

## Lesson 28: Acts 19:21-21:16 The Defense of Paul and the Riot in Ephesus

### Introduction

Defense of the Gospel and the Gospel Messenger Paul				
19:21-21:16 Nature Worship and the Defense of the Church of God  Ephesus to Jerusalem	21:17-23:11 The Gospel Judged by its Respect for Conscience  Jerusalem	23:12-24:27 The Gospel Judged by its Attitude to Morality & the Law  Caesarea	25:1-26:32 The Gospel Judged by its Message for Caesar & the World  Caesarea	27:1-28:29 Nature's Storms and the Reign of God  Caesarea to Rome
19:21-35a A Riot in Ephesus (Rescue)	21:17-36 A Riot in Jerusalem (Rescue)	23:12-24 Proposed Ambush (Rescue)	25:1-12 Proposed Ambush (Rescue)	27:1-44 Shipwreck (Rescue)
19:35b-41 Mob's False Ideas (Misrepresentation)	21:37-39 Commander's View (Misrepresentation)	23:25-35 Criminal Charges (Misrepresentation)	25:13-22 Priest's Charges (Misrepresentation)	28:1-6 Maltese View (Misrepresentation)
20:1-21:16 Miracles & Words to Ephesian Elders (Defense)	21:40-23:11 Commander's Investigation (Defense)	24:1-27 Trial Before Felix (Defense)	25:23-26:32 Enquiry Before Agrippa (Defense)	28:7-29 Miracle & Words to Jewish Leaders (Defense)
28:30-31 And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.				

David Gooding, *True to Faith*.<sup>1</sup>

### *The Structure of Acts Part IV*

Acts Part VI steps up the action in terms of danger to the Apostle Paul. In these five movements, Paul escapes a riot in Ephesus, a riot in Jerusalem, a proposed ambush from Jerusalem to Caesarea, another proposed ambush from Caesarea back to Jerusalem, and a shipwreck.

This final part takes up a full third of the book of Acts. I am going to move a little faster than I have been. I plan to cover all five movements in six or seven sessions because Luke's narrative is so good it will carry us along at places with only a little commentary from me.

The quality and the length of the narrative is partly due to the fact that Luke has rejoined the team. So, his reporting shifts from "they" to "we", indicating that he is present. After the riot that occurs in Jerusalem, Paul will be imprisoned for two years. It is quite possible that those two years gave Luke the opportunity to do research for this book and for his Gospel. Much of the birth story we celebrate at Christmas is only found in Luke. How did this Gentile companion of Paul get that information? You have to wonder, did Luke visit Mary and the Apostles? And when did he do that? Could it be at this time when Paul was imprisoned? Did he trace the steps of Jesus while putting together his notes? Did he research Pentecost and the Jerusalem Awakening for the book of Acts? Maybe. This could be the moment that Luke is putting together everything we have been studying.

The dangers Luke reports on in these five movements of Acts Part VI, riots, ambushes, the shipwreck, all lead into the correction of some misconception about Paul which is then followed by an occasion where Paul defends himself and his message. That's the pattern we will follow in each of the five movements: danger averted, misconception corrected, defense provided. After quelling the riot in Ephesus, the town clerk corrects the misconception of the mob, then later the ministry of Paul is defended by a miracle and in his speech to the Ephesian elders. In the second movement, the Roman commander quells the riot, has his misconception about Paul corrected and a defense of Paul is made through his speech to the mob and the investigation of the commander. In the third movement, the ambush attempt is thwarted, misconception about Paul is corrected by the commander's letter to Felix, then Paul makes his defense at the trial before Felix. In the fourth

<sup>1</sup> David Gooding. *True to Faith*. (Coleraine, N Ireland: Myrtlefield House, 1990) 406-413.

movement, another ambush is avoided, misconception about Paul is cleared up by Festus, then Paul gives another defense before King Agrippa. In the final movement, Paul is saved from shipwreck, the misconception of the Maltese is corrected, and Paul is defended by a miracle and by his speech to the Roman Jews.

