

ACTS 19.21

SLIDE # 1 and Genesis Rabbah 38 – Terach, Abram and death of Haran

- Monotheism
- Jewish humour

Luke's sense of humour – esp. Sons of Sceva and confusion and Demetrius' words

Background **SLIDE # 2**

“After all this happened”:

- Preaching in synagogue
- Lectures in Hall of Tyrannus
- Sons of Sceva and book-burnings

Paul has resolved to go back through Macedonia and Achaia en route back to Jerusalem, no doubt to deliver financial relief collected (see 2 Cor 8-9), but primarily to attend Pentecost festival.

Then plans to go on to Rome. “I must see Rome” isn't a tourist's dream but the '*dei* of divine necessity', i.e. “God has directed that I must...”

Sends Timothy and Erastus on to Macedonia ahead of him.

“No little disturbance concerning the Way”

NB. Paul plays no active role in this narrative. A reminder that Acts not primarily about Paul, but the spread of the Gospel, which threatens established religions and social ways.

Origin of riot

Artemis (Gk. = Roman Diana), the most widely followed cult in the ancient world. **SLIDE #3**

- Guardian of the city
- Were 33 other worship sites, from Spain to Syria
- Temple = one of 7 wonders of world. 4x size of Parthenon in Athens, 127 x 18m columns.
- Also a safe place to deposit money – functioned as a bank. Willimon: Artemis... was a goddess of banking and protector of debtors; and thus her worship was a syncretism of idolatrous religious devotion and economic interest.
- Made Ephesus a city of tremendous importance, as a centre of pilgrimage
- Pop. of 250,000

Demetrius:

- Shrines = not souvenirs but votive offerings, and idols to take home for worship or use as lucky charms

Paul's converting of pagans is impacting their livelihood.

Primary concern = self-interest, i.e. financial loss

Loss would have been significant because of the success of Paul's mission.

+ three other concerns, which = more respectable motives!:

- trades coming into disrepute: peddling trinkets which of no use/religious junk. **SLIDE #3** Abraham.
Artisans particularly vulnerable as workers with hands were of low social status. What status they did have = tied to their ability to make money. Easily marginalised if didn't make money.
- The temple will lose its prestige (one of 7 wonders of ancient world)
- and goddess will be discredited – “deposed from her magnificence”

The latter 2 would impact whole city as its whole life – religious, cultural, social and economic, revolved around cult of Artemis (its rites, festivals, routines and calendar).

Artemis cult, like other pagan cults at time, not so much a private devotion and belief but “mainly a public affair intertwined with politics and beliefs about the well-being of the city as a whole.” (Witherington)

Course of riot

Rage, and fervour for Artemis – “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

City filled with confusion.

Rushed into the theatre (>24,000) dragging Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul’s travel companions. **SLIDES #4 & 5**

The disciples and Asiarchs wouldn’t allow Paul to go into the theatre.

Asiarchs (holders of high office, powerful and wealthy men in the league of Greek cities within the Roman Empire). Guardians of the imperial cult.
=> didn’t see the Way as any threat, part of Judaism still cf. Gallio.

Confusion reigned in the theatre:

- Some called out one thing, some another
- Most did not know why they had come together
- Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward, to make a defence. While Judaism opposed idols too, it was an officially tolerated religion in Roman Empire and no threat (Jews not evangelistic/actively proselytising) => wanted to distance Judaism from the Way of Christ.
- But when they recognised he was a Jew, all united: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Blind prejudice.

i.e. not interested in reasoned debate, simply blind worship of Artemis.

Quelling of riot

Town clerk quiets the crowd, then says:

- Commends Ephesus as temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky (meteorites = considered to be sacred objects, sent by the gods, cf. 1980 movie *The Gods Must Be Crazy*).
- undeniable and don’t need defending. Implication: the claims against the Way are exaggerated, and true worshippers of Artemis will not be put off; Artemis will triumph cf. Gamaliel. Let Artemis defend herself??
- Timothy & Erastus are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess (technically done nothing specific. Maybe Paul would have been in more danger!)
- Demetrius and craftsmen should lay a private complaint properly, with the courts, to be heard by the proconsul.
- Anything else/additional, i.e. a public, more serious charge, can be settled in the *regular* assembly (met 3x per month, properly called v’s this one, which is irregular)
- In danger of being charged with rioting as no justification for the commotion

Dismisses the assembly.

Lessons from riot

Nothing totally new in this passage: affirms things already noted, esp.

- Paul's strategy of following up churches he has visited previously to ensure they're going on for the Lord
- Paul's Jewish piety & report to Jerusalem – by Pentecost (see 20.17)
- Foolishness of idolatry – cf. Athens 17.29
- conversion requires a complete rejection of pagan past

But particularly emphasised and of great relevance to us for evangelism and Covid:

1. Nature of opposition to the Way, esp. persecution:

- exaggerated risk/fear, twisting of truth, e.g. early Christians = cannibals.

Necessary because Christianity cannot be defeated on rational grounds. Good news for all.

Demetrius exaggerated to whip up support/hysteria.

Haechen: "The only thing heathenism can do against Paul is shout itself hoarse" (2 hours of hysterical shouting "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!")

BUT "The keen impression these vivid images of chaos and a mob riot create indicates a threat to the Gospel far worse than reasoned debate" (Witherington)

NB> reality of this sort of thing in places like parts of India today.

Christians need to be careful too though! Yes, all need to repent, and world's values very different, but esp. in societies founded on Christian values/by Christians, not all is bad.

Don't exaggerate/misrepresent the evil of the world and non-believers as turns them away. In our day, need to guard against exaggerated/irrational fear. Cf. Elijah.

2. Not all non-Christians were opposed to the Way,

- some even allies e.g. the Asiarchs here.
- Some were used by God unwittingly to help or advance it, e.g. Gallio in Corinth, the town clerk here. Cf. Cyrus in exilic times.

Don't tar all non-believers with the same brush!

God 'plants' Christians in significant roles for reason! Ashley Bloomfield.

And be careful not to offend/insult those who are not opposed to us!

Where Christianity a minority faith Christians very mindful of this.

Paul and early Christians very keen to defend the fact that Christianity no threat to Roman society – Christians are good citizens, and if act so “no law against such things as these” (Fruit of the Spirit, Gal 5.23).

Christians to work for good of the City (not just private faith) cf. Jer 29.4-7

Paul: pray for Govt – 1 Tim 2.1-4

3. Significance of Mammon v's God, here and throughout NT.

Greed or acquisitiveness an obstacle to submitting to lordship of Christ and saving faith in him, and faithful discipleship following the way – Luke 16.1-14; Acts 1.17-20; 5.1-11; 8.20-22; 16.16-18.

V's willingness to share possessions – Acts 4.32-37.

Financial issues musn't dominate church today E.g. campaign against church applying for lottery grants, esp. to fund buildings, let alone ministries.

4. Paul's flexibility,

- in way operated (synagogue -> Hall of Tyrannus)
- his travel plans. The Spirit's leading = always decisive, but also responded to context and opportunities. Will see that again in 20.3, but here, having sent Timothy and Erastus on, he hangs around for a while longer. See too Rom 1.10-13; 2 Cor 1.15-18;

On way home avoids Ephesus as presumably too dangerous, calls elders to Miletus (20.17).

- accepted advice from disciples and Asiarchs not to enter theatre