

## Paul's Third Missionary Journey Part II

### *Opposition at Ephesus*

(Acts 19:21-41)

#### Introduction:

1. Paul's ministry at Ephesus (approximately 3 years) was coming to a close
  - Here are a few indications of how well the Gospel penetrated the city of Ephesus and the surrounding region:
    - 1) "This took place for two years, and all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10)
    - 2) "Many of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices" (Acts 19:18)
    - 3) "So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing" (Acts 19:20)
    - 4) "From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called him the elders of the church.....and now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:17,32)
    - 5) "Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus.....For this reason I too having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints...." (Ephesians 1:1,15)

- The success of the spread of the Gospel throughout Asia ( as seen through the churches at Ephesus, Colosse, Hierapolis, Laodicea) allowed Paul to conclude his work was complete there and thus prepare for what would be his final mission – a visit to Rome.
  - 1) We know he has a desire to also visit Spain (Romans 15:22-24) and to the best of our knowledge he never is able to go there.
  - 2) Luke tells us in Acts 19:21 that Paul’s chief goal was to visit Rome; “Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, after I have been there I must also see Rome”
  
- There were two things Paul wanted to do before he proceeded to visit Rome:
  - 1) He wanted to re-visit the churches that had been established in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea) and Achaia (Corinth). **His goal was to receive a love offering from the believers in the region of Greece.** (see Romans 15:25-27, I Corinthians 16:1-4, II Corinthians 8-9)
  - 2) The second thing that Paul wanted to do was to deliver that offering (from the believers in Macedonia and Achaia) to the saints at Jerusalem. This did much to create a sense of unity between the believers in Greece, Asia and the region of Jerusalem. (see James 2:15-16, I Corinthians 12:26)
  
- 2. Prior to going to Macedonia Paul sends Timothy and Erastus ahead of him while he remains in Ephesus a little while longer. *It is believed that he wrote I Corinthians during this time.* (**I Corinthians 16:8-9**)

## The Motive behind the Opposition to the Spread of the Gospel: (Acts 19:23-27)

1. There are two cases in the Book of Acts where direct opposition to the Gospel came from the Gentiles. In both cases it involved the loss of revenue due to the exposure of their sin:
  - The first incident involved the slave girl who was a fortune teller at Philippi. Paul cast the demon out of her, and there went the ability of a group of men to exploit her evil powers. (Acts 16:16-24)
  - The other incident is recorded for us here in Acts 19:23-41
2. This disturbance/riot in Ephesus centered on Paul's preaching about Jesus Christ and against all other gods but Him.
  - The Ephesian people held the goddess "**Artemis**" in high esteem
    - 1) In the Roman system of gods – Artemis is called Diana.
    - 2) Artemis was their **goddess of fertility** and they believe she came from the heavens. (Acts 19:35)
    - 3) The silver craftsmen of Ephesus (as did many other craftsmen in other cities) made shrines or idols in her honor for the purpose of worship.
    - 4) The worship of Artemis was prevalent throughout the Roman Empire and it is believed there were over 33 shrines dedicated to the worship of Artemis. Most conclude that this may well have been the largest and most popular cult in the Roman Empire.
    - 5) The temple at Ephesus was the center of Artemis worship and it was now being impacted by Paul's preaching!
  - Those most impacted by Paul's preaching were the ones making the shrines and idols as their revenue was being affected.

3. The attacks against Paul came from the silversmiths at Ephesus (Acts 19:24-27)
- The ring leader that more or less stirred up the Silversmith's Union was a guy named **Demetrius**.
  - What was their basic beef with Paul?
4. There was a lot at stake here for those who embrace the “evil one” and reject the Good News:
- The loss of revenue was no doubt important to those who profited from the making of the shrines and idols. Although this may have been an issue – it was not the only issue.
  - As the unbelievers in Ephesus continued to embrace the Truth of the Gospel (Jesus Saves); the powerful grip that Satan had over their lives (through the worship of false gods such as Artemis) was diminishing. We already witnessed this in Acts 19:18-20.
  - The preaching of the Gospel (the Good News that Jesus Saves) at some point becomes unwelcome to those who refuse to embrace and accept it as truth:
    - 1) Some \_\_\_\_\_ it
    - 2) Some simply \_\_\_\_\_ it and walk away
    - 3) Some vehemently \_\_\_\_\_ it with all their might
5. What do you see as the true motive behind the opposition to the Gospel?

## The Method and the Means to try and stop the Spread of the Gospel (Acts 19:28-34)

1. These unbelieving Ephesians (*who chose to worship Artemis instead of submitting themselves to God*) became angry and worked themselves up into a frenzy, which created a sense of anarchy (mob rule) in the city. (Acts 19:28-29)
  - Should we be surprised at their response? Why?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - In what ways do we see this similar opposition today?
  
