



Walking Through the Scripture Together

September 7 - 14, 2008

Acts 19:23-41

# Riot

**Text** Acts 19:23-41 (TNIV)

## The Riot in Ephesus

<sup>23</sup> About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. <sup>24</sup> A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the skilled workers there. <sup>25</sup> He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: "You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. <sup>26</sup> And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. <sup>27</sup> There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty."

<sup>28</sup> When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" <sup>29</sup> Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed together into the theater. <sup>30</sup> Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. <sup>31</sup> Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

<sup>32</sup> The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. <sup>33</sup> The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. <sup>34</sup> But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

<sup>35</sup> The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "People of Ephesus, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? <sup>36</sup> Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. <sup>37</sup> You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. <sup>38</sup> If, then, Demetrius and his associates have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. <sup>39</sup> If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. <sup>40</sup> As it is, we are in danger

of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." <sup>41</sup> After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

## Thought

There are at least two major riots over Christianity in the book of Acts. One was started by pagan craftsmen over a pagan goddess and her temple and trade. The other was started by Jewish extremists in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem over fears their tradition and way of life was being undermined by Paul.

In each case, the agitators of the riot had strong opinions, but skewed facts. Both groups were feeling their toes pinched when it came to their power and/or economic base. They motivated others based on accusations playing to fear, pride and greed — factors dressed up, of course, in much more appealing garments for the crowd.

In each case, the agitated mob was swept off in a torrent of collective fear and excitement. "Most of the crowd didn't even know why they had come together." It's a classic case of mob rule — people moving in mass to a tune they don't even understand. It's instructive that the riot in Ephesus played out in the theater rather than the library.

In one riot, Paul watched more or less helplessly from the sidelines, while in the other (in Jerusalem, upcoming in Acts 21) he was right in the center of it, agitated rioters trying to beat him to death on the spot. In both instances, however, Paul had not acted as an enemy of either institution or tradition. He simply lived and demonstrated and proclaimed the life-changing reality of Jesus while endeavoring to be "all things to all men." He doesn't come across as one trying to "take on the system" — whether Jewish or pagan or Roman. That was Zealot territory around which he seemed to take a very wide berth. That seems to be one of Luke's key purposes in narrating Paul's story.

Seeing this riot in my mind, I was taken to images of Islamic Jihadists with their burning flags and raised fists and weapons, playing to media eagerly soaking it up. I was taken to our own race riots in the past, and to some of our own political rallies. And, considering that the Greek word *ekklesia* usually translated "church" in Acts occurs twice in this passage (19:32&41) referring to this confused and angry mob, it took me to images of church past in our not so bright moments. Images of our own holy wars and inquisitions and witch hunts. Episodes from our own history ostensibly driven by holy passion not to be like the world, but ultimately becoming indistinguishable from it. It's left me pondering — what would it be like if Christians became known in our culture as people of understanding who read more and judge less; who have more in common with libraries than excited rallies in the spotlight of our culture's wide stage?

## Small Group Discussion Guide

### Lean In

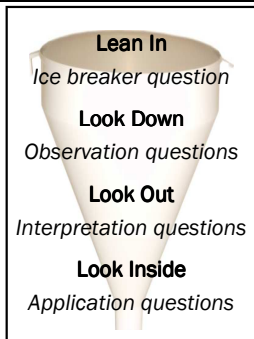
- Share a time when you were caught up in an agitated “throng”? What happened? What feelings did it stir in you at the time? How did you feel and think about it afterwards?

### Look Down / Look Out

- What would you identify as the driving force behind this riot in Ephesus? To what motivations does Demetrius appeal?
- What impact did Demetrius’ speech have on his listeners? How did this ripple out into the community? How does Luke describe the mood of the city? What did Paul want to do? Who stopped him?
- What was happening in the crowd? What is Luke’s evaluation of their mental state? Who tried to speak into this situation? What points do you think he might have made? Why did the crowd stop him?
- How is the mayor able to catch the crowd’s attention? What is his bottom line counsel to them? What reasons does he give for them staying calm? What does he say about the believers seized by the crowd?
- What course did the mayor recommend for Demetrius and his companions? What concern did he call attention to? What made this mayor so effective in dispersing the crowd?

### Look Inside

- When have you found yourself caught up in “ignorant zeal”? How readily do you tend to get caught up in the latest fears and worries of others around you? How do you know when to speak and when to be silent?
- Where do you think our culture see us as Jesus followers in this story: The powerplaying Demetrius? The agitated, ignorant mob? The calm voice of reason amidst confusion? Or what? Why?



