

G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

Paul's Third Missionary Journey, Part 3

A Riot at Ephesus

Acts 19:21-41

February 17, 2008

- I. **Demetrius Instigates a Riot**
- II. **The Crowd Rushes to the Theatre**
- III. **The City Clerk Quiets the Crowd**

- ❑ It has been said that there are two kinds of music: good music and bad music. I, for one, prefer good music. In fact, I love good music. And as we look back several centuries, one of the clearest characteristics of good music is that it *stands the test of time*.
- ❑ Like anything, different types and genres of music come and go, yet, it is the good music that remains. Music from greats such as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven. Even in the church today, objectively good music abounds through past [and present] hymn writers, such as Isaac Watts, William Cowper and Charles Wesley.
- ❑ Yet, it is also quite amazing, as we look back over history; the same principle is true for “religion.” If you were to travel to Rome or Greece or Turkey today – commercial and religious centers in the ancient Greco-Roman world – you would observe ruins...mere shadows of a by-gone era. It would be impossible apart from the aid of an archeological expert, to picture in your mind and imagine what the grandeur of cities like Rome, Athens, and Ephesus would have been some 2,000 years ago.
- ❑ The reason? Because the gods upon which the people built their cities lay in ruin. For, when each of these cities fell at the hands of foreign invaders, so did their man-made gods – gods who were dependent upon their worshippers for their very existence.
- ❑ Yet, I marvel at the truth of Christianity as I look at it, not only from a theological, but from a historical perspective. Christianity has not only stood the test of time, unchanged

for nearly 2,000 years, but it stands out as the one true – and truly unique – “religion” in the world.

- ❑ The other two monotheistic religions in the world – Judaism and Islam – present a view of God that asserts that he is unknowable. Consequently, Islam and Judaism [Judaism in its modern-form], are essentially agnostic. Even the concept of salvation in these religions is essentially unknown.
- ❑ Therefore, as Paul makes his last stand in the Book of Acts against the pagan deities of his day, he does so with the full confidence and understanding that his God – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – is the eternal God of the universe. When all else falls, dies, and fades away, the One True and Living God remains.

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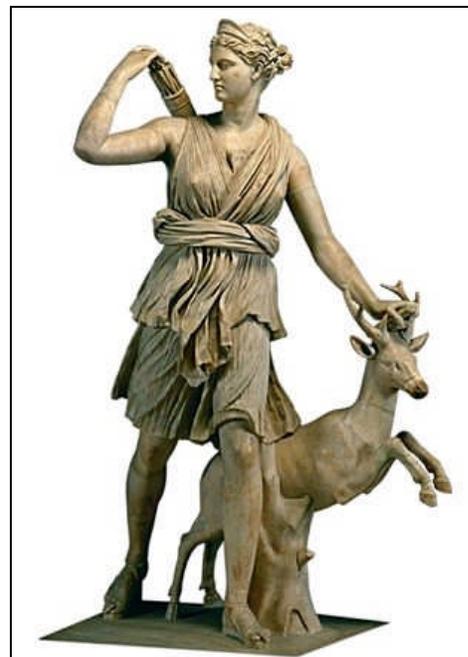
- ❑ Here, in **Acts 19:21-41**, Paul’s three-year ministry in Ephesus finally comes to an end. This is the second and last confrontation in the Book of Acts between Paul and the pagan deities of the ancient Greco-Roman world.
- ❑ In **Verses 21-22**, Luke writes, “Now after these things were finished, 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.’ And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.”
 - Luke’s description, at first glance, appears rather strange – that Paul would desire to go to Jerusalem by way of Macedonia and Achaia – two regions that were in an opposite direction from Jerusalem.
 - Yet, this is fully consistent with Paul’s great desire for the unity of the church and his responsibility to do his best to ensure that the churches throughout the region remain unified and grounded in the gospel.
 - Furthermore, the Church in Jerusalem was very poor, and one of Paul’s objectives was to gather support for the church there from the Gentile regions, such as Macedonia and Achaia [Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8-9].
 - Once Paul visited Jerusalem [by way of Macedonia and Achaia], he intended to go to Rome, as he makes clear here. However, according to **Romans 15:28**, he sought to go even further west – into Spain. Perhaps, he hoped the Roman Christians would help finance such a trip. Because of Paul’s great desire to preach the Gospel in Rome, the remainder of the Book of Acts will be dedicated to the continual movement of Paul in the direction of Rome – the great capital of the Empire.
 - In order to prepare for his arrival in Macedonia [and possibly collect financial support for the impoverished Church in Jerusalem], Paul sent two of his coworkers, a Corinthian named Erastus, referred to in **Romans 16:23** and **2 Timothy 4:20**. Also, Paul sent Timothy with Erastus.

