

Acts 19:21-41

21-22 We have a brief preview of Paul's plans. This was the long way back to Jerusalem, but there was a purpose in it. Paul was displaying the unity of the church by taking a collection from the Gentile churches (a love offering) because the church in Jerusalem was in need. (Romans 15:25-27; James 2:15-16) He sent Timothy and Erastus ahead so that people would be ready to give.

Paul was ever moving westward in his outreach. He wanted to reach the church in Rome to impart a blessing on them. (Romans 1:11) But he planned to go even further west to Spain. (Romans 15:22-24) He would get to Rome, but not in the way he had planned.

23 They had a long period of fruitful ministry in Ephesus, but before Paul left on his next journey, the effects of conversions in the city created a controversy. The Way was an early name for the faith. (Acts 9:2)

24 The shrine of Artemis in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. There were 33 different shrines to her in the Roman Empire, the most to any one god or goddess. Demetrius was a common name. It sounds like he was either the head of the silver workers guild or had some kind of lucrative approval from the priests to make replicas of the shrine. He subbed out the work to other silver workers. The little shrines would be purchased and taken home as a household shrine. Though no silver ones have remained, (probably due to the value of the silver) a number of terra cotta ones have been discovered.

25-26 He begins his speech with the real motivation for the riot, money. The Gospel had been so effective in helping large numbers of people realize that idols were worthless that the revenues of the idol makers were taking a hit. Praise God! (1Corinthians 8:4-6) It was partly due to Paul's diligence. (Acts 20:27,31) MacArthur also point out that another factor may have been the public display of purity back in verse 18-19. The city saw they were serious. It was the power of changed lives, not political activism or verbal attacks, that drew others to believe. If we only had that problem in Sedona!

27 He sounds so noble, but remember, it's all about the money. The city derived a great deal of revenue when, during the spring, great crowds would make pilgrimages to the temple of Artemis in Ephesus.

28-30 His speech worked. He got the people to fear the loss of their income and fear can drive a crowd. They grabbed Paul's coworkers. The theater is well preserved today and could hold about 25,000. City business was usually conducted there. Paul wanted to appeal to them – what a fearless Jesus freak! –

but the other disciples were afraid he would be killed and stopped him. (Acts 20:24)

31 Paul had made friends in high places. If you want to reach a town, you must reach out to every sector, including the officials of the city. Official –Assiarch – was a member of the Emperor cult and each city with Emperor shrines elected one or more of them to represent this group of the noble, wealthy class. They held the title for life so there were a number of people in Ephesus with the title.

32 Chaos is the devil’s work. Persecution often pulls in people who don’t understand the issues. (1Corinthians 14:33)

33-34 The Jews may have been trying to disassociate themselves from the Christians, but Alexander didn’t get a chance to speak. Recognizing he was a Jew just fired up the crowd all the more. They knew the Jews believe in one God and renounce idols. Instead of separating themselves from Christians, they were lumped together with them.

35-36 The mayor’s speech had a calming effect, but he was completely mistaken. Today, no one worships Artemis, but there are more than a billion followers of Jesus Christ.

37-39 He was telling them to be civilized and work within the law.

40-41 If Rome investigated the riot and found there was no just cause for it, the city could lose some of its privileges. For several centuries, Ephesus was instrumental in the growth of the church. (Psalm 76:10)