*The Emphasis of Acts Part IV*

The text of the five speeches of Paul that we will see in these five movements adds up to the length of 1 Thessalonians. So, in terms of Biblical narrative it is really quite a lot of speech. But what we will notice is that very little of the content of these speeches provides further development of the theology of the Gospel. Luke has developed the Gospel through the ministries of Peter and Paul as we follow the story in Acts. And now he is moving on. These speeches are going to focus on the defense of Paul; the defense of his behavior and of his calling.

In defending himself, Paul is defending the Gospel. He recognizes that his person is tied together with his message. David Gooding makes this argument. I will read a paragraph from him.

To defend the Gospel adequately, Paul would have to defend himself, his character, and behavior. At the various public gatherings, judicial inquiries and trials, the bench and the public would of course be interested to hear his exposition of the Gospel and to discover that it was not subversive political propaganda, nor the unhealthy notions of some bizarre sect. But they would also be weighing up his character and personality and sifting the reports of his past and recent behavior with the result that the impression they formed of the Gospel itself would be inseparably bound up with, and influenced by, their assessment of Paul himself. In that sense Paul was the Gospel.<sup>2</sup>

We can formulate at least three different reasons for making a vigorous defense of Paul. First, a written defense in the book of Acts could provide material for Paul's legal defense at the court of Caesar. This first goal would be to bring about Paul's release. Second, a defense of Paul supports the evangelistic goal of bringing more people to faith. If the questions non-Christians have about Paul are answered, they will be more open to hearing the message preached by Paul. Third, a defense of Paul supports the goal of strengthening the Christian Church. Christians who do not know Paul, but have heard about Paul, may have heard some strange things. What was he teaching the Gentiles? What really is his opinion about Moses? What really happened that caused the riot in the Temple?

Paul is the Apostle through whom God chose to provide for us the most extensive development of the Gospel message that we have. That's not only true of the believers living in Paul's day. That's true for believers living at all times. It would have been one thing to have a negative opinion about some famous Christian in our own day, Billy Graham, for example. If some Christians had developed a bad impression of Billy Graham, maybe your church or your city would miss out on the fruitfulness of his evangelistic movement and ministry. But okay. That is not the end of your church. God raises up other evangelists and teachers. But to have a negative opinion of the character and behavior of the Apostle Paul might turn you away from 25% of the New Testament. That's how much of Paul's writing God has included into the Bible.

In providing a defense of Paul, the Book of Acts continues to point us to the Gospel as it is developed by Paul, both here in the book of Acts and also in his epistles. Sometimes you hear in certain circles a devaluing of Paul's letters, the ideas that come out of his epistles. So-called "Red-Letter Christians" give greater emphasis to the word of Jesus than to the later writings of the New Testament. They recognize a canon within the canon. They might be rightly reacting in part to a devaluation of the Gospels. If we focus only on Paul, then we're missing the rest of the New Testament. But if they are, they lose a lot by erroneously swinging the pendulum away from the epistles. The Word of God includes the Gospels and the Letters, both of which God has connected for us with the book of Acts. The defense of Paul is also a defense of Scripture.

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<sup>2</sup> Gooding, 399.