I. Demetrius Instigates a Riot

- ❑ In **Verses 23-25**, Luke writes, “About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, ‘Men, you know that our prosperity depends on this business.’”
- ❑ This riot may be what Paul is referring to in **2 Corinthians 1:8-10**: “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 so that we would 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. And He will yet deliver us,”

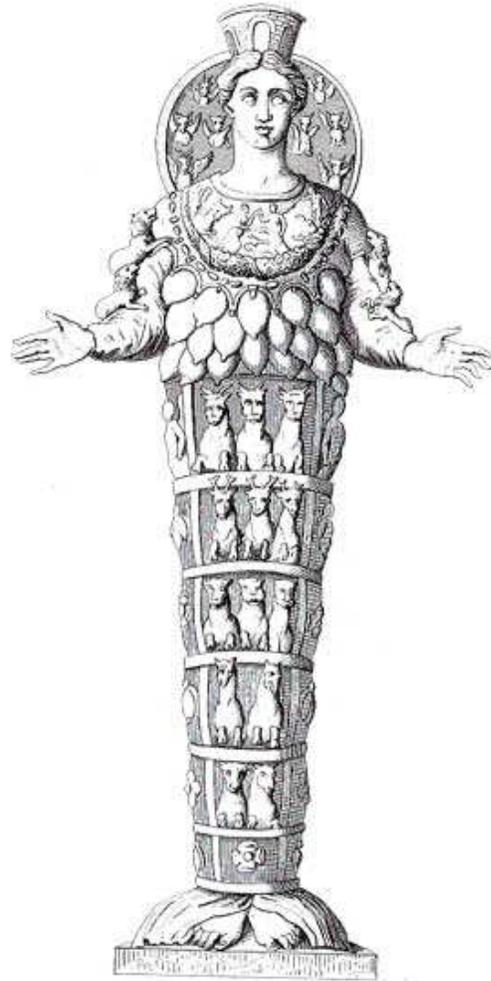
THE GODDESS ARTEMIS [ROMAN, *DIANA*]

- ❑ Artemis was the Greek goddess of the hunt, carrying with her a bow and arrow. She was considered a virgin goddess who valued chastity and also helped women in childbirth. Furthermore, in Ephesus, she was the chief deity of the city and was likely worshipped as the *Lady of Ephesus*, the “Mother Goddess” of the city.
- ❑ She was the daughter of Zeus and Leto, and one of the sisters of Apollo. The Romans referred to her as Diana.



- ❑ Artemis was also known as a **fertility goddess** and as “mistress of the wild beasts.” Ancient statues of Artemis picture her adorned with a zodiac necklace, demonstrating her sovereignty and authority over the stars and events of humans.

- In her Temple, the altar to Artemis was 20 feet by 20 feet. It contained a colossal representation of the goddess, complete with a veiled head. Further, her head and lower body were adorned with animals and birds. Yet, the most famous aspect of the statue was the numerous breasts from Artemis' neck down to her waist. John Polhill comments, **“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 [fruitfulness] of all living things.”**



THE TEMPLE OF ARTEMIS

- The great temple to Artemis which stood in Paul's day had been built to replace the ancient temple which burned in 356 B.C. The Temple was located a mile and a half to the northeast of the city of Ephesus. Female cultic/pagan slaves as well as male eunuchs served within the temple complex.
- The Temple of Artemis was impressive, even by modern-day standards. The platform of the Temple measured 225 by 425 feet. The building itself was 165 feet by 345 feet. It had 127 marble columns, each of them being 62 feet high. The statue of Artemis stood in

an inner room of the Temple. **The entire complex was the largest building in the ancient Greek world.**

- ❑ So large was the Temple to Artemis that it was considered one of the **seven wonders of the ancient world. In fact, it was four times larger than the Parthenon atop the Acropolis in Athens, Greece.**

THE WORSHIP OF ARTEMIS

John Polhill writes, “In Ephesus the worship of the goddess centered around the **Artemision**, a week in the spring dedicated to the goddess. The highlight of the festivities was a solemn processional in which the image of the goddess was carried through the streets between the theater and the temple. Throughout the week there were numerous events, including ritual plays and dances. In former times the primary attendants of the goddess were self-emasculated priests [eunuchs]...”

