

Bible Commentaries

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Acts 19 ▾

Verse 1

Here is presented by Luke the story of certain Christians who needed re-baptism (**Acts 19:1-7**), a record of Paul's mighty successes in Ephesus (**Acts 19:8-13**), the account of the exorcists who were exorcised (**Acts 19:14-20**), a summary of Paul's further work in Asia (**Acts 19:21-22**), and a full account of the uproar created by Demetrius and the shrine-makers (**Acts 19:23-41**).

CHRISTIANS WHO NEEDED TO BE RE-BAPTIZED

And it came to pass that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found certain disciples. (Acts 19:1)

While Apollos was at Corinth ... definitely suggests that these disciples were converts made by Apollos; and that the providence of God appears in this: that, whereas Aquila and Priscilla had taught Apollos the way of the Lord more accurately, some of those whom he had inadequately instructed were found and properly taught by Paul. Aquila and Priscilla had sent Apollos on to Corinth.

Certain disciples ... That these men were Christians is certainly to be inferred from the way in which Luke describes them as `disciples.'^[1]

Through the upper country ... This was the country north of Ephesus.

ENDNOTE:

[1] F. F. Bruce, The Book of Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Publishers, 1954), p. 385.

Verse 2

And he said unto them, Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed? And they said unto him, Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Spirit was given.

When ye believed ... This cannot mean, as suggested by Trenchard, that Paul expected that they had received the Spirit, merely upon their having believed;^[2] but, as Plumptre said, the meaning is this:

Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed? that is, did you receive the Holy Spirit upon your conversion and baptism? We are left to conjecture what prompted the question.^[3]

Plumptre is correct in seeing "believed" in this verse as a synecdoche for the whole process of conversion: faith, repentance and baptism.

Did not hear whether the Holy Spirit was given ... To be sure, as Boles said, "They had heard of the existence of the Holy Spirit, but not that he had been given on Pentecost."^[4]

^[2] E. H. Trenchard, *A New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), p. 325.

^[3] E. H. Plumptre, *Ellicott's Commentary on the Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), p. 128.

^[4] H. Leo Boles, *Commentary on Acts* (Nashville: The Gospel Advocate Company, 1953), p. 298.

Verse 3

And he said, Into what then were ye baptized? And they said, Into John's baptism.

Alexander Campbell said that "This indicates that John the Baptist's baptism was not Christian baptism; for in the latter they could not have been baptized without hearing of it."^[5] Dummelow concurred in this view, saying that in the apostolic age, "It is probable that the Trinitarian formula was used (in baptizing), **Matthew 28:19**."^[6]

Unto John's baptism ... Wesley was no doubt incorrect in the view that these people "had been formerly baptized by John the Baptist."^[7] "They had been baptized by some of John's disciples after the baptism of John had been invalidated."^[8] John's baptism lasted only until Pentecost; but the persons who had submitted to it while it was in force were not required to be re-baptized, hence the conclusion that the disciples here were baptized unto John's baptism at a time when it was no longer valid.

As Hervey declared:

Nothing can mark more strongly the connection between baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit than this question does. For it implies, How could you be ignorant of the giving of the Holy Spirit if you were duly baptized?^{Acts 2p. 114.}>^[9]

In New Testament, the reception of the Holy Spirit was made contingent upon the baptism of penitent believers (**Acts 2:38f**).

^[5] Alexander Campbell, *Acts of Apostles* (Austin, Texas: Firm Foundation Publishing House), p. 126.

^[6] J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 845.

^[7] John Wesley, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, in loco.

[8] H. Leo Boles, op. cit., p. 299.

Acts 2p. 114.">[9] A. C. Hervey, The Pulpit Commentary, Acts (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Publishers, 1950), **Acts 2**p. 114.

Verse 4

And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus. And when they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Boles noted that "Luke does not give a formula for baptizing, but simply explains that these men were baptized in obedience to their faith in Christ."^[10]

ENDNOTE:

[10] H. Leo Boles, op. cit., p. 299.

Verse 6

And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied. And they were in all about twelve men.

It is a mistake to make another Pentecost out of this. Walker said that "This was the same phenomenon witnessed on Pentecost and at the house of Cornelius";^[11] but in neither case was the phenomenon due to the imposition of apostolic hands. This is therefore clearly something else. As Lange declared: "The true baptism ... and not the imposition of hands ... (is among) the conditions upon which the gift of the Spirit depends."^[12] Bruner, who did an incredible amount of study on this, said:

Peter does not contrast the gift of the Spirit and baptism; he joins them ... It is one of the major purposes of Acts to show that baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit belong indissolubly together. This is the special lesson of **Acts 8** and **Acts 19**.^[13]

Ramsay seems to be correct when he supposed that:

Luke's purpose in dwelling on this episode is to show that even Apollos' teaching at Corinth was Pauline in character and owed its effectiveness largely to the ideas of Paul, learned through Paul's two disciples (Aquila and Priscilla).^[14]

Certainly the episode before us, so closely connected with Apollos' instruction by Aquila and Priscilla, casts Paul in the role of correcting those who had been inadequately taught, and whose baptism had been for a purpose other than that of bringing them "into Christ."

