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Idol-Makers Start a Riot in Ephesus
Acts 19: 23-41

54-56 AD

Idol-makers start a riot in Ephesus DIG: Why would Demetrius rally people against Paul (see Acts 17:29)? Since this temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, what businesses would be affected by Paul's teachings? What do you think the crowd was seeing and hearing? Why are they there? Why are the Jews trying to get a speaker to represent them? Why would Paul be shouted down? How is the concern of the town clerk unlike that of Demetrius?

REFLECT: Success, money and independence are some cultural "idols" (values most people accept without question). What others come to mind? How has your faith affected your relationship to these idols? Could Demetrius have become a believer and kept his business? Can you think of situations today where someone in a "respectable" trade would be forced to choose between that trade and Messiah? How have you seen religious and patriotic loyalties used as a cover for economic concerns? What does it mean to follow Yeshua in those times? What originally started as Artemis-worship became Artemis-business. How might believers fall into the same trap?

Whenever the Church boldly and faithfully proclaims the Gospel it faces Satanic opposition.

One lesson that history teaches is the paradoxical truth that the Church thrives under persecution. Effectiveness and persecution usually go hand in hand, since an effective church is a bold church, and a bold church is often a church made strong through suffering. **The Lord Yeshua Messiah** called **His** Church to be **salt** and **light** in the world **(Matthew 5:13-14)**; **salt** stings when rubbed in wounds, and **light** reveals the evil deeds done in darkness. Both can provoke a hostile reaction.

The early Church faced persecution from its inception. In **Yerushalayim**, that persecution came from pharisaic **Judaism (Acts 4:1-31, 5:17-42, 6:9-15, 8:1-4)**. In **Pisidian Antioch**, it stemmed from prejudice and envy **(Acts 13:44-52)**. In **Lystra**, it was the result of ignorant paganism **(Acts 14:8-19)**. In **Philippi**, it was the reaction to a victory over the demonic realm **(Acts 16:16-40)**. In **Thessalonica**, it came from an unruly **mob**, urged on by jealous religious leaders **(Acts 17:1-9)**. In **Athens**, the Gospel faced the opposition of worldly philosophy **(Acts 17:16-34)**. In **Corinth**, as in **Jerusalem**, it came from pharisaic **Judaism**, not a Roman court **(Acts 18:5-17)**. Whenever the Church boldly and faithfully proclaims the Gospel it faces Satanic opposition. It comes as no surprise that persecution also arose in **Ephesus**, stemming from a pseudo-religious materialism.[27]

1. The cause of the riot: **Luke** informs us that **around that time –** before **Paul** left **Ephesus** as **he** had planned **(Acts 19:21-22)** – **there arose no small uproar concerning the Way (Acts 9:2, 19:9, 22:4, 24:14-22).** This is probably the context that **Paul** refers to figuratively in **First Corinthians 15:32** when **he** said: **For I fought wild beasts in Ephesus.** She was not only the capital of the Izmir province, but also the capital of occultism, witchcraft and idolatry. **The city's** greatest claim to fame was **the temple of Artemis**, the goddess of love, fertility, and nourishment. This **temple** was larger than a football field. It was an impressive building, some 165 feet by 345 feet in dimension and built on a platform 240 by 420 feet. Its roof supported by 127 sixty-foot-high stone columns. The entire edifice was elaborately adorned in brilliant colors and gold leaf. The altar was 20 feet square and contained a massive image of **the goddess** with a veiled head, with animals and birds decorating **her** head.[28]

While the **Diana** of the Romans corresponded to **the Artemis** of the Greeks, the

Artemis of the Ephesians was a totally distinct deity. The original **Ephesian** image was said to have **fallen from heaven (Acts 19:35)**. **The temple** statue of **Artemis** also wore a zodiac necklace indicating her power over the control of the stars (see the commentary on **Genesis, to see link click Lw – The Witness of the Stars**). **She** was a multi-breasted goddess who was supposed to be the goddess of fertility in mankind, animals and nature. **She** was known as the Great Mother. Every year in May there was a great festival in **her** honor.

Artemis worship was not confined to **Ephesus**. Scores of priests and prostitute-priestesses served worshipers and tourists from all over the world. There was a sanctuary in Rome also and a similar festival there every April. All told there were at least thirty-three shrines to the mother goddess throughout the Roman Empire. **Ephesus**, however, was considered to be the center of the cult, and pilgrims flocked from all over the empire to worship at its famous **temple**, which was the center of everything in **Ephesus**, including religion and the arts.[29] **The temple of Artemis** was also a major treasury and bank of the ancient world, where merchants, kings, and even cities made deposits, and where their money could be supposedly kept safe under the protection of their **deity**.[30]

The “lusty month of May” brought the annual month-long Festival of **Artemis**, honoring the goddess. The highlight of the festival was a solemn processional in which the image of **the goddess** was carried through the streets between **the theater** and **the temple**. Nearly the whole province converged on **Ephesus** to “worship,” and indulge in sin of every imaginable kind . . . and spend money. Souvenir salesmen and merchants depended on the festival for their yearly prophets. Tens-of-thousands bought trinkets and such to remember the occasion. Especially popular were wooden, **silver**, or gold images of **the goddess** and **the temple**.[31]

The instigator of the riot was **a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, a maker of silver shrines of Artemis – was providing no small amount of business to the craftsmen (Acts 19:23-24). These silver shrines** were miniature representations of the most sacred portion of the pagan **temple**; that part of it where the statue of the goddess stood. **They** were set up in homes and worn as good luck charms.

