

A Gospel Uproar

Acts 19:21-41 on September 26, 2021

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Today we're going to do things a little bit differently. I've incorporated our Scripture reading right into the message. So, we'll work our way through Acts 19:21-41 and then talk about 3 main ideas we find in this text. Please turn or click in your Bible to Acts 19:21. Let's read Acts 19:21-41. Acts 19:21 begins, "After all this had happened," This is referring to the events we learned about last week:

- > the extraordinary miracles that God did through Paul in Ephesus,
- > the 7 sons of Sceva who tried to wield Jesus' name like some kind of a magical incantation, resulting in them getting beat up by a man possessed by an evil spirit, and
- > the believers who openly confessed that they used to practice sorcery and then publicly burned their scrolls, as a demonstration of their devotion to Christ alone.

Acts 19:21 continues "...Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia..." So after spending over 2 years teaching in Ephesus, Paul decides that it's time to hit the road again, and he lays out his travel plans for us. In Acts 19:21-22 Paul then says "...'After I have been there (Jerusalem),' he said, 'I must visit Rome also.'¹ He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer." So Paul sends his helpers ahead of him, up north to Macedonia, while he stays back in Ephesus just a little while longer.² And that's when something pretty crazy happens! Acts 19:23-24 tells us, "About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.³ ["The Way" is a reference to Christianity.] A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis,⁴ brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there."

[Now, the temple of the goddess Artemis was 1 of the 7 Wonders of the Ancient World, so "people came from far and wide to view it. Their purchase of silver shrines and images produced a lucrative business for the craftsmen."⁵ "The temple was the glory of

¹ Luke doesn't give us much detail as to WHY Paul feels he must also visit Rome. However, what we'll learn later on in Acts 23:11, is that the Lord will stand near to Paul and tell him, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." (See also Acts 27:23-25.) Darrell L. Bock also notes that the Greek word order in Acts 19:21 emphasizes that going to Rome was a necessity for Paul (Acts, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 605).

² Likely these helpers will arrange for things like housing, food, and speaking engagements.

³ To be clear, the uproar in Ephesus is not what caused Paul to leave. He'd already decided it was time to move on in verse 21. However, once this great disturbance occurred, it may have served to confirm that it was indeed time to move on. (See Darrell L. Bock, Acts, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, discussion on top of p. 606.)

⁴ Artemis = "The Greek name for the Roman goddess Diana. The Ephesian Artemis, however, was very different from the Greco-Roman goddess. She had taken on the characteristics of Cybele, the mother goddess of fertility worshipped in Asia Minor. A meteorite may be the basis of the many-breasted image of heavenly workmanship claimed by Artemis (v. 35)." *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1866 footnote on Acts 19:24.

⁵ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1866 footnote on Acts 19:25.

Ephesus: 425 feet long and 220 feet wide, having 127 white marble columns 62 feet high and less than four feet apart...⁶ Our church sanctuary is roughly 120' long by 60' wide by 30' high, which means the Temple of Artemis was almost 4 times the size and about twice as high as our church Sanctuary. So picture a space that is 4x as big and 2x as tall and then try to imagine a line of massive marble columns spaced every 4'. Imagine a 60' foot high marble column in the middle of every 3rd chair. The silver shrines that these craftsmen made, were basically small replicas of the temple, and they earned them a TON OF MONEY!⁷]

Acts 19:25-27 continues, "He [*Demetrius*] 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.⁸ 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.⁹ [So just to be clear, that's exactly what these craftsmen did, they used their human hands, to make shrines of Artemis.] 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 worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty." [We'll come back to verse 27 a little later, but first, let's finish reading through today's story.] Acts 19:28-32 goes on, "When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus¹⁰, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together.¹¹ Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.¹² The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there."

⁶ ...In the inner sanctuary was the many-breasted image supposedly dropped from heaven." *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1866 footnote on Acts 19:27.

⁷ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2261 footnote on Acts 19:24.

⁸ "In direct opposition to the Ephesian Christians, who were willing to make a monetary sacrifice for their faith, were the pagan craftsmen of Ephesus, who found Paul's witness to be damaging their financial interests." (Polhill, J. B. (1992). *Acts* (Vol. 26, p. 407). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁹ "Paul was said to be leading astray (literally, "seducing") all the people in Ephesus and throughout Asia, denying that idols were real gods. One only needs to refer to Paul's Areopagus speech (cf. 17:29) to realize that this was indeed the case." Polhill, J. B. (1992). *Acts* (Vol. 26, p. 410). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹⁰ ehr iss TAHR kuhs (Severance, W. M., & Eddinger, T. (1997). In *That's easy for you to say: your quick guide to pronouncing Bible names* (p. 28). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.)