Before leaving this, it should be inquired what application this has for the Christians today and for those who desire to declare the whole counsel of God.

DISCIPLES NEEDING RE-BAPTISM

Are there any today whose baptism was so defective or inadequate that they should be baptized again "into the Lord Jesus"? The answer without any doubt whatever is affirmative. And who are

they? (1) Those who were baptized in infancy, or at a time in childhood so early that no adequate understanding of the ordinance was possible. Millions today have never in any sense obeyed the apostolic injunction to "have yourselves baptized" as Peter commanded (**Acts 2:38**)^[15] That passage makes it absolutely clear that the convert must consciously, and of his own will, submit to Christian baptism. If infant baptism is adequate, then baptism without faith, confession, or repentance is valid; and this we hold to be absolutely impossible of acceptance. (2) Those whose baptism was by some action other than the immersion submitted to by Christ, taught by the apostles, and practiced by the apostolic church, which action was denominated by the Holy Spirit as a figure of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (**Romans 6:3-5**), making it certain that forms of baptism (so-called) without such a likeness are invalid. (3) Those whose baptism was an action initiated by others, not themselves, or whose baptism was in their hearts undertaken for any unscriptural purpose, such as (a) merely going with the group, (b) primarily to please parents, husband, wife, or other persons, or (c) any purpose other than that of surrendering the soul to the Lord as commanded in the gospel and for the purpose of coming "into Christ," receiving the forgiveness of sins and the promise of the Holy Spirit. (4) Those whose baptism was understood by themselves as having no connection with salvation, or as being, in their view, absolutely unnecessary, irrelevant, or unessential. (5) Those whose baptism, instead of being "into Christ," was into some organization unknown to the Scripture, operating contrary to New Testament authority, and constituting some kind of fellowship other than that of Christians "in Christ."

This writer earnestly prays that all who read these lines will ask himself in all humility, "Was I Scripturally baptized?" If the answer is negative, the re-baptism of these twelve disciples at Ephesus, long ago, provides an inspiring example of what should be done. There was nothing wrong with their baptism, except that it had been for the wrong purpose; but that was enough to invalidate it. One hundred sixty-nine times, in the writings of Paul alone, the New Testament uses the expression "in Christ," "in him," or its equivalent;^[16] and that says as loudly as it could be said that this purpose of Christian baptism is absolutely vital and should be honored by all men (**Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:26,27**).

[11] W. R. Walker, *Studies in Acts* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press), p. 53.

[12] John Peter Lange, *Commentary on Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1866), p. 350.

[13] Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Publishers, 1971), p. 169.

[14] Sir William M. Ramsay, *Pictures of the Apostolic Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1959), p. 216.

[15] Vine's Greek Dictionary (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1962), p. 97.

[16] John Mackay, *God's Order* (New York: The Macmillan Company), 1953), p. 97.

Verse 8

And he entered into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, reasoning and persuading as to the things concerning the kingdom of God.

PAUL'S MIGHTY DEEDS IN EPHESUS

DeWelt made a deduction from this verse which should be heeded by all. He said:

Now here is a question: If Paul established a church in Ephesus by "reasoning and persuading concerning the kingdom of God," what must then be the relationship of the kingdom of God and the church? There is only one conclusion, and that is that the kingdom of God and the church are one and the same institution.^[17]

(For more on the identity of the church as the kingdom, see my Commentary on Hebrews, under **Hebrews 12:29**).

There seems to have been a variation in Paul's work at Ephesus in the event of his meeting with the twelve disciples mentioned above and correcting them before going to the synagogue. This was probably due to the natural priority that the true Israel of God would be given over the secular Israel.

ENDNOTE:

[17] Don DeWelt, Acts Made Actual (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1958), p. 257.

Verse 9

But when some were hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

Were hardened and disobedient ... With regard to God's hardening of willful sinners, see dissertation in my Commentary on Romans under **Romans 1:25**; 11:7.

Reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus ... There is an addition to this place in Codex Bezae, according to Dummelow, which says, "Paul disputed from the fifth hour to the tenth," and which Dummelow believed was "probably an authentic detail."^[18] Nothing is known of Tyrannus.