Justification by faith is not Paul's idea. Not at all! It's God's idea. But it's not the easiest idea to preach and to communicate. God inspired Paul to maintain a tension that exists in the Gospel: a tension between calling believers to live in the freedom of Christ while also calling believers to pursue a high moral vision. Paul, who argues fiercely against laying the yoke of Old Covenant law onto Gentiles, is the same Apostle who requires Timothy to be circumcised and who willingly participates in a vow in the Temple. It takes a bit of effort to unpack what is going on here. Paul can be criticized on one hand as being too legalistic, but then on the other hand as being too free. But that is not Paul. That is the Gospel. A Gospel message that cannot be misunderstood as promoting sin through grace is not the Gospel. If you guard it so much that people can't misunderstand grace, you are not communicating the Gospel. When grace is taught correctly, people will misunderstand it. Likewise, the Gospel continues to call believers to righteousness in a way that can be misunderstood as legalism. There is a challenge to understanding grace. And Paul does not simplify the challenge. He maintains the tension of the Gospel, and in doing so, he opens himself to criticism. The answer is not to devalue Paul's teaching. You know, "He is too difficult. He says some hard things. Let's pull away from him." That's certainly not the answer. You want some hard things? Read what Jesus says in the Gospel. Jesus says plenty of hard things in the Gospel. The answer is to dive into the gospels and the epistles with a commitment to continual growth in our understanding of a grace that results in righteousness; a commitment to maintain the tensions in the hard questions, not to simplify them or do away with them but to seek to understand them and let them exist, however uncomfortable, until we do understand them. Luke's defense of Paul here in Acts is God's indication to us that Paul is indeed a very special messenger that God has chosen to provide for us deeper insight into the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Amidst the defense, all the defense that is going on in this section, Paul especially emphasizes one theological point – the resurrection of Jesus Christ. At one point, mention of the resurrection may seem like a shrewd move to pit Sadducees against Pharisees. And that may be the case. It was shrewd. But it is more than that. The resurrection remains a central theme throughout the book of Acts. The Jewish leadership has argued that this Jesus of Nazareth is no Messiah. "We know He is not because He lost. He did not set up a kingdom. He did not succeed. He was executed by the Romans on a cross, proving that He was a fraud. No Messiah."

Peter and Paul have countered by showing in the Old Testament Scriptures that the Messiah comes not only to reign, but first to suffer and die. He was not proved to be a false Messiah by His crucifixion. On the contrary, He was proved to be the true Messiah by His resurrection. He had to die. But He is not dead. The defense of the Gospel is first and foremost a defense of Jesus Christ. The reality of His resurrection is a key point of the Gospel that continues to be a key point even as we're turning to the defense of Paul and his message. This Jesus, whom you crucified, is alive!

That's my set-up for this Acts Part VI. Now let's turn to our text for this lesson. I am going to break this first movement into two parts. We will cover the first two components of the movement in this lesson, the danger avoided and the misconception corrected. Then I'll say the third component, the defense provided, for our next lesson.

The first danger avoided is the riot in Ephesus. Before we get to the riot, we do have a short two-verse introduction from Luke that I'd like to address first. This is Acts 19:21–22

#### **Luke's Introduction to Acts Part VI: Back to Jerusalem and Then on to Rome (Acts 19:21-22)**

<sup>21</sup> Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." <sup>22</sup> And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while."

"Now after these things were finished" may be better translated as, "After all this had happened," or, "When all this had been done." And we are talking about the events of the spread of the Gospel in Ephesus. Luke's select reports from Paul's time in Ephesus give us an overview of very fruitful

ministry among Jews and Gentiles. We think of the twelve Jewish men who professed faith in Jesus and were filled with the Spirit spoke in tongues and prophesied. You can imagine some of them becoming significant witnesses to others, particularly among the 10,000 plus Jews in Ephesus. We heard of a major awakening among magical practitioners in the city who denounced their practices and turned to Jesus. Those were two fantastic events Luke told us about. He also told us Paul organized regular lectures through more than two years. He is in the hall of Tyrannus, conducting a teaching ministry, and that teaching ministry propels the Gospel out from Ephesus into the whole province of Asia.

And that's what Luke means when he says, "After all this had happened," all this in Ephesus. Now, the Spirit of God stirred in Paul, indicating to him it was time to go. Paul had a pastor's heart, but he was not a pastor. He was a pioneer missionary. After the riot in Ephesus that we will read about in a moment, Paul will do as he says. He will go over to Macedonia and Achaia, to strengthen those churches just as he regularly has done in his visits to the Galatian churches. While in Corinth, he will write a letter to the Roman church to let them know about his plan to visit them. That letter will become Paul's most famous presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We also get more information about Paul's ministry plans and his specific sense of call in that letter. He will write to the Romans, "from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ (Romans 15:19)." That is what Luke has shown us. From his base in Syria, Paul has preached the Gospel up through Cilicia, across Galatia and Asia, over to Macedonia, and into Achaia. The province of Macedonia borders the region of Illyricum that Paul mentions in his letter, a region that extends through modern day Albania leading up through Montenegro and into Croatia. Paul has been a witness to the Gospel up to that border by establishing Gospel communities in influential urban centers in each of these provinces mentioned; Gospel communities enabled with Paul's vision to spread the message of Jesus Christ through the surrounding area.