Concealing **his** real motive, which was greed, **Demetrius** concealed this with the appearance of civic pride. Being the leader of **the silversmith** guild, **he gathered these together, along with those of related occupations, and he said,**

“Men, you know that our wealth is from this business, thus revealing that it wasn’t a religious issue, but an economic issue**. They** had become **wealthy** because of idolatry. **You see and hear that not only in Ephesus but also throughout all Asia (Acts 19:10), Paul has persuaded and perverted a considerable crowd, saying that handmade gods are not gods at all (Acts 17:29). Not only is there a danger that this trade of ours might come into disrepute, but** to **also** seem that it was a religious issue, **he** said **that the temple of the great goddess Artemis might be considered as nothing. She whom all Asia and the world worships might even be thrown down from her majesty (Acts 19:25-27).** All this was going to be set aside by only one **man** . . . and a **Jew** at that.[32]

2. The characteristics of the riot: Demetrius’ scheme worked. The specter of financial disaster, the challenge to **their** fervently held religious beliefs, and the threat to **their** civic pride were too much for **the mob** to bear.

> **The first characteristic is anger: When they heard his** lies, **they were filled with anger and began shouting** and kept **yelling, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians** for **hours (Acts 19:28)!” Demetrius** had accomplished his goal and whipped the crowd into a frenzy. Inflamed by his incendiary speech, **the people** surged into the streets, invoking the name of **their goddess**. Like **Jeremiah’s far eschatological prophecy** of the end times, **people will go mad** as a result of **their** own hand made **idols** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Fc – Babylon’s Enemy and Isra’el’s Redeemer**). This is the typical response to the Gospel. When **the Jewish** leaders heard **Stephen’s** speech in defense of the Good News, **they were cut to the heart** (literally *sawed in half*). **And began gnashing their teeth at him (Acts 7:54).** The Gospel makes people angry because it confronts them with their false religion, and their sin, and it forces them to recognize the inadequacy of their world view, exposing the emptiness of their lifestyle.
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> **The second characteristic is confusion:** As the frenzied rioters swarmed through **Ephesus, the city was filled with confusion. Then** surging through the main streets, **they** came down the hill where **the mob rushed into the** open-air **theater,** which could seat 25,000 people. Many didn’t have any idea what all the confusion was about, but they joined **the mob**. They didn’t want to miss whatever was happening. Unable to find Paul, they **dragged with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were travel companions of Paul (Acts 19:29).** This the theater in **Ephesus**

where **Paul** faced **the mob.**

When **he** heard what was happening, **Paul wanted to enter among the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. He** wanted to face that howling **mob** even though it could mean certain death. This is the background of **Paul's** comment in **his** letter to **the Corinthians, "For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of our trouble that happened in Asia. We were under great pressure – so far beyond our strength that we despaired even of living. In fact, we had within ourselves the death sentence – so that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead" (2 Cor 1:8-9). But some of the high-ranking government officials of Asia, being his friends, sent** a message **to him and** insisted over **Paul's** protest, **begging him not to surrender himself in the theater.** In doing so, **they** probably saved **Paul's** life. **Now some** of **the mob** continually **cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in** utter **confusion. Most did not know why they had come together (Acts 19:30-32).**

The third characteristic is closed-mindedness: Some of the unbelieving **Jews,** fearing that **the mob** might turn on **them** as well, **solicited Alexander** to try and explain that **they** didn't believe in **Yeshua. He motioned with his hand** to **the crowd** because **he wished to offer a defense to the crowd,** but never got a chance. **The mob** might have **recognized that he was Jewish,** but it made little difference. To the pagan crowd, Messianic believers worship an invisible **God** and reject idolatry. **Their** minds were closed to whatever **Alexander** might have said.[33] Instead, **they** drowned **him** out and **for about two hours they all with one voice cried out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians,"** not letting **him** speak **(Acts 19:33-34)!**

