

RIOT IN EPHEBUS

Acts 19:23-41

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Paul and Demetrius

Key-location: Ephesus

Key-repetitions:

- Reasons for the riot in Ephesus: silversmiths made money from models of the temple (Ac 19:24-25); Demetrius said Paul's preaching could hurt their trade (Ac 19:26-27); the temple of Artemis could lose its importance (Ac 19:27); Ephesus' goddess could be robbed of her majesty (Ac 19:27); the craftsmen became furious (Ac 19:28); an uninformed mob became violent (Ac 19:29, 32).
- People who protected Paul: believers wouldn't let Paul appear before the mob (Ac 19:30); government officials, who were Paul's friends, urged Paul not to enter the theater (Ac 19:31); the city clerk defended Paul and his companions (Ac 19:35-37).
- Paul and his companions did not: rob the temples (Ac 19:37); insult Ephesus' goddess (Ac 19:37).

Key-attitudes:

- Silversmiths' selfish greed masked as patriotism and religious loyalty.
- Mob violence.
- Concern for Paul.

Initial-situation:

Paul left Antioch of Syria to begin his third missionary journey. The basic purposes of Paul's third missionary trip were the same as the second, to take the gospel to non-evangelized cities and to strengthen churches in places already visited.

Paul went to Ephesus. Paul spoke in the synagogue for three months. Some Jews refused to believe and publicly cursed the Lord's Way. Paul then taught daily in Tyrannus' school for two years. Paul's daily teaching resulted in all Jews and non-Jews, who lived in the province of Asia, hearing the Lord's word.

Initial-problem:

A silversmith named Demetrius called together other silversmiths and said, "Men, we make a lot of money from our business. Paul has convinced many people here in Ephesus and in almost all of Asia that man-made gods are no gods at all."

Final-situation:

After the uproar ended, Paul sent for the disciples, encouraged them, said good-bye, and left Ephesus.

BIBLE STORY

A disturbance about the Way of Christ developed in Ephesus. Demetrius, a silversmith, made miniature silver shrine models of the temple of the goddess Artemis. (*Artemis, the "Great Mother," was a goddess of fertility. Her temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The festival of Artemis involved wild orgies and carousing.*) Men who worked for Demetrius made a lot of money. Demetrius called together fellow silversmiths and said, "Men, we make a lot of money from our business. Paul has convinced many people here in Ephesus and in almost all of Asia that human-made gods are no gods at all. There is danger that our trade will lose its good name, but there is another danger. The temple of the great goddess Artemis will lose its importance. The goddess herself will be robbed of her divine majesty."

The craftsmen became furious and shouted, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" The confusion spread to the whole city. People grabbed two of Paul's traveling companions and rushed into the theater. (*The Ephesian amphitheater seated 24,000 people.*) Paul wanted to enter the theater, but the followers of Jesus wouldn't let Paul appear before the crowd. Even some government officials, who were Paul's friends, sent Paul a message, urging him not to risk going into the theater.

Most of the assembled people didn't even know why they came together. They shouted in unison for about two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

The city clerk finally quieted the crowd and said, "Citizens of Ephesus, the world knows that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her holy stone which fell from heaven. No one can deny these facts. Be quiet! Don't do anything foolish! You brought men here who have neither robbed temples nor insulted our goddess. If Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a legal complaint against anyone, the courts are open with judges. Today, we are in danger of being charged with rioting. There is no explanation for this mob." The city clerk dismissed the assembly (19:21-41).

After the uproar ended, Paul sent for the disciples, encouraged them, said good-bye, and left Ephesus (20:1-2).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What reasons did Demetrius use to rally people against Paul?
2. The temple of Artemis was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. What trades and businesses would be affected if large numbers of people believed in Paul's teachings?

3. What businesses today are threatened by gospel truth?
4. How did the city clerk and Demetrius have different concerns?
5. What positive things did the city clerk say about Paul?
6. What can we learn from the city clerk's comments about how Paul evangelized people who worshiped another god?
7. What should be our reactions when gospel truths are in conflict with the culture that surrounds us?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Fear of financial loss is often a choice weapon against God's truth and spiritual growth.** Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen feared Paul's preaching threatened their profits. Demetrius profited from making silver models of the temple of the goddess Artemis. He created confusion, because Paul taught that man-made idols were not true gods (Ac 19:23-29).
2. **Those who attack the gospel often hide the real reason for their attack.** Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen were angry at Paul because his preaching threatened their profits. The silversmiths didn't show the selfish motive for their rioting. They hid their greed behind the mask of patriotism and religious loyalty (Ac 19:23-27).
3. **Idolatry is a commitment or devotion to anything that removes God from the throne of the human heart.** Unless God has the first place in people's hearts and lives, they are guilty of idolatry. The people of Ephesus gave first place to the goddess Artemis and her idol (Ac 19:28). Greed is also idolatry (Eph 5:5; Col 3:5). Some of the things that become idols because people put them in first place are: false gods, gaining possessions, having pleasure, self-gratification, and getting their own way. (See 1 Corinthians 10:6-7, 14-15; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; and 1 John 5:21.)
4. **The gospel should penetrate all levels of society.** Paul's preaching spread throughout Asia, making him a threat to the beliefs and the lifestyle of all who worshiped the goddess Artemis (Ac 19:26-27). Some government officials were friends of Paul and sent him word, urging him not to enter the theater. Paul's message crossed all levels of society, giving him friends in high places (Ac 19:31).
5. **Those who attack the gospel and Christianity often violate civil and judicial procedures.** The city clerk made it clear that Demetrius' actions were against the law and didn't follow due process (Ac 19:37-39). When Paul was in Corinth, some Jews took Paul to court. The governor ejected them from the court because they could not accuse Paul of any crime (Ac 18:14-15). When Jesus was on trial, the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Council, looked for false testimony against him (Mat 26:60).

6. **Christians who evangelize followers of a false religion, should present the truth without attacking their false beliefs.** The city clerk in Ephesus recognized that they could not accuse Paul of either robbing temples nor insulting the goddess Artemis (Ac 19:37). When Paul was in Athens, he didn't attack the Athenians for their idolatry. He introduced Jesus as being the "UNKNOWN GOD" (Ac 17:22-31).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Role-playing Drama:

Have someone play the role of a TV reporter interviewing people who were part of the mob in the theater at Ephesus. Ask volunteers to portray one of the following characters:

- A silversmith.
- A person who followed the mob to the theater, without knowing what the riot was about.
- A government official who was friendly toward Paul.
- A believer.