Paul explains further,

<sup>20</sup> And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was *already* named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation; <sup>21</sup> but as it is written, "THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND" (Romans 15:16).

You see, Paul's ultimate goal is not Rome. He certainly sees the value of strengthening the church in Rome. As we see from his greetings in Romans 16, his friends Priscilla and Aquila have gone back. A church is meeting in their home. Paul wants to aid them and other fellow workers in the Gospel to establish the church of Rome firmly in the truth of grace. You see Paul's pastoral heart for the believers in Rome clearly expressed through his letter. He wants to build them up. But as he concludes his ministry in Asia, Macedonia and Achaia, his eyes are not fixed on Rome. He is not drawn to set up shop in Rome. He is looking further afield to where Jesus has not been named. He writes in Romans 15:23-33,

<sup>23</sup> but now, with no further place for me in these regions, and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you <sup>24</sup> whenever I go to Spain—for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while— <sup>25</sup> but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. <sup>26</sup> For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup> Yes, they were pleased *to do so*, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. <sup>28</sup> Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain. <sup>29</sup> I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. <sup>30</sup> Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, <sup>31</sup> that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and *that* my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; <sup>32</sup>

so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and find *refreshing* rest in your company.<sup>33</sup>  
Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Paul wants to go West. First, he must go East. That is the way it is sometimes in service of God. We submit to His leadership, whether His call matches our gifting and our particular desire or passion, or His call matches a need that must be met. It depends on God. Paul is God's servant. Paul is going to do what God leads him to do, not what he wants to do. So, this is the full plan. Paul plans to leave Ephesus. First, he will go strengthen the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, you know: Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, those places. He does not want to rush to something new without one more trip to strengthen what he has planted. Then he will go to Jerusalem to take a gift of money to Jewish believers, a gift he collected from Gentile believers. His goal is Christian unity. He says he wants to set his seal on it because he wants them to see the health and the orthodoxy of the churches that he has planted outside of Israel. Then after Jerusalem, he will go to Rome because it is very important that the believers in that very influential city, that they are established firmly in their understanding and practice of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Then, and only then, will he follow his heart's desire to take the Gospel to Spain.

We see that emphasis on Spain in Paul's letter to the Romans. Luke knows about that plan, but he does not mention Spain here in Acts 19. That is not part of this story. This story is going to end in Rome. Luke simplifies Paul's plan; Macedonia and Achaia, then Jerusalem, then Rome. That's the plan. It is interesting to me that Paul asked the Romans to pray for protection for him on his trip to Jerusalem. Someone might say, "Wow! That prayer really was not answered!" He gets thrown into prison for two years, and then he is shipwrecked, and then he is imprisoned when he arrives in Rome. But when we look at all the dangers that God takes Paul through, you think God was not answering prayers for Paul? And we consider all the ministry fruitfulness that God produces along the way, and this may even be the time when the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are written, and when we do recognize that Paul actually ends up in Rome, which is what he wanted, to come to Rome, we have to conclude that God abundantly answered Paul's prayer, just not in a way that anyone praying would have imagined or asked for.

Paul's travel will begin soon. He sends Timothy and Erastus over to Macedonia to prepare the way. But before he himself sets off, opposition in Ephesus leads to a very dangerous moment for Paul and for the Christian movement in that city. If he is going to continue his ministry for God, that danger must first be avoided. This is Acts 19:23-41.

#### **Danger Avoided (Acts 19:23-35a)**

<sup>23</sup> About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way. <sup>24</sup> For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; <sup>25</sup> these he gathered together with the workmen of similar *trades*, and said, "Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. <sup>26</sup> "You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods *at all*. <sup>27</sup> "Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence." <sup>28</sup> When they heard *this* and were filled with rage, they *began* crying out, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" <sup>29</sup> The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia. <sup>30</sup> And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him. <sup>31</sup> Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater. <sup>32</sup> So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together. <sup>33</sup> Some of the crowd concluded *it was* Alexander, since the Jews had put him forward; and having

motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly.<sup>34</sup> But when they recognized that he was a Jew, a *single* outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"<sup>35</sup> After quieting the crowd, the town clerk said, "Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of the *image* which fell down from heaven?"<sup>36</sup> "So, since these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash."<sup>37</sup> "For you have brought these men *here* who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess."<sup>38</sup> "So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are *available*; let them bring charges against one another."<sup>39</sup> "But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly."<sup>40</sup> "For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's events, since there is no *real* cause *for it*, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering."<sup>41</sup> After saying this he dismissed the assembly.