ENDNOTE:

[18] J. R. Dummelow, op. cit., p. 845.

Verse 10

And this continued for the space of two years; so that all that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

Paul previously had wanted to preach in Asia but was forbidden (**Acts 16:6**); now it was different, and tremendous success attended his efforts. De Welt believed that "The seven churches of Asia referred to in **Revelation 1:4**, as well as the church at Colossae (**Colossians 1:2**), were doubtless established at this time."^[19] Joseph Benson agreed, saying:

The fame of the apostle's doctrine and miracles brought multitudes to Ephesus from distant parts; and these, being converted, preached the gospel in their own cities, and founded those churches which the apostle tells the Colossians had not seen him face to face (**Colossians 2:1**).^[20]

Asia ... here means, not the continent, but the proconsular Roman province of Asia, of which Ephesus was the capital.

[19] Don DeWelt, op. cit., p. 258.

[20] Joseph Benson, One Volume New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1972), in loco.

Verse 11

And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: insomuch that unto the sick were carried away from his body handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out.

Special miracles ... From this it is clear that the miracles of healing by means of aprons, etc., taken from Paul's body to the distressed, must be allowed as genuine, for the word "inasmuch" dearly shows this. Perhaps, as Dummelow said:

God condescended to work miracles through these handkerchiefs, having regard to the genuine faith of those who thus used them, and not to their superstition.^[21]

Such healings were so rare that "Luke calls them "special miracles."^[22]

This is an appropriate place to mention the number of striking parallels between the lives of Peter and Paul as outlined by Luke in Acts. (1) Both at an early point in their ministries heal lame men (**Acts 3:2ff**; 14:8ff). (2) Both exorcise demons (**Acts 5:16**; 16:18). (3) Both have triumphant encounters with sorcerers (**Acts 8:18ff**; 13:6ff). (4) Both raise the dead (**Acts 9:36ff**; 20:9ff). (5) Both miraculously escape from prison (**Acts 12:7ff**; 16:25ff). (6) Both figure in miracles emanating from their bodies (**Acts 5:15**; 19:12). (7) Peter was a surname given to Simon by Jesus; and it appears that the name Paul replaced the name of Saul by design of the Holy Spirit. Paul himself said, "I am not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles" (**2 Corinthians 11:5**); and the record in Acts corroborates his statement. To be sure, the radical critics have seized upon such similarities as an excuse to accuse Luke of inventing parallels through the inclusion of unhistorical material. As Bruce said, however, Luke does this "unobtrusively,"^[23] which no inventor or forger would have done. As a matter of fact, some of the parallels are not discernible at all, except upon careful study. (See under **Acts 22** introduction.)

[21] J. R. Dummelow, op. cit., p. 845.

[22] W. R. Walker, op. cit., p. 54.

[23] F. F. Bruce, op. cit., p. 387.

Verse 13

But certain also of the strolling Jews, exorcists, took upon them to name over them that had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, a chief priest, who did this.

THE EXORCISTS EXORCISED!

The very fact of these exorcists pretending to use the name of Jesus proves that they had no confidence in the methods they had been using; for if their previous methods had been effective,

there would have been no need for a change. They had recognized the great power of Jesus' name, as used by Paul; hence their presumption in seeking to appropriate such a power to their own purposes. Ancient superstitions attributed unusual powers to the seventh son of a seventh son.

Verse 15

And the evil spirit answered and said unto them Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?

It was appropriate enough that the demon himself, working through his victim, should have exposed and denounced such a wicked attempt to appropriate a precious and holy name to the promotion of evil enterprises. The lesson should be clear to all, that no man has a right merely to appropriate the name of Jesus. It may be supposed that many today are guilty of doing the same thing. Are there not thousands who say, "O yes, I am a Christian," who really have no right to such a claim? How does one become a rightful and lawful wearer of the name of Jesus? In this very chapter it is declared that men were "baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus" (**Acts 19:5**); and the Scriptures reveal no honorable alternative to that means of being entitled to his holy name.

Verse 16

And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and mastered both of them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Mastered both of them ... Apparently, only two of the seven brothers were involved in this episode, as indicated by the word "both." Their defeat was sudden, dramatic, and overwhelming. As Bruce said,

They employed the name of Jesus in an attempt to imitate Paul's exorcism; but when they tried to use it, like an unfamiliar weapon wrongly handled, it exploded in their hands.^[24]

Many have noted an element of humor in Luke's words here to the effect that "casters out" were themselves "cast out"!

ENDNOTE:

[24] Ibid., p. 390.

Verse 17

And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, that dwelt at Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all, and the name of Jesus was magnified.

