

EXPOSITION OF ACTS

Message #44

Acts 19:21-20:1

God's Word was in Ephesus and it was being used in a mighty way by God as Paul taught it (19:20). Paul was devoting many hours per week to teaching God's Word and he had done that for three years, two of which were in a school (19:9).

Now **verse 21** is important because we learn that Paul decided it was time to go. He purposed "in the spirit" (εν τω πνευματι) that he needed to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and visit the churches there and then go on to Jerusalem and then to Rome. The Greek would certainly suggest that God's Spirit was leading him to do this. In fact, he said "I must also see Rome."

Now he didn't want to go to Rome as a tourist. He didn't want to go there just to admire the various buildings or historical relics; he wanted to reach Rome with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This conviction that Paul had to go to Rome must have truly been led by Jesus Christ because by the time we get to Acts 23:11, the Lord will tell Paul that he is to go from Jerusalem to Rome.

According to **verse 22**, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus on to Macedonia. Notice the verse said they had ministered to Paul and now Paul was sending them to minister elsewhere. He decided to stay in Asia, specifically in Ephesus. Had Paul left, rather than stay, another major hostile episode would have been missed. But Paul chose to stay awhile longer in Ephesus and things got wild.

As we have said previously, Ephesus was one of the greatest cities in the world. In fact, even to this day some of the greatest ruins in the ancient world are found in Ephesus. It was a city known for the worship of Artemis, who was the goddess of fruit and is pictured as a multi-breasted woman. **Artemis is the mythological Greek goddess who is also identified by the Roman mythological goddess Diana.** There was a temple in Ephesus designed for worship, which we have mentioned. There was a theater there, actually an outdoor amphitheater that could seat thousands of people, about as many as you can seat in Waldo Stadium at WMU.

Verse 23 says there was no small disturbance concerning "the Way" (της οδου). That particular noun "the Way" is one that means Paul was preaching that faith in Jesus Christ was the only way to having a relationship with God. Luke uses this title "the way" throughout this narrative (18:26; 19:9; **19:23**). The point of this is that faith in Jesus Christ is the one and only narrow way to salvation. **Broad are the paths of religion that will lead to eternal destruction, but one narrow path of faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to eternal salvation.**

Placing your faith in Artemis or Diana will not save you anymore than placing your faith in yourself, your education, your religion or good works. You could be a person who goes through all kinds of religious rituals including water baptism and communion, but that will not save you. Only faith in Jesus Christ will justify you and that is exactly what Paul preached and it was causing big trouble in Ephesus.

What we see here is that:

GOD'S TRUTH CONCERNING SALVATION BY FAITH ALONE IN CHRIST ALONE WAS SO IMPACTING IN EPHEBUS THAT THERE WAS A MAJOR EFFORT TO STOP PAUL, SILENCE PAUL AND REMOVE PAUL.

There are four critical action scenes given here:

ACTION SCENE #1 – What happens with the business men of Ephesus. **19:24-28**

Keep in mind that thousands of people came to Ephesus to visit the temple and the souvenir shops made big money for the merchants. These merchants made huge sums of money by selling their religious trinkets.

Now one of the things that was sold in Ephesus was a little silver shrine or image or idol of Artemis and Diana. So when Paul came to Ephesus and started teaching the truth about Jesus Christ and pointed out that there was no such thing as a god made with hands of men (**v. 26**), it started a major uproar in this Ephesian business world.

According to **verses 24-25**, a man by the name of Demetrius, who was a silversmith, was troubled, so he gathered all those craftsmen together who were making these things, to discuss the potential loss to their business. All the business men gathered and held a town meeting. Their livelihood depended on the popularity of this false religion.

Just imagine if you preached to all the Catholics and pointed out that rosary beads and crucifixes don't mean a thing. Think what that would do to the people who are in the business of making millions of dollars off these religious trinkets. People who make the rosary beads and the crucifixes would be a little upset because you would be putting a real dent in their business.

Now Demetrius is a shrewd man. He is a good politician. He figures if he can gather together the other business men and show them how Paul's ministry is a threat to their business and also their religious beliefs, he can put Paul out of business and get him out of Ephesus. Since Diana was worshipped all over Asia, he decided the best way to stop Paul was to show that he was against their religion and religious beliefs.