3. The calming of the riot: Finally, **after two hours** of riotous confusion, order was restored by **the town clerk**. As the chairman of the city government (the equivalent of the mayor of a modern city) and liaison between the city council and the Roman authorities, **he** was the leading citizen of **Ephesus**. As such, **he** knew the Romans would hold **him** personally responsible for what happened. After **quieting the crowd** because **his** presence demanded respect**, he** said: **Men of Ephesus, what man is there who doesn't know that the city of the Ephesians is the temple keeper of the great Artemis and of her image fallen from heaven? Since these things are undeniable, you must be calm and do nothing reckless. For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor revilers of our goddess.** Even this pagan official testified to the character of **Paul** and **his Macedonians** traveling companions **(Acts 19:29)**, **they** were not thieves, nor did **they** use insulting language. Despite the claims of **Demetrius**, **they** had not acted improperly. Having reassured the crowd, he next criticized **Demetrius and the craftsmen** for sparking the riot. Rather than resorting to **mob** violence, they should have followed the due process of the law.[34] After all, **he** reminded them, if **they had a complaint against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them accuse them. But if you seek anything further, it will be settled in the lawful assembly.** This assembly was clearly an unlawful one. **Ephesus** was permitted by Rome to exist as a "free city" with its own elected representatives. But if riots were to occur, Rome would move in and reestablish order and with it, Roman taxes. Therefore, **the town clerk** concluded **his** speech with a sobering warning: **For we are in danger of being charged with rioting today, there being no reason which we are able to give to justify this mob. Upon saying this, he dismissed the assembly** and **they** went quietly **(Acts 19:35-41).** The same tactics that **the silversmiths** used to arouse **the mob**, **the town clerk** used to quiet and reassure **them** – the greatness of **their** city and **their goddess**.

Luke records the official statement that **the believers** were innocent of any crime, either public **(Acts 19:27)** or private **(Acts 19:38)**. **Paul** had this same kind of "official approval" in **Philippi (Acts 16:35-40)** and in **Corinth (Acts 18:12-17)**, and **he** would receive it again after **his** arrest in **Jerusalem**. Throughout the book of **Acts**, **Luke** makes it clear that the persecution of the Church was incited by unbelieving **Jews**, not by the Romans. In anything, **Paul** used **his** Roman citizenship to protect **himself**, **his** friends, and the local congregations of **God**.

The crowd was dismissed, and no doubt **the people** went home congratulating

themselves that **they** had successfully defended **their** great **city** and **their** famous **goddess**. It is doubtful that any of **them** questioned the truthfulness of **their** devotion to **Artemis** or were determined to investigate what **Paul** had been preaching for three years. It was much easier to believe a lie and follow **the crowd**.

But **Ephesus** is gone, and so is the worldwide worship of **Artemis of the Ephesians**. **The city** and **the temple** are gone, and **the silversmith's** guild is gone. **Ephesus** is a place visited primarily by archeologists and people on Holy Land tours. Yet the Gospel of **God's** grace and the Church of **Yeshua Messiah** are still here! We have four inspired letters that were sent to **the believers** in **Ephesus** – **Ephesians, First** and **Second Timothy**, and **Revelation 2:1-7**. The name of **Paul** is honored, but the name of **Demetrius** is forgotten (were it not for **Paul**, we would have never heard of **Demetrius** in the first place)! The Church ministers by persuasion, not propaganda. We share **ADONAI's** truth, not mankind's religious lies. Our motive is **love**, not anger; and the glory of **God**, not the praise of mankind. We have an audience of **One**. This is why the Church goes on, and we must keep it so.[35]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise and thank **You** for **Your** great wisdom that uses percussion to **Your** glory to refine me and to honor **Your** holy name by standing for **You** in the midst of life's **trials**. **You** never waste anything that happens in my life, but as I yield to **Your** touch, **You** use **the trial** to draw me closer to **You**, increasing my trust in **You** and leaning on **You** for **Your** wisdom on how to handle each and every situation. **You** are **the Master** of refining! **You** get rid of the dross and make me of purer gold. **These trials are so that the true metal of your faith (far more valuable than gold, which perishes though refined by fire) may come to light in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Messiah Yeshua (First Peter 1:7).***

***You** place greater value on giving an Eternal reward, than giving me a comfortable life on earth that will be over in a blink. **For I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18). You** are so wise to value my eternal happiness over a momentary pleasure which I will quickly forget. I know that I will be rewarded for my patience and l**ove** for **You**.*

***You love** to bless me and **trials** are one means that **You** use to bring my eternal reward. **You** allow trials in my life where my positive attitude of l**ove** and trust in **You** will open the door for you to give me eternal joy in a reward that lasts forever!*

For no one can lay any other foundation than what is already laid – which is Yeshua the Messiah. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear. For the Day will show it, because it is to be revealed by fire; and the fire itself will test each one's work – what sort it is. If anyone's work built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward (First Corinthians 3:11-14).

*Thank **You** for being with me in my **trials** and in turning the hardness of **the trial** into an eternal joy as you reward me for my **steadfast love** and trust in **Your steadfast love** for me -even in trials. In the midst of David's great trial of being sought after by King Sha'ul, he focused his attention on **God's steadfast love** for him and praised **God**. David knew **God's love for** him was real, even in the midst of **a trail**. **Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. For you have been my help . . . and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy (Psalms 63:3, 7).** In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*