The tremendous results which followed the discomfiture of the ambitious "seven sons" was brought about by the widespread interest in a place like Ephesus in magical arts of witchcraft, etc. In Shakespeare's **COMEDY OF ERRORS** (**Acts 1**, Scene 2, lines 97ff), one finds the following description of Ephesus:

They say this town is full of cozenage, As, nimble jugglers that deceive the eye, Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind, Soul-killing witches that deform the body, Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks, And many such-like liberties of sin.

Thus it came about that in such a climate dominated by the works of darkness, the victory of the name of Jesus over the would-be exorcists was just the kind of thing to have produced the results Luke mentioned.

Verse 18

Many also of them that had believed came, confessing, and declaring their deeds.

At Corinth, many of the Christians came from among those who have been involved in the grossest of sins (**1 Corinthians 6:9-11**); and so it was here, that among the Christians were many who had been involved in the black arts of magic. Upon beholding the truth, however, they forsook their evil ways.

Verse 19

And not a few of them that practiced magical arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

It is a shame that in our own times all kinds of spiritualists, fortune-tellers, palm-readers, and voodoo specialists are operating in the same manner as those ancient sinners. Ever since this event at Ephesus, Satan and his advocates have been screaming about the "book burners"; but it surely must be true that many books today deserve the same fate. "Fifty thousand pieces of silver ..." This was an immense sum, no matter how figured. Hervey supposed the "pieces" were Greek coins, calculating the value at 1,815 English pounds (\$9,000.00 at the old rate),^[25] and Wesley, supposing the "pieces" were Jewish shekels, gave the value as 6,250 English pounds (\$35,000.00).^[26]

[25] A. C. Hervey, op. cit., p. 117.

[26] John Wesley, op. cit., in loco.

Verse 20

So mightily grew the word of the Lord and prevailed.

During this period of some two years and three months, or "three years" as Paul referred to it, extensive growth and development attended the preaching of the gospel. Churches sprang up everywhere. Countless thousands became Christians; and many public officials and leaders of the people became friendly to the apostolic preachers, as is clearly evidenced by the event Luke next reported (19:23ff).

Verse 21

Now after these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. And having sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

Purposed in the spirit ... I must see Rome ... Paul's plans were made prayerfully and with his considered best judgment; and here is the first historical mention of his avowed purpose of going to Rome, a purpose often thwarted, until at last, in circumstances he could never have dreamed of, he came down the Appian way, between two soldiers, wearing a chain.

Wesley has a moving comment on the breadth of vision and daring courage of this mighty apostle. He said:

Paul sought not to rest, but pressed on as if he had yet done nothing. He is already possessed of Ephesus and Asia; but he purposes for Macedonia and Achaia. He has his eye upon Jerusalem, then upon Rome, afterward on Spain (**Romans 15:24**). No Caesar, no Alexander the Great, no other hero comes up to the magnanimity of this little Benjamite. Faith and love to God and man had enlarged his heart, even as the sand of the sea.^[27]

Timothy and Erastus ... Timothy frequently traveled with Paul; and, again and again, made excursions in Paul's name to visit the young churches (**Acts 17:16,17**). Erastus is mentioned again in **2 Timothy 4:20**; and in **Romans 16:23** a man of this name is mentioned as "the treasurer of the city (Corinth)." "Several authorities suggest that these two men are the same person";^[28] and strong agreement is felt with Plumptre who declared that "Erastus may fairly be identified with the chamberlain or steward of Corinth (**Romans 16:23**)."^[29] Jack Lewis, however, observed that "An inscription in the theater at Corinth informs us that Erastus ... (held the office of) **AEDILE**,"^[30] not the same as that of "treasurer." This, to be sure, does not prove that Erastus was not "treasurer" when Paul wrote; because city offices then, as now, often were served by men who had experience in more than one office.

Timothy ... was sent into Macedonia; and the purpose of his mission is clear from **1 Corinthians 4:17**. "He was sent on in advance to warn and exhort, saving the apostle from the necessity of using severity when he himself arrived."^[31]

First and Second Corinthians, Galatians and Romans "all belong to the period of Paul's third missionary journey," according to **ISBE**, although, as noted earlier (introduction to **Acts 15**), there appear to be good reasons to suppose that Galatians might properly belong to the period near the time of the Jerusalem council. The dates of all these "four great, or principal epistles of Paul" belong to studies of the epistles themselves. Nevertheless, it seems quite certain that in the period covered by the above verses, Paul wrote the Corinthians both epistles.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Herbert Lockyer, *All the Men of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), p. 113.

[29] E. H. Plumptre, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

[30] Jack P. Lewis, *Historical Backgrounds of Bible History* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1971), p. 173.