## details, details...

### About that time there arose a great disturbance

With this verse commences what some consider the final “panel” in Acts, which presents Paul’s somewhat circuitous journey to Jerusalem, his arrest and defenses, his imprisonment and defenses in Caesarea, his voyage to Rome, and his ministry at Rome. The panel is introduced by the programmatic statement of 19:21-22 and concludes with the summary statement of 28:31. Three features immediately strike the reader in this final segment: (1) the disproportionate length of the panel, including one-third of the total material of Acts; (2) the prominence given the speeches of Paul in his defense; and (3) the dominance of the “we” sections in the narrative portions. The length seems to be related to Luke’s apologetic purpose, particularly in Paul’s five defenses, and to the eyewitness character of the narrative (i.e., a predominance of “we” sections) with its inevitable elaboration of details. The events narrated here span the time from approximately AD 56 through 62.

### Officials of the province, friends of Paul

Officials, literally, *Asiarchs*. These 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. While they did not have political authority, they served Rome’s interests by securing loyalty to Roman rule. That some of these men were friendly to Paul and gave him advice in such an explosive situation suggests that imperial policy at this time was not hostile to Christianity. This fits in with Luke’s apologetic purpose.

### The city clerk quieted the crowd

The “city clerk” of Ephesus was the chief executive officer of the assembly. He came to his position from within the assembly and was not appointed by Rome. As the most important native official of the city, he was responsible for disturbances within it.

## Family Discussion Guide

### Day One Acts 19:23-27 & 1 Timothy 6:9-10

What do you think was mostly bothering Demetrius and his fellow tradesmen? Why was he upset? Whom do you talk to when you are upset about something? What’s a healthy way to deal with fears, worries, and anger that makes us upset?

### Day Two Acts 19:28-31 & Proverbs 19:2, 12

How did Demetrius’ anger affect other people around him? What impact did he have on the entire city? What lessons about anger do you see in this? How can we keep anger from making us “mad dogs,” as the Proverb describes it?

### Day Three Acts 19:32-34 & Proverbs 18:6-7

How is it for you not just to “go along” with the crowd and do or say what everyone else is saying? What can help us to be different when we need to be?

### Day Four Acts 19:35-37 & Proverbs 18:13, 15

What do you tend to do when others are angry around you? Why? How can we help bring peace to other’s arguments like the mayor did?

### Day Five Acts 19:38-41 & Proverbs 17:22, 27

Which of the Proverbs from the past few days do you like most? Why? How can you live out its wisdom in your life?

## Life in Bible Times



### “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!”

In Greek mythology, *Artemis* was supposed to be the daughter of Zeus, and the twin sister of Apollo. She was the Hellenic goddess of forests, hills, virginity/fertility, and the hunt and was often depicted as a huntress carrying a bow and arrows. Artemis was one of the most widely venerated of the gods and one of the oldest. She also became identified with the Roman goddess *Diana* and with the Etruscan goddess, *Artume*. Some also draw parallels between *Artemis* and the Canaanite goddess *Astarte*.

At Ephesus, her temple became one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It was probably the best known center of her worship. There she was worshiped primarily as a mother goddess, in an ancient sanctuary where her cult image that was said to have fallen from sky depicted the “Lady of Ephesus” adorned with multiple rounded breast like protuberances on her chest.

Paul’s preaching had turned many away from the idolatry of the Artemis cult, with the result that the economy of Ephesus was being affected. One profitable business was the making of “silver shrines of Artemis,” probably silver statuettes of Artemis to be used as souvenirs, votive offerings, and amulets. When the Gospel began to touch their income, the silversmiths, led by their guild master Demetrius, instigated a disturbance they hoped would turn the people against the missionaries and stir up greater devotion for the goddess Artemis—and greater profits for them.

The silversmiths began shouting out the ceremonial chant: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” hoping thereby to stir up the city on a pretext of religious devotion. A magnificent boulevard ran through the heart of Ephesus, lined with fine buildings and columned porticoes. Into this boulevard Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen most likely poured, sweeping along with them in noisy procession all the residents and visitors within earshot. Their destination was the large open-air theater on the eastern side of the city, large enough to seat 24,000 people.



*Ruins of the theater in Ephesus*