2. The method of mob rule, rebellion and anarchy has often been a tool of the devil to oppose the Truth because he is the father of lies (John 8:44). Here are a few examples from Scripture where we see this evidenced:
  - It began in the \_\_\_\_\_  
(Gen. 3:1-15)
  
  - You can see it at the \_\_\_\_\_  
(Gen. 11:1-9)
  
  - You can see this \_\_\_\_\_  
(Ex. 32:1-0)
  
  - You can see this at the \_\_\_\_\_  
(Luke 23)
  
  - You can see this when \_\_\_\_\_ was martyred (Acts 7:54-60)
  
  - The Apostle \_\_\_\_\_ faced such opposition on many occasions  
(Acts 13:44-52, Acts 14:1-5, Acts 14:19)

3. All of this mass confusion came to a head when the people of Ephesus assembled themselves together in what Luke calls “the theater” (Acts 19:29-34)
  - This theater at Ephesus (of which the ruins are still preserved to this day – see page 314) was believed to be capable of seating approximately 25,000 people, and it was probably where they held their town meetings.
    - 1) The mob seized two of Paul’s traveling companions who Luke identifies as Gaius and Aristarchus. Neither of the two appears to be harmed.
    - 2) This meeting that took place apparently had no real purpose (Acts 19:32) and even the majority of the people did not even know why they were there.
    - 3) My personal feeling is these “instigators of the riot” intended to draw Paul to the theater with plans to bring harm to him or have him killed.
  - It appears that Paul wanted to go to the theater (Acts 19:30)
    - 1) Paul probably wanted to use the opportunity (with such a large gathering) to preach the Gospel and defend it.
    - 2) The disciples there at Ephesus probably knew of the evil intent of the instigators and would not allow Paul to go to the theater. (Acts 19:30)
    - 3) There was even a group of people called “Asiarchs” (rulers of Asia – probably political and or religious leaders) who were friends of Paul who advised him not to go to the theater. (Acts 19:31)
  - The obvious plan was to bring harm to Paul had he come to the theater but the instigators did not get the chance!

- The meeting was so chaotic that the people had no idea why they were gathered or who was even in charge of the meeting. (Acts 19:32-34)
  - 1) Apparently someone identified as Alexander stands up to make a defense to the assembly. We don't know whether he was a Christian Jew or an unbelieving Jew, nor do we know his purpose for standing up to speak.
  - 2) Perhaps this Alexander sensed that the people of Ephesus would lump them together with the Christians (people of the Way) and he wanted to disassociate the Jews from the Christians.
  - 3) We don't really know the motive behind what Alexander was going to say – but he was pretty much silenced by the crowd who continually shouted “**Great is Artemis of Ephesus**” for about 2 hours.
  - 4) In the midst of all of this chaos – God will use someone who Luke calls “the town clerk” (more than likely he was in charge of the city), to quiet the crowd by using the rule of law and basic reason. (See I Corinthians 14:33)
  
- 4. In spite of the evil intents and influence of Satan, as well as the evil intents of mankind – God will have His way in His time.
  - He protected Paul from harm because it was not in God's timing or plan to allow harm or death to come to him.
  - The church at Ephesus (much like the church at Philippi) was taking shape and God would see to it they would succeed in the midst of strong adversity.
  - Read Matthew 16:18 and compare them to what is transpiring here in Acts 19:35ff. Do you see any connection?

## The Miraculous Moving of God to ensure the Spread of the Gospel (Acts 19:35-41)

1. As this **unnamed city official** (whom Luke calls the town clerk) speaks he makes several appeals to the people at Ephesus in order to get them to settle down and cease from their anarchy:
  - He boasts of the enormous influence of the city of Ephesus as the so called guardian of the temple of Artemis.
    - 1) Although this may have appealed to their pride – it revealed the emptiness of a religion that was unable to deliver them from the bondage of sin.
    - 2) Pride has a way of blinding people and keeping them from seeing the truth.
  - He argues that “Artemis” was not man made and in their minds came from heaven – thus why should they be concerned with Paul’s preaching against their worship of her.
    - 1) His attempt is to convince or argue that their belief in Artemis (as a deity) is legitimate and stands on equal footing or perhaps even superior to what Paul declares.
    - 2) His argument is wrong, and in the same way that many of the philosophers and people of Athens chose to continue to embrace their false gods after Paul preached there, this city official also chooses a neutral path in order to establish a sense of calmness.
    - 3) We have no indication that this city official embraced the preaching of Paul. In fact, it appears he simply took the path of least resistance. What are the dangers in that?



- The city official claims that the two men (Gaius and Aristarchus) were innocent of the charges and in doing this it would stand to reason that Paul was also not guilty. (Acts 19:37)
    - 1) He states they were not robbers of temples indicating that they were not responsible for the loss of revenue from the sale of idols.
    - 2) He further states there was no evidence that they were even blasphemers of their goddess (Artemis).
    - 3) **This city official may not realize the profound statement that he makes; “For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess”. It is true that no blasphemy occurred because “Artemis” is not God!**
  
  - This city official also points out that their assembly (gathering) to more or less put these men on trial – was not even legal. (Acts 19:38)
    - 1) There was a rule of law that needed to be followed within the Roman system.
    - 2) If there were legitimate charges to being then those who had them (Demetrius and the other silversmiths) should use the normal process provided through the court system.
  
  - The final claim by this city official brought a warning that this unlawful assembly had significant “political” implications that they would do well to avoid! (Acts 19:40-41)
2. The assembly was dismissed and Paul was cleared of any political or religious charges because he had done no wrong! (Acts 19:41)

3. In what ways can you see the miraculous working of God in this situation described in Acts 19:35-41?
  
4. Can you name other instances in Scripture where God worked through someone who does not follow Him?
  
5. Do you find it difficult to grasp that people after hearing the truth of the Gospel, can still choose to walk away from it and not embrace Jesus as Savior?
  
6. What is it about the Gospel that even in the midst of opposition; It still prevails?

**Closing Remarks:**

1. In spite of all this persecution by Demetrius and others; the church at Ephesus will play a prominent role not only in the region of Asia Minor during the days of Paul, it will also have a world wide impact for several centuries beyond that!
  
2. It is from Ephesus that Paul writes I Corinthians
  
3. Paul will now depart Ephesus and head to Macedonia (Acts 20:1) with the plan to take up a collection for the saints in Jerusalem. This will be the focus of our next lesson.....stay tuned!