



DEVOTIONAL

I have never been caught in the midst of a riot, much less been the target of one. But I have read of Hudson and Maria Taylor's harrowing experience in Yangchow, China, when an angry, drunk mob attacked their house and tried to set fire to it, and it doesn't sound enjoyable (see Roger Steer, *J. Hudson Taylor [OMF]*, pp. 217-224)! Somehow God miraculously spared them and their children from permanent injury and death, although Maria, who was six months pregnant, had to jump out of a second story window to escape. If you've never read the story of Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission, you are lacking a profound spiritual experience!

Our text reports the story of a riot in Ephesus instigated against Paul and the infant church there. Although Paul was not at the center of the action, it must have been an unforgettably frightening ordeal. He may have been referring to it when he told the Corinthians how he had fought with wild beasts at Ephesus (1 Corinthians 15:32). He probably was referring to it when he also told them, *"For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope"* (2 Corinthians 1:8-10).

Most of us have never had to face that kind of severe opposition because of our faith. Hopefully, we never will, but we should not be taken by surprise if it does come. Sometimes I think that the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture has made American Christians naively assume that they will be spared from any serious persecution in the end times. But whether the pretrib rapture is true or not, we have no guarantee of protection from persecution. Christians in other countries have suffered terribly for their faith, and America is not exempt. We need to be ready in case it comes.

Luke's purpose for including this incident seems to be twofold (I'm following Richard Longenecker, *Expositor's Bible Commentary* [Zondervan], 9:502): First, he was trying to present an apologetic that the Christian faith was a legitimate religion, not at odds with Roman law or government. Therefore, any who persecuted the Christian Church were in violation of Roman law. He shows this by telling of the friendliness of Asiarchs toward Paul (19:31). These men were from the noblest and wealthiest families in the province of Asia and were a quasi-religious association that sought to secure loyalty to Roman rule (ibid., pp. 503-504). The fact that they were friendly toward Paul shows that he could not have been a threat to the state. Also, the city clerk's intervention to quell the riot (19:35-41) shows that he did not regard the Christians as a threat to the city or its citizens.

Luke's second purpose for including this incident was to show that spiritually, the only thing that heathenism can do against Paul and the Christian faith "is to shout itself hoarse" (Ernst Haenchen, cited by Longenecker, p. 502). Unbelievers oppose the gospel because Satan has blinded their minds and the gospel confronts their sin. Satan's fury against the church is great, but pagan religions are impotent and empty in the long run. God's sovereign providence protects His church, even in the face of fierce opposition. So our text is showing us that ...

People oppose the gospel because Satan has blinded them and the gospel confronts their sin; but God rules over all.¹

OPEN IT

1. Have you ever taken part in a protest or some sort of rally for a cause? If so, what was it for or against? Did you feel the protest or rally accomplished its intended purpose or goal?

READ IT

Acts 19:21–41

EXPLORE IT

2. As Paul looked to the future where did he resolve to go?
3. What was the occupation of Demetrius, and what concern did he bring to the others?
4. What was the response of the crowd to the words of Demetrius, and why?
5. Why doesn't Paul intervene when his companions are dragged away?
6. What does the town clerk say to quiet the mob?

¹ Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-49-why-people-oppose-gospel-acts-1921-41>

APPLY IT

MY BUCKET LIST

After summarizing how the power of Jesus was displayed in Ephesus and spotlighting the triumph of the Word (v. 20), Luke tells about the protest in Ephesus. But before we see how the gospel impacted social norms, we get two verses about Paul's travel plans (vv. 21–22). This gives a glimpse of what's to come in the book of Acts. Paul plans on returning to Jerusalem via Macedonia and Achaia. Then he hopes to fulfill his desire to preach in Rome (cf. Romans 1:13). The Spirit prompts this decision, even though He lets Paul know that trials await him in Jerusalem (20:22–23; 21:10–11). Paul apparently wrote 1 Corinthians during his time here in Ephesus. He sent the letter ahead with Timothy and Erastus (1 Corinthians 16:5–10), and he later visited Corinth himself (Acts 20:1–2).²

- 7. Paul had a grand plan for his life and ministry that he believed would culminate in the city of Rome. How important is long-term planning to you? What are some pros and cons to this approach of planning for one's future?**

Paul also expressed his purpose of visiting Rome; more precisely he commented that he must see Rome, not in the sense of a tourist who says, "I must see Venice," but in the same sense as Jesus who was conscious that the course of his life was dictated by a "must" that had its origin in the purpose of God (Luke 4:43; 9:22).³

- 8. Paul says that he "must see Rome." What are some things you want to see or do before you die? Why are these bucket list items so important to you?**

- 9. What elements of Christian service or ministry do you desire to participate in before it's too late? What keeps you from these opportunities, and what steps are you taking to make this dream a reality?**

² Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Acts (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (Kindle Locations 6464–6471). Holman Reference. Kindle Edition.