- ❑ Although the primary Temple to Artemis was in Ephesus, at least thirty-three known sanctuaries to the pagan goddess existed throughout the Empire. In fact, even Rome had an Artemis sanctuary as well as its own version of the Artemision, which the Romans celebrated during the month of April.
- ❑ Artemis [Diana] was worshipped throughout the ancient Greco-Roman world, and archeologists have discovered at least thirty-three shrines dedicated to this goddess alone.

THE ECONOMICS OF ARTEMIS

- ❑ The Temple of Artemis was one of the financial and economic centers of Ephesus. In fact, so profitable were the activities surrounding Artemis and her Temple, that the complex eventually emerged as “the principle financial institution of Asia” as well as serving as **a bank – receiving deposits and granting loans.**
- ❑ In **Verse 24**, what becomes clear is that the profitability of one of the industries closely linked to the worship of Artemis was silver making.
- ❑ In fact, this major riot in Ephesus is sparked by a silversmith named Demetrius.
 - Luke states that he “made silver shrines of Artemis” and that this business “was bringing no little business to the craftsmen.” In other words, the business of making silver shrines of Artemis was quite lucrative in the city of Ephesus.
 - Throughout the year, pilgrims would descend upon Ephesus and purchase one of the silver shrines from the silversmiths, such as Demetrius. **These pilgrims would purchase the miniature temple replicas to use in their homes for private worship or to present as offerings in the actual Temple of Artemis itself.**

- In **Verse 25**, Demetrius, who may have been the head of the silversmith guild, stated his primary concern, “Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business.” He continues in **Verses 26-27**, “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. Not only is there danger that this trade of ours falls 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.” From this speech by Demetrius, several truths emerge:

1. **The true motive of Demetrius was not the defense of the glory of Artemis; but rather, the protection of his own personal wealth.** This is clear in **Verse 25**, when he says, “Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business.”

- Demetrius begins by stating his true concern – the threat of Paul’s teaching to the profitability of their business. However, he then begins to speak as though his concern has something to do with Artemis [which, technically, it did!], saying, “Not only is their danger that this trade of ours falls 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.”
 - Notice, the interesting point that Demetrius makes. He is concerned at the “**worth**” of the Temple of Artemis. The reason for this, is that if her “worth” drops, so does the monetary worth of the silver replicas of the temple that he makes! Again, for Demetrius, the issue boils down to money. Finally, he speaks of Artemis being “dethroned from her magnificence”; yet, again, this concern ultimately is a way to mask his selfish fears.
- Professing Christians are experts in “masking” our true motives in “spiritual talk.” Conversations such as, “How is ‘so-and-so’ doing? I would like to know how to pray for him better.” Or, “I have prayed about it, and I have a peace.” Or, “The Lord spoke to me and I believe that I am to do ‘x’.” Comments like these are often ways that all of us seek to “spiritually mask” our true selfish motives. If we can say “I have prayed about it.” Or, “I have a peace.” Or, “I believe this is what God wants me to do.”...then, we have a blank check to do whatever we would like with little or no accountability.
- So it was with Demetrius and the Ephesian silversmiths. **They were not truly concerned about Artemis. They were concerned about themselves.** Although, they were good in masking their true intentions.

2. **The chief end of every religion other than Christianity [to include the worship of Artemis] is personal fulfillment and satisfaction in things apart and separate from God Himself.** “God” is simply reduced to the role of fulfilling the personal, selfish, and carnal desires of the worshipper.

- The chief end of Christianity is the glory of God and the enjoyment and fulfillment of His worshippers *in Him*. **For the Scriptures declare that there is no satisfaction, no joy, and no fulfillment outside of God Himself.** This is why **only** the God of the Scriptures can say [and only the God of the Scriptures can even speak!], “I not only give truth, I AM Truth; I not only give life, I AM Life; I not only give joy, I AM Joy; and I not only point to the way of salvation, I AM the Way.”
- This explains why central benefit of Demetrius’ relationship with Artemis – wealth – was threatened by the actions of men. However, **the central benefit of our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ – God Himself – can never be taken away by God.**
- In the ancient world, when a desire or need arose, the pagans would simply create a new deity which would be responsible for that area of life. As a result, there was no god that was in absolute control of everything. Unfortunately, far too many of us view the Sovereign Lord in the same manner. We view Him as being in control of whatever crisis we may find ourselves in at a given point in time. We too seldom view Him as the absolute ruler of the cosmos.