Luke uses one of the titles for the Christian movement first used in Judea, "no small disturbance concerning the Way". Jesus himself is the Way, the Truth, the Life. He is our way to God, and He is our way of life. It is a new, counter-cultural approach to living that is creating problems for the craftsmen who make money off the worship of Artemis.

Worship of a mother goddess at Ephesus predated the Greek conquest of the city. The name "Artemis" is not Greek. There was a chaste, huntress version of an Artemis-like god on the Greek mainland. But the Ephesian Artemis combined the virgin warrior and the nurturing mother together. She was the whole woman. She was everything. You can get an idea of what Artemis' temple looked like by searching for an image of the Parthenon. Just google it. When you find that image, multiply it in your mind four times and you'll have the temple of Artemis in Ephesus, one of the seven great wonders of the ancient world, something they were really, really proud of. You can imagine that, if you visit Ephesus at this time, then you're going to have a picture of Artemis or her temple on your T-shirt. This is the identity of the city.

The silversmith Demetrius represented numerous craftsmen who worried about the loss of income that might occur if people stopped venerating Artemis. Then they start buying Christian T-shirts, and that's going to be a problem. And that's the number one concern he raises. But knowing how to stir up support for his argument against these Christians, Demetrius does not just leave it at the financial argument. He taps into three different streams of emotion. First, he creates fear over a loss of income. Our livelihood might be affected. "Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business." And that will get people's attention if you're saying that their financial state is going to be affected. After that, he stirs up religious feeling.

<sup>26</sup> "You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods *at all*."

Can you believe that? The charge of atheism was an early charge in writings against Christians. That makes no sense to us today that Christians are atheists. But back then to argue that there is only one God, to reject the vast number of gods recognized throughout the ancient world, that was tantamount to belief in no gods at all. To be against belief in the gods is to be a-theist: against god. That's not just an Ephesian problem. That is a problem all across Asia and the wider Greek-speaking world. This is bigger Hellenistic religious feeling. Demetrius brings in a third issue by describing the Christian message as an attack on the Ephesians sense of local identity.

<sup>27</sup> “Not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence.”

There is a real difference between these two streams of emotion. Where I am in Zagreb, Croatia, I could disagree with specific points of Roman Catholic doctrine, and that could get some people upset at me. But if I start arguing something more specific and local, if I say something bad specifically about the golden statue of Mary that’s on the column in the square, out in front of the cathedral, or if I disrespect the prayers given through the day at the stone gate leading to upper town, then I am tapping into a more fundamental sense of Zagreb identity, of how people understand themselves.

For me, if someone makes fun of the hymn, “Jesus Makes My Heart Rejoice,” or if they don’t like our sugar-cake or our lovefeast buns, if they make fun of the love-feast, or a brass band playing before the worship service, I am actually going to get upset. And I know it is silly, but my sense of Moravian identity is something fundamental about who I am and how I grew up. It is not a rational thing. It is an emotional thing.

Paul’s rejection of the gods results in a specific rejection of Artemis. And a degradation of Artemis is a degradation of Ephesus. And a degradation of Ephesus digs into the sense of a person’s own uniqueness and value.