³ Marshall, I. Howard. *Acts: 5* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) (p. 331). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

“And having sent two of his helpers” These two men were with Paul in Ephesus, and he sent them ahead to the churches in Macedonia and Achaia to prepare for the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. These two men were ideal choices. Timothy was well known among these churches and people are not so likely to balk at a collection if they trust a person. It may be that Erastus was the treasurer of Corinth before his conversion to Christ. *“Galus, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother”* (Romans 16:23). If so, he too would be a good man to send to prepare people for the taking up of a special offering. Paul undoubtedly tried to choose the right men for the task.⁴

10. Paul had many helpers along the way who enabled him to live out his Christian life and serve God. Who are some “helpers” that God has put into your life that have served to help you in your life and ministry as a Christian?

11. Who are you helping? In what ways does your service to them enhance their walk and ministry for God?

All In for the early church

Timothy and Erastus were given charge to handle the collection of money from the Macedonian churches (see 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).

12. What safeguards do we glean from this passage here in Acts regarding the handling of money, and what are some important safeguards and practices for churches today so that the monies given are kept safe and used wisely?

⁴ Sermon by Jack Arnold entitled “Christ Changes Culture” found @ <http://www.cleartheology.com/expo/01Acts/Acts%2047.html>

SILVERSMITHS UNION LOCAL 666

In verses 23–41 we read the last recorded event in Paul’s stay in Ephesus. It’s a vivid picture of what happens when people exalt Jesus instead of idols. Paul’s gospel-centered, Jesus-exalting, Spirit-empowered ministry impacted the local economy and caused an uproar. The “disturbance” begins with a man named Demetrius, a leader among the silversmiths (v. 24). These craftsmen made silver replicas of the temple of Artemis. People would purchase them as souvenirs and for home altars. These have been found throughout the Mediterranean world. John Polhill describes this temple: The temple of Artemis was indeed a hub of Ephesian economic life. It was an impressive building, some 165 feet by 345 feet in dimension and built on a platform 240 by 420 feet. The entire edifice was elaborately adorned in brilliant colors and gold leaf. The altar area was 20 feet square and contained a massive image of the goddess with a veiled head, with animals and birds decorating her head and lower body, and numerous breasts from her waist to her neck. The animals and breasts were symbolic of her status as the ancient Asian Mother Goddess, the goddess of nature who was believed to protect and preserve the fecundity of all living things (Acts, 408–9). This temple grew so wealthy that it became the main financial institution of Asia, receiving deposits and making loans (ibid.). Clearly, Artemis and the god of money were tied closely together in Ephesus.

The angry Demetrius gathers a crew of craftsmen and delivers his speech (vv. 25–27). Here’s his argument: Paul’s preaching threatens the craftsmen’s idol-making business—both its profitability and its reputation; Paul is misleading people by proclaiming that gods made with hands aren’t gods (cf. 17:24, 29). To these claims he adds a third argument: Paul’s preaching threatens to rob our world-renowned goddess of her rightful glory. This assertion was meant to stir up the emotions of patriotic Ephesians. In making it, he essentially said, “To attack Artemis is to attack Ephesus” (Polhill, Acts, 410). Demetrius has no interest in trying to learn what Paul is teaching. He’s driven ultimately by greed (“which is idolatry,” Colossians 3:5), not by his love for the goddess. He’s driven by dollars, not doctrine. Many today may not bow down to a statue, but millions bow to the idol of money—oblivious to the fact that it can never satisfy or provide ultimate security (Ecclesiastes 5:10; 1 Timothy 6:6–10).⁵

13. Idols were big business in the ancient world. What are some big business idols today and how could the gospel negatively impact sales?

14. Read again Acts 19:25–27. What caused a drop in idol sales? How might these verses cause us to rethink our strategies for cultural engagement with an unbelieving world?

