedonia that he writes 2 Corinthians, next week we are going to take an overview of the second letter to the Corinthians (which is actually the fourth letter Paul has written to them)