3. **True worship of the true God is, in its essence, spiritual, not physical.** Yet, the worship of Artemis [and every false god] involved material objects that cost money; however, the worship of our God is spiritual – standing in direct contrast to every other god. The worship of the true God “costs” nothing [materially]; while costing everything [spiritually]. For we are to give Him all of who we are, and in turn, **He gives us Himself.** Tragically, the people of Ephesus gave Artemis material objects and she, in turn, gave them nothing!

- This is always one of that clearest signs of a false religion – that true devotion would cost anything monetarily, whereby anyone, to include “The Church” would benefit in some material way.

4. **Next, every God other than the God of the Bible is a false god and is created.**

- Demetrius’ comment that “Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all” is perfectly consistent with the overall teaching, not only of Paul, but of Scripture [Isaiah 40:17; 44:9-20; 46:1-7; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 10:20].
- **It is quite possible that Paul’s most scathing attack on the idolatry in Ephesus occurred in the springtime during the festival of Artemision.**
- **Imagine the reaction of most Americans if someone launched a massive, multi-billion dollar advertising campaign attacking the claims of Christianity, and he did so during the month of December. The truth is that the people most concerned with such attacks, at least during that time of**

year, would be those who financially profit from the commercialization of Christmas! In fact, most of them would likely not even be Christians.

5. Finally, unlike Artemis, the One True and Living God cannot be dethroned.

However, it is Demetrius' concern that, because of the widespread teaching of Paul, that Artemis would be lose her magnificence.

- The majesty of Almighty God is infinitely beyond all human comprehension. Furthermore, because God's nature is essentially spiritual, the fallen human eye cannot even behold the majesty of the infinite and eternal God.

II. The Crowd Rushes to the Theatre

- After hearing the words of Demetrius, Luke explains, in **Verse 28**, that the men “were filled with rage” and “began crying out, saying, ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’” This phrase, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians” was often used in this region. The ancient Ephesian author Xenophon of Ephesus wrote, in *Ephesian Tales* “our ancestral goddess, the great Artemis of the Ephesians.”
- Yet, in **Verse 29**, Luke states, “The city was filled with confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia.”

- Notice one of the primary characteristics of this crowd was that they were “filled with **confusion**.” The word here translated, “confusion” is the Greek word συγχυσεως, *synchyseos*. It is the only time in the entire New Testament that this word is used; however, in the Septuagint, LXX, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, the word is used as the name for the city of Babel in Genesis 11:9.
- Such a description stands in direct contrast to those who are filled with the Holy Spirit of God. For our **God is not a God of confusion, but of order and peace** [1 Corinthians 14:33, 40; 11:1-16; Galatians 1:7; 5:10].

- One of the most beautiful pictures of such order, amidst diversity, is in **Revelation 7:9-12**:

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, ‘Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever Amen.’”

- Here is a picture of innumerable believers, from “every tribe and tongue.” They all have different culture backgrounds, they are from different races, and they

even speak different languages. Yet, they are all one in Christ, and therefore, there is perfect harmony and unity!

- This is why in Christian worship even today, where there Spirit of the LORD is, there is peace, harmony and order. If there is confusion, then it is NOT Holy Spirit-wrought.
- Yet, the practice of every false religion will eventually lead to confusion!
- Notice, in **Verse 29**, the men of Ephesus, in the midst of their rage and confusion, drag two companions of Paul into the theatre.
- The great theatre in Ephesus was a magnificent open-air amphitheater that was almost 500 feet in diameter. It was built on the western slope of Mount Pion and could seat nearly 25,000 spectators. It was the location of massive civic assemblies which occurred there three times each year.
- In **Verse 30**, Luke states that Paul desired to go to the theater; however, “the disciples” and the “Asiarchs” urged him not to go.

○ According to Richard Longnecker, the **Asiarchs**:
“...were members of the noblest and wealthiest families of the province of Asia and were bound together in a league for promoting the cult of the emperor and Rome...Every year an Asiarch was elected for the entire province, and additional Asiarchs were elected for each city that had a temple honoring the emperor. The title was probably borne for life by officers in the league; so in Paul’s day there could have been a number of Asiarchs at Ephesus.”