15. Demetrius and his fellow silversmiths were worried about a “boycott” of their goods because of the people’s new-found faith. When is it right for Christians to boycott products or services? How can such boycotts be productive and in what ways can they fall short?

⁵ Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Acts (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (Kindle Locations 6476–6496). Holman Reference. Kindle Edition.

16. While it is understandable for pagans to have idols, are there any forms or kinds of idolatry today that have been made acceptable by Christians? What should the church do to address them?

MARRIED TO THE MOB

Benjamin Franklin said that **“a mob’s a monster; heads enough, but no brains.”** How sad it is when people permit themselves to be led by a few selfish leaders who know the art of manipulation. Demetrius made use of the two things the Ephesians loved the most: the honor of their city and the greatness of their goddess and her temple. Without the help of radio, TV, or newspaper, he got his propaganda machine going and soon had the whole city in an uproar. Max Lerner wrote in *The Unfinished Country*,

“Every mob, in its ignorance and blindness and bewilderment, is a League of Frightened Men that seeks reassurance in collective action.” It was a “religious mob” that shouted “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” to Pilate, and eventually got its way. Had this Ephesian mob succeeded in its plans, Paul would have been arrested and executed before the law could have stepped in to protect him. The confused crowd, some twenty-five thousand shouting people, finally filled up the amphitheater; most of them did not know what was happening or why they were there. Since the mob could not find Paul, they seized two of his helpers, Gaius (not the Gaius of Acts 20:4; Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14) and Aristarchus (Acts 20: 4). Paul wanted to enter the theater—what an opportunity for preaching the gospel! —but the believers and some of the city leaders wisely counseled him to stay away (Acts 19:30–31). Before long, racial prejudice entered the picture, when a Jew named Alexander tried to address the crowd (Acts 19: 33–34). No doubt he wanted to explain to them that the Jews living in Ephesus did not endorse Paul’s message or ministry, and, therefore, must not be made scapegoats just to satisfy the crowd. But his very presence only aroused the mob even more, and they shouted for two more hours, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” The crowd knew that the Jews did not approve of idols and would not honor Diana. The only thing that protected the Jews was the Roman law that gave them freedom of religion.⁶

17. Take a look at Luke’s description of the people in verses 28–34. What is the difference between a mob and any other group of people? What potential danger can come from any mob no matter if their assembly or protest is just or not?

18. Where have you seen a mob mentality take place in a church? What impact did the mob have on the rest of the church? How does a church protect itself against this happening?

⁶ Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Daring (Acts 13–28): Put Your Faith Where the Action Is* (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 90). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

EXECUTIVE DECISION

Finally, the city clerk, executive officer of the town council, quieted the crowd with a somber warning. “This meeting is adjourned!” the clerk said. Repeatedly in Acts and in church history since that time to the present, the Lord has used honest judges and government officials to protect His people who are under attack. William Barclay says [The town clerk] saved Paul and his companions but he saved them because he was saving his own skin.... Paul wished to face the mob but they would not let him. Paul was a man without fear. For the silversmiths and the town clerk it was safety first; for Paul it was always safety last.⁷

19. How much time and energy should Christians engage with the political authorities to protect their religious freedoms?

The church ministers by persuasion, not propaganda. We share God’s truth, not man’s religious lies. Our motive is love, not anger; and the glory of God, not the praise of men. This is why the church goes on, and we must keep it so.⁸

20. Read the above quote. Do you agree with it? What does speaking with compassion, clarity, and conviction look like in a world that seems at times totally unwilling to listen?

The crowd was dismissed, and no doubt the people went home congratulating themselves that they had succeeded in defending their great city and their famous goddess. It is doubtful that many of them questioned the truthfulness of their religion or determined to investigate what Paul had been preaching for three years. It is much easier to believe a lie and follow the crowd. But Ephesus is gone, and so is the worldwide worship of Diana of the Ephesians. The city and the temple are gone, and the silversmiths’ 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 Jesus Christ are still here! We have four inspired letters that were sent to the saints in Ephesus—Ephesians, 1 and 2 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 not have met Demetrius in the first place!)⁹

21. Ephesus is known primarily now only for the impact Christianity had on its area and people. How can that truth motivate us to not grow weary in being salt and light in our community no matter the opposition that comes our way?

⁷ Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 4334-4335). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁸ Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Daring (Acts 13–28): Put Your Faith Where the Action Is* (The BE Series Commentary) (pp. 91-92). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

⁹ Ibid.

Note: This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.church/smallgroups