¹¹ This theater was "an open-air amphitheater...that could hold over 20,000 people." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2261 footnote on Acts 19:29.

¹² All throughout the books of Acts, we find that Paul had some friends in pretty high places, including these provincial officials.

[Boy, you've gotta pause for at least a moment here, and think about this one. "Most of the people didn't even know WHY they were there!" Brother or Sister in Christ, if you ever find yourself in the midst of a citywide uproar, and you suddenly realize that you have no idea why you're even there, please do the wise and godly thing: GO HOME!]

Acts 19:33-34 continue, "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. But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about TWO HOURS: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

[You see, the crowd knew that the Jewish faith rejected idol worship, just as much as the Christian faith did. So when they realized that Alexander was a Jew, they had no interest in listening to him.^{13 14}]

A key leader in the city then steps up and leads in Acts 19:35-41, "The city clerk¹⁵ quieted the crowd and said: "Fellow Ephesians, 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? [By the way, this "image which fell from heaven" is likely a reference to a meteor that fell from the sky.¹⁶] Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.¹⁷ If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a LEGAL assembly. As it is, WE are in danger of being charged with rioting¹⁸ 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." After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly."

Verse 40 makes it clear: it wasn't the Christians who were breaking the law, it wasn't the Christians who were in danger of being charged with rioting, it was the Ephesian

¹³ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1866 footnote on Acts 19:33.

¹⁴ Alexander was "Probably a Jewish representative trying to disassociate the Christians from the Jews and show that the Jews are not responsible for any sacrilege against Artemis. The crowd shouts him down because they recognize him as a Jew who rejects idols." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2261 footnote on Acts 19:33.

¹⁵ A city clerk may sound kind of harmless to us but actually he functioned kind of like a mayor who presided over the entire city. *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2261 footnote on Acts 19:35.

¹⁶ "Perhaps a meteorite kept in the temple that they consider a sacred sign from heaven of Artemis's greatness." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2262 footnote on Acts 19:35.

¹⁷ "Probably...meant that they had not robbed the temple of the respect due it. If there was any illegality involved, it was not on the part of the Christians but rather of the Ephesians." Polhill, J. B. (1992). Acts (Vol. 26, p. 413). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹⁸ When I think about a "Gospel Riot" I can't help but think of the old song by Christian artist, Carmen, "RIOT: Righteous Invasion of Truth," which begins, "Webster's dictionary says a riot is like an unrestrained Uproar in a public space, turbulent right in your face." The video is a little "cringy" but may put a smile on your face: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8OIXBD5zQQ>

crowd who the city clerk was warning.¹⁹ If Demetrius and the craftsmen wanted to take the Christians to court, that was fine, but the city clerk states it directly, “we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it.” One of the things that we can see in today’s text, is a theme that will repeat itself in the chapters ahead, “the innocence of the Christians with respect to the civil law. Paul was NEVER found guilty by ANY Roman official. If anything, the civil authorities pled Paul’s case for him; the city clerk is just one of many examples still to come.”²⁰

This leads us right into our first main point: **The UPROAR in Ephesus was...**

1) ...NOT due to illegal activities by Christians. One Study Bible notes that the “sane and balanced perspective” of the city clerk, “introduces a recurring theme in Acts: Christianity is innocent under Roman law. An important part of Luke’s purpose is to demonstrate to the Roman authorities, that the Christians who live among them are law-abiding citizens and NOT enemies of the empire.”^{21 22 23} Luke was the author of both Acts and the Gospel of Luke. In these twin volumes, “Luke [tries] to show that God’s people can be good citizens AND good Christians.”²⁴ For example, Jesus was crucified as a criminal, even though He was innocent of the charges against him (Luke writes in LUKE 23:4 Pilate announced, “I find NO BASIS for a charge against this man.”). Paul and the early Christians are another example. They weren’t troublemakers, they were peace-loving citizens (Luke writes in Acts 19:37 the city clerk himself declares, “these men...have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.”).

The faith of the early Christians should inspire us to avoid TWO EXTREMES.²⁵

1st) “The Troublemaker Christian.” (This is one extreme to avoid.) 1 Peter 2:12-17 says, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. Submit

¹⁹ “In verse 27 Demetrius argued that Paul was a danger to Ephesus. In verse 40 the clerk clarified where the real danger lay—not from Paul but from the unruly Ephesians.” Polhill, J. B. (1992). Acts (Vol. 26, p. 414). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

²⁰ Polhill, J. B. (1992). Acts (Vol. 26, p. 414). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

²¹ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2262 footnote on Acts 19:35.

²² In fact, Scripture encourages us as Christ-followers to make every effort to live at peace. See Matthew 5:9; Romans 12:18; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; and James 3:18.