- Luke’s inclusion of this detail certainly demonstrates that Paul had gained allies and friends in the highest levels of government.

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- Yet, so enraged and confused were the people of Ephesus, that Luke writes, in an almost *humorous* manner, in **Verse 32**, “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.**”

The men of Ephesus are shouting and frantically running around in confusion, and they do not even know why!

- Here, in **Verse 32**, the word translated “confusion” is συγκεχυμενη, *synkechymene* in the Greek. Here, it is slightly different from “confusion” in Verse 29. Here, it can be rightly translated as “chaos.” It can also mean “mixed up” or “confounded.” It is also used as a reference to Babel in Genesis 11:7,9.
- So it is for those, who are even professing Christians, that lack genuine faith. They do not know what they believe. They are not grounded. And, as a result, they are vulnerable to being blindly led by “whatever the crowd does.”

- As James writes, in **James 1:6-8**: “But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”
- Then the crowd, in their panic, falsely accuses a man named Alexander, because the Jews had put him forward. In other words, they were so out of control, they were willing to condemn anyone of the perceived crime.
- Then, in **Verse 34**, once they recognized that he was a Jew, they began shouting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” **for two hours**.
 - It is an interesting thought to think, “What was God doing as this riot raged in Ephesus?” And the answer is clear: He remained in absolute control on His throne.
 - So often, when we do not know what we believe or doubt what we want to believe, we become like these Ephesian pagans when challenged. We become defensive, angry and even irrational.
 - However, God remains on His throne. One of the greatest Verses that demonstrates this truth is Psalm 29:10. “The LORD sat as King at the flood; Yes, the LORD sits as King forever.” In other words, as the flood raged, and it seemed as though all was chaotic, God *sat* as King – **the Ruler of the cosmos in absolute control**.
 - This is why Paul can confidently assert that God will work all things together for the good of His people and His own glory – for He is in control.

III. The City Clerk Quiets the Crowd

- Then, in the midst of this massive confusion, the town clerk quiets the crowd and stands to speak [**Verse 35**]. The town clerk would have been the most powerful elected civic officer in the city, someone similar to a modern-day mayor or city manager. He would have also been the liaison – go-between man – between the city and the Roman occupying authorities. Further, he would have been the keeper of the official city records and the accountant for the temple funds. As such, his opinion would have carried great weight among the people, especially given that he was the most powerful man in a city that was considered “the guardian of the Temple of Artemis.”
- In **Verses 35-40**, the city clerk offers a straightforward and well-reasoned speech intended to calm the Ephesians.
 - He opens, in **Verses 35-36**, with a question, “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? So, since these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash.”

- The “image which fell down from heaven” was most likely a meteor, which would have been viewed as a sign from heaven.
- Then, in **Verses 37-39**, the town clerk exonerates Paul and his companions, stating that they “are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess.”
- Therefore, just as Paul was vindicated by Gaius in Corinth, so he is vindicated by the pagan town clerk in Ephesus.
- In fact, in **Verse 40**, the town clerk warns of the “danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today’s events [from Roman officials], *since there was no real cause for it...*”
- Finally, after the crowd calms down, Luke writes, in **Verse 41**, “After saying this he dismissed the assembly.”

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- So, the question remains: “Where is Artemis now?” - She, along with all other false gods, is buried with her worshippers – for **it is was out of them that she was created – and it was with them that she died.**
- The Great **Temple to Artemis** **TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO** [c. 500 B.C.]



- The Temple to Artemis **TODAY** [2008 A.D.]



- In the year 401, B.C., the Temple of Artemis was finally destroyed, but a mob, reportedly led by John Chrysostom. And along with the destruction of the physical Temple of Artemis – so was the goddess herself destroyed.
- However, our God – the One True God – exists from eternity. He is the self-existent One who has life in Himself and the One who created all out of nothing. He is infinite and without limits and consequently **He does not dwell in houses made of human hands.**
- He can never be destroyed, for He is uncreated. He can never be enshrined, for He is unlimited and infinite. He has no end, for He is eternal.
- Therefore, if we place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – the eternal Son of God – we, unlike Artemis, will be “in Him” and with Him for eternity.