We get to see what is really motivating Demetrius here- this is all about money. His opposition to the true Gospel of God and his pretending to be such a pious and worshipful man of Diana is all about money.

According to **verses 27-28**, Demetrius was able to put the other businessmen into a rage by his economic and religious talk. He really played up the Artemis and Diana insult and the men went into such an emotional frenzy that they started crying out "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians."

ACTION SCENE #2 – What happens to the friends of Paul. **19:29**

Two friends of Paul were Gaius and Aristarchus. Gaius was from Derbe and Aristarchus was from Thessalonica (Acts 20:2). Paul had gone to Derbe on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:20) and he had gone to Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1ff.). So these two had come to faith under Paul's ministry and were now traveling with him. They had been with him since Macedonia. So this tells us that it wasn't until Paul's second missionary journey when they started traveling with Paul. They were proven men.

They apparently were walking on the main street of Ephesus and were spotted by these business men so they grabbed them and took them into the public theater, which seats about 25,000 people. **They are learning first hand that the truth Paul preaches gets you into serious trouble in this world.**

Now these are supposedly the leading businessmen of the city and their reaction would certainly affect the other citizens and the entire city to the point that according to **verse 29** they rushed into the theater and dragged Gaius and Aristarchus with them. Gaius and Aristarchus had traveled with Paul from Macedonia.

ACTION SCENE #3 – What happens to Paul. **19:30-31**

Now the moment Paul heard about this, he wanted to go right into the theater after them, but the other believers would not let him go (**verse 30**). The other believers sensed the real danger and knew Paul's life could be in jeopardy, so they would not permit him to go to the theater. Also, according to **verse 31**, some of those in Asia, who were his friends, told him to stay out of there.

Now the Asiarchs were ten men who were chosen annually to be superintendents over various games and festivals in Ephesus, much like an Olympic committee. These were typically wealthy types of individuals. Apparently, Paul's teaching ministry had made an impact on some of these people in high places and they became Paul's friends.

When you are a front line man like Paul in the work of God, you need some good behind scenes friends who will pray for you and support you. It is an honor to preach and teach God's Word, but many times it isn't a lot of fun. It seems you are always at odds with someone. Paul's friends rallied around him and said "stay out of there."

ACTION SCENE #4 – What happens inside the theater. **19:32-41**

Now when the hysterical religious group got inside the theater they were shouting all kinds of things but according to **verse 32**, no one really knew why they were there. You have a crowd and it is all excited and yelling and some said, "what exactly are we all excited about?"

Well in the crowd was a Jewish man named Alexander. He was not a Christian but he was concerned about this uproar that was taking place. Alexander was a Jew, as was Paul, so they put him out on the front and center stage. He intended to speak to them, but for about two hours this mob kept crying out “great is Artemis of the Ephesians” (v. 33-34). Over and over again they kept repeating this. Someone has well said “one lie multiplied by ten thousand voices never becomes truth.” If you have ever been to an Indian celebration, they chant over and over again. It is interesting for about thirty seconds, but then as it goes on you want to yell “shut up.”

Now about this time, the town clerk sensed this thing is getting out of control, so he made his way to the stage to quiet things down with a speech (v. 35). Now the town clerk of Ephesus is much like our church clerk here. There have been inscriptions found in various cities that seem to suggest that the job of a town clerk was to record and document public meetings regarding public acts or laws. He was a very important magistrate who was expected to be at public meetings and he was second in rank to the chief magistrate (Horatio B. Hackett, *Commentary on Acts*, p. 227).

The town clerk is not a Christian nor does he defend biblical Christianity, but God will sovereignly use him to quiet down this situation. God can use unsaved people to say things that will accomplish His will. That is exactly what He does with this speech from this town clerk.

In the speech he makes five major points:

Point #1 - All people know that Ephesus has the great temple of Artemis and the image that fell down from heaven . **19:35**

One of the key points that apparently was driving this emotional frenzy was the thought that this will ruin our reputation in the world and people will no longer even want to come here to our Temple. It will hurt our tourist business.

