

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 19:35-20:6 | Session 55 | Paul's Final Departure from Ephesus

A.D. 59

In our previous passage there was a great *uproar* in the city of Ephesus prompted by the daily teaching, over the course of two years, by the apostle Paul (19:9,10). His teaching was of the Kingdom of God and that there was one coming, Jesus Christ who would be King of Kings and Lord of lords. This thought of a coming King was a threat not only to Roman Emperor worship, but to the economic livelihood of the craftsmen of Ephesus; those who made statues and idols of the great goddess Diana, or Artemis (19:27). A certain influential man named Demetrius worked the crowd into a frenzy so that they grabbed two of Paul's traveling companions (19:29), dragged them into the theatre presumably to do them harm. The crowd, however, was in great confusion (19:32), some not even understanding what was going on added to the chaos and chanted for two hours, **Great is Diana of the Ephesians**.

Verses 35,36—

Appeasing or quieting a large *frenzied* crowd in an outdoor arena was no easy task. Most likely it was done with hand motions, or perhaps there were certain men who walked along the stage yelling for the crowd to quiet down. Acoustics were excellent in ancient theatres. The **townclerk** (Greek: *grammateus*, literally, *Scribe*), according to documents was one of the highest officials in Ephesus, even superior to city council members, and he would have been recognized by the crowd. He appeals to the civic pride of the Ephesians, **what man knoweth not...**a rhetorical question, "Don't worry people we are **worshippers of the great goddess Diana**, nothing can change that!" The **townclerk** claimed that the image of their goddess **fell down** from the heavens **from Jupiter**. Throughout history cultures have worshipped the heavens, and in this case, it may have been a meteorite that became the object of worship (Romans 1:21-25). People today continue to worship the creation rather than the Creator. The townclerk continues, **these things cannot be spoken against...**He is appealing to the crowd by noting that because Diana is so glorious (the word **great** in verse 35 is *meGas* in Greek) they are in no danger of losing their wealth. Whether or not he really believed what he was saying is debatable.

Verse 37—

Somehow the **townclerk** knows that the two men in the theatre were innocent. How he knew is not known, but perhaps word came to him by the **certain of the chief of Asia** who were Paul's friends (19:31). Regardless, he states two truths about the men 1) **which are neither robbers of churches**, this word **churches** does not mean *church as we think of it*. A clearer translation would be *temples* (Greek: *hierosulos*), not *ekklesia*. Temple robbery was a serious offence. 2) **nor yet blasphemers of your goddess**. And

both were true as Paul was never seen blaspheming against a pagan deity. Because one may believe in only one God and opposing idolatry, as was the case of Paul, doesn't mean he is committing sacrilege against another's *god*. In fact, Josephus notes that Jewish Law forbade mocking other's gods.

*Let no one blaspheme those gods which other cities esteem such; nor may anyone steal what belongs to strange temples; nor take away the gifts that are dedicated to any god.*¹

Verses 38,39—

The **townclerk** put the focus on *Demetrius* (in a sense he is rebuking him publicly) who started the riot, and he understands the rule of law. Mob rule is never the solution, there has to be order or a society ceases to exist. But this isn't the first time Paul, his companions, or those around him have faced a mob (Act 14:5,19; 16:22; 17:5-8; 18:17). **The law is open...deputies...let them implead one another**, he is probably referring to the courts. **It shall be determined in a lawful assembly**.

Verse 40, 41—

For we are in danger...Ephesus, being under Roman rule was, however, a free city. Rome cherished the rule of law, and the danger that was presenting itself here was the loss of their *free* status. The last thing they wanted was Roman intervention. And thus, after he had given his speech, **he dismissed the crowd**.

Chapter 20:1-3—

The thing that would calm the city most was if Paul **departed**. He **embraced** them. The ESV, NIV say he **encouraged** them, the NASB says **exhorted**. I think either works, but consider how Paul had been with the believers in Ephesus for over two years and now he as leaving (under duress?), I think **embrace** is a touching and appropriate translation for what transpired. Nevertheless, he **departed for to go into Macedonia**, and then **Greece**.

He abode there three months until he was ready to sail back to **Syria**, presumably to Antioch where the home base was located. But **the Jews** (Judeans) **laid wait for him as he was about to sail**, so he made a change of plans and went by land (or ship) **through Macedonia**. Notice there is no indication of the Holy Spirit guiding him in this decision.

Verse 4-6—

In Macedonia he gathered a group of colleagues or associates in the ministry to travel with him. For some reason, he sent the seven men ahead, to **Troas**, to wait for him. At this point we also should note that Luke, the author, has joined Paul again, which means we may read more details of Paul's travels in this chapter and the next.

¹ Josephus, Flavius, and William Whiston. *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987. Jos. Ant. 4.207