<sup>28</sup> When they heard *this* and were filled with rage, they *began* crying out, saying, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

Luke suggests to us that Demetrius’ primary motivation was financial. And that is not hard to believe. Whether the motive is financial or political, this is a known formula that gets used through the centuries. You won’t find it difficult to think of an example in your own recent cultural experience. Today, especially if you think about religious nationalism. You know, how do we stir up support for our side and anger at the other side? You suggest an economic reality for which the other side is to blame. You know, because of their behavior, we are losing money. But don’t just make it about economics. That doesn’t sound quite credible enough. We may be upset about money, but let’s make it about something more pure. Let’s make it about religion. But don’t make it a rational argument about religion. Let’s not discuss theology. There might actually be something to that. We might have real differences to discuss, but we are not trying to have a productive, rational discussion. We are trying to move the masses. We are trying to get a huge number of people on our side. We don’t care what they think as long as they are angry at the other side. So, let’s make it an attack on religion and then make it personal. Your city, your denomination, your history, your sense of identity. That is what is being attacked here.

Those who instigate the emotion of a mob may have their own self-interest at heart, whether financial or political, but when they can strike the right cord, the mob takes on an electricity of its own. These people were not primarily motivated by an economic downturn. They were not worried about religious argumentation in the abstract. They are angry that anyone would attack their sense of identity and importance. This is who we are. We are Ephesians. And we are known for the temple of Artemis. “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

<sup>29</sup> The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia. <sup>30</sup> And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him. <sup>31</sup> Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater.

That's good advice. Paul had some high-up friends who gave him wise council. "Stay out of this storm of emotion!"

<sup>32</sup> So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together.

That's classic mob. Most of them have no idea why they are even there. Somebody talked bad about Ephesus. Somebody said something? "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" And you can see in here a glimpse of the antisemitism Jews have had to deal with for centuries. The Old Covenant code made them stand out as other, as not truly Ephesian, not truly European, not truly American, not truly African. They are something else. They are a convenient scapegoat.

<sup>33</sup> Some of the crowd concluded [they were there because of] Alexander, since the Jews had put him forward; and having motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly. <sup>34</sup> But when they recognized that he was a Jew, a *single* outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

For about two hours they're shouting, jumping up and down, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" It sounds like a soccer match in any major city. You know, like, "Ole, ole, ole, ole. Ole. Ole!" And then you launch into your team's chant. The songs begin to take on a sense of local identity. Here is one of the songs from Split.

Dalmatinac sam  
Tu sam rođen ja  
Plavo more zna,  
Da ga volim ja  
Splitskog Hajduka

That sounds a lot better when you have a crowd of guys singing it. And I don't really have any right to sing it. It says,

I'm a Dalmatian  
I was born here  
The blue sea knows  
That I love  
Hajduk of Split (Hajduk is the soccer team.)

It's fun. It's easy to get caught up in the emotion of it all. You feel like you are part of something. You belong to something. But things can turn nasty. They have another song about burning Zagreb fans alive. So, you tell them there is going to be no tourism at all this year. We are shutting down tourism. And say something bad about Mary. And then add on that Hajduk sucks. And even if they agree with you, it is okay for them to say those things. It is not okay for you to say that. Economic fear, religious identity, local identity, that's the way to start a riot. Add in an appropriate scapegoat, somebody we can all hate, and it can become quite dangerous.

So, they are going at this for two hours, most of them do not even know why they are there, and then the town clerk stands up and quiets the crowd, and the danger is averted. It was a real danger. We have got leaders in the city who are like, "Paul, don't go in there! This is explosive!" Jewish communities through history have suffered repeatedly, have not been rescued by God from the hands of angry mobs looking for a scapegoat to blame for economic problems, or the spread of disease, or natural disaster. We are really on the knife edge here. The outflow of emotion by the mob could easily turn physical and deadly, destructive against Jews' and Christians' homes and the synagogue. God kept the emotion of this incident contained to the theater, and He gave wisdom and success to the town clerk in quelling the crowd.



God also used the town clerk to correct the misconception of the people in the crowd. This is the second component of the pattern that we will see in each movement of Acts Part VI. That pattern starts with a danger avoided, then moves on to a misconception corrected. And in each case the misconception is corrected by someone other than Paul. In a rather clever method of presentation, Luke is calling real, credible witnesses in the course of his narrative.

**Misconception corrected (Acts 19:35b-41)**

We can imagine later, Paul on trial and this town clerk being called before the bench as a witness to events.

“Mr. Town Clerk. State for the court your responsibilities.”