²³ 1 Peter 2:17 urges Christians, “Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.” Peter very likely wrote this during the brutal reign of the Emperor Nero. In fact, some traditions report that Peter was executed by Nero. (*The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2543 footnote on 1 Peter 2:17). Nonetheless, the New Testament consistently repeats a message of being peacemakers rather political revolutionaries.

²⁴ In both volumes, Luke’s original audience was a guy named Theophilus (Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1). Theophilus was likely someone of high social status and great wealth, perhaps even a government official (*The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, introductory notes pp. 2208-2209). If this was so, it would have been vital for Luke to record the history which proved both the legality and peacefulness of the Christian movement.

²⁵ Kevin DeYoung talks about this in his sermon, “A Gospel Riot,” based on Acts 19:21-41.

<https://www.avisualguide.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/47.-A-Gospel-Riot.mp3>

yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, BUT do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor."²⁶ If you think you might be a "Troublemaker Christian," then ask yourself questions like these:

1. Am I careful to obey ALL of the laws of our land, that DON'T require me to sin?
2. Do non-Christians see me as a kind person who stands for his/her convictions, or as a lawbreaking, mean-spirited, troublemaker?

If God's Spirit is convicting you through these questions, then take some time this week, to think and pray about this. Our boldness for the Lord, shouldn't be an excuse to go out and break whatever laws we feel like breaking. Our Christian faith should make us the most law-abiding, concerned citizens, that Bemidji's ever seen. As the community watches us and gets to know us, we should have a reputation for kindness and good deeds. We should be known as people who have a backbone, but also as people who bend over backwards to be peacemakers.²⁷

The other extreme that the early Christians should inspire us to avoid is...

2nd) "The Timid Christian." (This is another extreme to avoid.) 2 Timothy 1:7 says, "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline." If you think you might be a "Timid Christian," then ask yourself questions like these:

1. Am I more concerned about public opinion or pleasing God?
2. Are my faith convictions bold enough, to be a deterrent to the sinful practices around me?

If God's Spirit is convicting you through these questions, then take some time this week, to think and pray about this. There should be a Spirit-empowered boldness and a deep conviction surrounding our Christian beliefs and practices. There will be times, when our Christian faith makes us a bit uncomfortable, as it stretches us and grows us, into more mature Christ-followers. There will also be times, when our Christian faith makes the people around us a bit uncomfortable, as the light of the gospel shines into the darkness of sin.

²⁶ 1 Peter 4:15 says, "If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, **or even as a meddler.**" "Meddler" probably equals "troublemaker!" The Greek (ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος) is hard to translate, but it's probably something like "one who busies himself in the affairs of others in an unwarranted manner—'busybody, meddler.'" (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 767). New York: United Bible Societies.)

²⁷ "It's not at all surprising that the origin of the idiom "bend over backwards" is in gymnastics. The term was used as early as 920 CE to compare the athletic act of back bending with an expenditure of effort to ensure that something went as planned."

<https://www.gingersoftware.com/content/phrases/bend-over-backwards/>

Another main idea from today's text is that... **The UPROAR in Ephesus was...**

2) ...NOT about the greatness of Artemis. Now it's certainly POSSIBLE that some of what Demetrius was saying, was motivated by genuine religious fervor, and by his personal commitment to worshipping Artemis. However, from the context, it seems much more likely, that his economic losses are what really motivated him.²⁸ The chant of, "Great is Artemis OF THE EPHESIANS!" certainly reveals a certain amount of religious fervor on the part of some; BUT, it was also steeped in civic patriotism.²⁹ You see, the Temple of Artemis is what put Ephesus on the map at this time in history. Thousands and thousands of people would travel to Ephesus just to see this amazing temple! It's what made Ephesus famous; and it's what made Ephesus RICH. One author notes: "Artemis worship was not confined to Ephesus. ...All told there were at least thirty-three shrines to the mother goddess throughout the Roman Empire, and it was perhaps the most popular cult of all. Ephesus was considered to be the center of the cult, and pilgrims flocked from all over the empire to worship at its famous temple, especially during the spring [festival]. Economics and religion were closely bound.

The temple received lavish votive offerings from the devotees of the mother goddess. In fact, [it was SO wealthy], that it became the principal financial institution of Asia, receiving deposits and [even] making loans."³⁰ So basically the temple was a HUGE bank!