The clerk appeals to their ego and pride. He says everyone in the world knows that we here in Ephesus are dedicated to Artemis/Diana. Everyone in the world knows about our Temple and these Bible preachers cannot stop the worldwide impact of the Temple of Diana.

Look how crazy and bizarre false religion is and how it affects people. The people were told that the image of Artemis or Diana had fallen out of heaven and they all believed it. It is like the Mormons who all believe that Moroni gave golden tablets to Joseph Smith. People just believe lies. This city clerk believed them too. But God will use him to calm this crowd down.

It is a funny thing that today no one except those interested in biblical history knows that Ephesus was the city where Artemis or Diana was worshipped. However, people who visit there today know about Jesus Christ and Christianity.

Now actually the clerk is right. Bible preachers cannot put much of a dent in the world impact of false religion. For example, there have been biblical preachers preaching against Mormonism since Joseph Smith started it in the 1820's. They have warned of the devilish doctrines that attack Jesus Christ and God's grace. Yet thousands of people annually go to Salt Lake City to see their devilish Temple. The town clerk of Ephesus was right; people will still come to the temple of Diana from all over the world.

Point #2 - Since you all know the "facts" stay calm and don't do anything rash. **19:36**

Now the town clerk says since you know these "undeniable facts" that Ephesus is the city that is supposed to protect Diana who fell out of the sky, stay calm. Do you see how brainwashing false religion is? It is not based on any facts, yet the people think they know the facts. In this New Testament era, biblical Christianity is the only belief system that is based on real facts.

There is a program called "Antiques Roadshow" in which people take antique things to various gathering spots to have them appraised by knowledgeable people in a particular field. One that I saw recently featured a science teacher who had a first edition copy of Darwin's Origin of Species. The value of the book turned out to be over \$100,000. When the teacher was talking, he said this book meant a lot to him as a science teacher because of the facts it revealed. There are few observations Darwin made that are true, but the book is filled with crazy distorted theories which many even in the world of science today view as untrue. People view crazy theories and stories as fact. That is exactly what was happening here in Ephesus with this nonsense about Artemis falling out of the sky.

Point #3 - The men you have brought here have not robbed our temple or blasphemed our goddess. **19:37**

Now the town clerk says Gaius and Aristarchus were not in the temple of Diana trying to rob it, nor were they saying anything bad about Diana. In fact, as far as we know, they were just walking in town when they were grabbed and taken into the theater. They were not on some rampage against Diana.

Apparently Paul preached and taught God's Word at the school of Tyrannus. He didn't waste a lot of time studying false religion. He preached Jesus Christ. He did spend a lot of time studying all the false religions of the world so he could point out their quirks. It is true that he did say any god made by the hands of men is no god. But for the most part he was simply dedicated to preaching the truth of God's Word.

There is a place for pointing out faulty beliefs of false religions, but the primary thing that should characterize the pulpit is the preaching and teaching of God's Word. That is what Paul did.

Point #4 - If anyone has done something legally wrong, they need to take it to the court of law. **19:38-39**

In other words, we don't operate by some lynch mob law. There are right, legal ways to handle legal matters.

Point #5 - We are in danger of being accused of starting a riot . **19:40**

Back in this time, you did not want to get Rome mad at you. You did not want to stir up some political problem. You enjoyed a lot of freedom and Rome was very interested in political unrest, so this clerk said, “we had better back away from this.”

According to **verse 41**, when he completed this, he dismissed the crowd and they all went home. According to **20:1**, after the uproar died down Paul left and went to Macedonia.

There is no evidence that the problems in Ephesus caused Paul to leave. He left when the problem had died down. There were occasions when Paul quickly got out of town, but this was not one of them.

When major opposition occurs, sometimes it is wise to leave and sometimes it is wise to stay and see it through.

G. Campbell Morgan said the Church persecuted is the Church pure and the Church powerful.

There were powerful people who did not like Paul, but they could not stop his ministry and his ministry was one of carefully teaching and preaching God’s Word. His message was one of pure grace. It was not a message of religion or works. It was a message of justification that taught if you will believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you shall be saved.