“As the court knows, Ephesus is recognized by his majesty the Emperor of Rome as a free Greek city. I am the executive officer of the city assembly. I draft and publicize legislation. And I serve as a liaison between the government of Ephesus and the Roman provincial authorities whose offices are in Ephesus.”

“And those authorities would hold you accountable for a civil disturbance?”

“That is correct. I had a vested interest in calming down the crowd that had gathered because I could have been held responsible.”

“How did you calm the crowd?”

“It is my job to preside over the city assembly. I am recognized as a man of Ephesus and as a man of authority. When I made my presence known, the crowd quieted down to listen to what I would say. I began by affirming their local pride in Ephesus and Artemis, telling them,

‘Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of the *image* which fell down from heaven?

<sup>36</sup> So, since these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash.’”

“And what of these men charged by the mob with wrongdoing? These Macedonians Gaius and Aristarchus? And their leader, the Jew Paul who is on trial here today?”

“Right. I said to the whole crowd in the theater, ‘you have brought these men *here* who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess.’”

“Let us be clear on this for the court. You did not have any evidence that these men had robbed or defiled the temple of Artemis, or that they had spoken in a blasphemous manner about the goddess?”

“That is correct. And I told them, ‘if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are *available*; let them bring charges against one another. But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly.’

“Is that all you said?”

“Not quite. After affirming the greatness of Ephesus and then pointing out that no one had evidence of wrongdoing against the accused, I then warned the crowd that, on the contrary, they might have charges brought against them. I told them,

‘Indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today’s events, since there is no *real* cause *for it*, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering.’”

“So, it’s in your opinion that there was no legal cause for this riot?”

“That is correct.”

“And what happened then?”

“And then I dismissed the assembly.”

Rather ingeniously, Luke has recorded this testimony of a respected Greek leader in the context of this riot which might later be used as an attack on Paul’s character and on his behavior. If a Roman prosecutor were to bring up this disturbance in Ephesus, or if a Christian leader in Judea or somewhere else hears about it in a way that throws negative light onto Paul, this testimony recorded by Luke will help clarify misconceptions that someone might have about the event.

With the danger averted and the misconception corrected, Paul calls together the disciples, exhorts them, and leaves Ephesus. He was not leaving because of the riot. He had already made plans to leave and send Timothy on ahead. But the riot made good timing for leaving. Paul will spend three months in Macedonia and Achaia. He will get to make his long-desired visit to the Corinthians. The drama presented in those two letters to the Corinthians happened during Paul’s time in Ephesus. Now Paul can visit them. While with them, he will write to the Romans and send that letter with Phoebe, a deaconess of the church in Cenchrea, one of the two port-towns of Corinth.

And then, completing his ministry to the Greek and Macedonian churches, Paul will turn his sights east to Jerusalem, but not without taking one more opportunity to meet with the leaders of the church in Ephesus. Three months after the riot, as he is sailing to Jerusalem, he will stop for a day near Ephesus for a conference with the leaders of the church. He will exhort them to faithfully fulfill their ministry to the body of Christ, and he will also take opportunity to defend his own ministry. That is the third component in each of the five movement of Acts Part VI; danger avoided, misconception corrected, and defense provided. We will consider the defense component of this first movement in our next lesson.

### Reflection questions

1. Read Acts 19:21-41. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What questions come to mind?
2. Why does Paul plan to return to Jerusalem when he is already half-way to Rome? What does the text reveal here in 19:21-22? What does Paul add to this in Romans 15:22-33 (which may have been written soon after the riot when Paul was again in Corinth)?
3. What seems to be the primary motive of Demetrius? What is moving him to speak against Christians?
4. What motives does Demetrius tap into in his speech to the craftsmen?
5. What motivates other citizens to join in with the shouting of the mob? Use your imagination to come up with possible reasons this person or that person might find themselves in the theater shouting. What got them there?
6. What is the possible motive of the town clerk who speaks up in 35b-41?
7. What misconception does he address in regard to the Christians? How does he correct that misconception?
8. What does it mean for a Christian to be a good citizen? Were the Christians of Ephesus good citizens of the city?