So it was a combination of financial concerns and civic pride that motivated the uproar in Ephesus.³¹ ³² However, appealing to the Ephesians' civic pride was mostly a smoke screen for plain old financial greed. After all, shouting "our money is in danger!" probably wouldn't have gained them nearly as much community support. Verse 32

²⁸ "In all fairness to Demetrius, his argument was not without solid foundation. Paul did preach forcefully against idolatry and was indeed a threat to anyone who made a living from idols. He was likewise a genuine threat to the Artemis cult. He considered not only her images but the goddess herself as "no god at all." But one should not miss the real point of Demetrius's opposition. It was not his piety that was offended but his pocketbook. For Paul to hold his sessions in the hall of Tyrannus was one thing. People could listen to his teachings all they wanted. But when those teachings began to have ramifications for the town economy, that was quite another matter." Polhill, J. B. (1992). Acts (Vol. 26, p. 410). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

²⁹ "Demetrius's appeal had the desired effect, with all the craftsmen running forth and shouting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Note that it was his appeal to religious and civic pride that was picked up. They were not shouting "our business is in danger," even if that was the real issue. A crowd quickly formed and joined in the chant." Polhill, J. B. (1992). Acts (Vol. 26, p. 411). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³⁰ Polhill, J. B. (1992). Acts (Vol. 26, p. 409). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³¹ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2261 footnote on Acts 19:25-27.

³² "At Ephesus the traditional Greek Artemis, a goddess of the hunt, was merged with the traditional Anatolian fertility goddess Cybele. The many-breasted statue of Artemis stood in the temple at Ephesus, and a week-long festival in the spring, known as the Artemision, attracted thousands of devotees to the city. Worshipping the goddess was a source of enormous civic pride." (*The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2261 footnote on Acts 19:23-41.) (*Perhaps somewhat similar to the Mardi Gras in New Orleans.*)

states it bluntly, “most of the people didn’t even know why they were there.” They were merely pawns being used for financial purposes.^{33 34}

So, if the UPROAR in Ephesus was...

...NOT due to illegal activities by Christians, and

...NOT about the greatness of Artemis,

...Then was it just about money? Well, no. Ultimately, it wasn’t even about money. And this leads to our 3rd and final main idea from today’s text. This is by far the most crucial idea for us to grasp... **The UPROAR in Ephesus was...**

3) ...actually A GOSPEL UPROAR against evil powers! Even though Acts 19 doesn’t explicitly mention spiritual warfare, it’s important for us as believers to recognize that that’s exactly what’s going on here. Remember what we learned last Sunday about what had been going on in Ephesus earlier? Acts 19:17 told us, “...the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.” Can you think of anyone in particular who may not have been happy about this...? The result of Jesus’ name being held in high honor is recorded in Acts 19:20, “the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.” There’s someone in particular, who wasn’t at all happy about this: our enemy, the devil. (Remember him?) The thing that makes our enemy happy, is the reality behind the last half of Acts 19:27, “... the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her DIVINE majesty.” Our enemy, the devil, is the last one to sit back and allow the name of Jesus to be held in high honor. So he is very happy to cheer on the worship of Artemis, and to help declare her supposed divinity. So, the devil enjoys hearing the voices of the crowd; it’s music to his ears: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” (The name Artemis being held in high honor, sounds oh SO MUCH better to him, than the name of Jesus being held in high honor.) The spiritual forces of evil do not want to see the word of the Lord spread widely or grow in power. Brother or Sister in Christ, this is why we need to PRAY FERVENTLY for our own spiritual lives and for the ministries of our church! We are in a spiritual battle against evil powers!

So let’s not conclude that this UPROAR in Ephesus was about simple monetary concerns or civic pride; any more than we should conclude this about the uproar in our own day and age. Issues like money and civic pride, are not ultimately why our society

³³ “It was not by accident then that Demetrius mixed economics and religion in his appeal to his fellow craftsmen. In Ephesus the two were closely linked. Luke left no doubt that Demetrius’s real concern was the damage Paul’s preaching was doing to his economic interests. Still, as a skilled demagogue Demetrius was quick to bring religion and patriotism into the picture, which were much more prone to get the public attention.” Polhill, J. B. (1992). Acts (Vol. 26, p. 409). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

³⁴ “Paul was said to be endangering religion, discrediting the reputation of Artemis, robbing her of her greatness. In his reference to her cult being spread throughout the whole world there was an implicit appeal to civic pride: “The great temple of Artemis is here in Ephesus. Its reputation through all the world is based on the fame of this temple. To attack Artemis is to attack Ephesus.” Polhill, J. B. (1992). Acts (Vol. 26, p. 410). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

is in an uproar. There is something much more deeply spiritual behind this uproar in the city of Ephesus. Just in case we're still not convinced, let's conclude with this: Let's consider part of the letter that Paul wrote to his Ephesian brothers and sisters in Christ, just a few years later. In Ephesians 6:10-19 he writes, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you [*Ephesian Christians*] can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is NOT against flesh and blood [*NOT against Demetrius and the craftsmen, and the crowd of people in Ephesus*], BUT against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And PRAY in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always KEEP ON PRAYING for all the Lord's people. PRAY also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel."

With all of this in mind, won't you please pray?