[31] E. H. Plumptre, op. cit., p. 132.

Verse 23

THE RIOT AT EPHEBUS

And about that time there arose no small stir concerning the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no little business unto the craftsmen; whom he gathered together, with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs ye know that by this business we have our wealth.

EPHEBUS

Only a miserable village remains near the site of this once proud city of a third of a million. Its history reaches back more than a millennium B.C.; but it was the Ionians who built the first of five great temples dedicated to the ancient fertility goddess, Artemis, giving the name "Ionian" to the distinctive columns which adorned the temples. The history of Ephesus is, in fact, the history of those temples. The fourth temple burned the night Alexander the Great was born (October, 356 B.C.), and by 350 B.C. the fifth was under construction, requiring some 120 years to build. Alexander offered to finish it, with the provision that his name would adorn it; but the offer was declined on the basis that it would be improper to have the "names of two gods" on one temple!

The location of the fifth temple of Artemis was about a mile from Ephesus, north northeast of the city on a level plain, the city itself occupying a strategic location on the Cayster river, the central stream lying between the Hermus and the Maeander. In ancient times a seaport, Ephesus "retreated inland" some seven miles as the Cayster silted the harbor and extended the delta.

The temple's center of devotion was an image of Artemis which reportedly fell from heaven, the same being no doubt a meteorite, the many strange blobs upon which gave a rough appearance of a many-breasted female, encased from the waist downward in a coffin. Blaiklock wrote that "The sacred stone was lost somewhere in the ruins of Ephesus, or concealed in the hills by its last devotees, and probably still exists."^[32]

The temple was a vast structure, four times the size of the Greek Parthenon of Pericles, having some 80,000 square feet.^[33]

The great Ephesian temple of Artemis (loosely identified with Diana) was ranked by ancient writers as one of the seven wonders of the world, its importance deriving not merely from its architectural beauty and size, but from the status which the temple management enjoyed as "banker of the whole world." It has been said that the temple of Diana was the equivalent in ancient pagan society to the Bank of England in modern times. The principal industry of Ephesus was that of manufacturing and selling images.

Demetrius ... This man was a thorough pagan, named after one of the agricultural gods whose worship had been absorbed by the temple; he was the embodiment of selfishness and carnality. His first words in gathering the mob regarded "our wealth"; and he left no doubt of the basis of his opposition to Paul. Thus, the ancient pagan priests and their supporting craftsmen were one in heart with the high priestly concessionaires in the temple of God in Jerusalem.

[32] E. M. Blaiklock, *Cities of the New Testament* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1965), p. 63.

[33] The Encyclopedia Britannica and the New Bible Dictionary provide the above information on Ephesus and the temple of Artemis.

Verse 26

And ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they are no gods, that are made with hands.

Saying that they are no gods By this, Demetrius committed himself to the proposition opposite, namely, that their shrines were real gods. This is a glimpse of the practical fact regarding images, that being that they are indeed considered "gods" by the persons using them, regardless of the specious rationalizations by which the consecration of them is allegedly justified.

It is likely that Demetrius exaggerated the success of Paul; but even if he did, the insight which he had regarding the eventual fate of the shrine business was accurate:

Pliny in his epistle to Trajan (**Ephesians 10**p. 96), half a century later, spoke of "deserted temples," "worship neglected," and "hardly a single purchaser" found for sacrificial victims.^[34]

ENDNOTE:

[34] E. H. Plumptre, op. cit., p. 133.

Verse 27

And not only is there danger that this our trade come into disrepute; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana be made of no account, and that she should even be deposed from her magnificence whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

Diana ... The Greek here is Artemis (English Revised Version margin); and although Artemis might be loosely identified as Diana, it would have been better to translate it like it is. As J.H. Rusco said, "When Rome adopted Greek mythology, they changed the name from Artemis to Diana."

She should even be deposed ... This indeed came to pass. A mighty church was founded in Ephesus; and, with the advance of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire, the shrines and temples of pagan gods and goddesses fell into ruin. In 262 A.D. it was sacked and ruined by the Goths; and in 389 A.D. the Edict of Theodosius banned the remnant of the pagan cult which continued 127 years after the temple was destroyed. During quite a long period from the days of Paul to the sack of the temple by the Goths, the edifice itself enabled the cult's survival, long after all popular support of it vanished.

Verse 28

And when they heard this they were filled with wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the city was filled with confusion: and they rushed with one accord into the

theater, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel.

Great is Diana of the Ephesians ... When Elijah contested with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, the priests of Baal carried on a continuous shout for hours, crying, "O Baal, hear us" (**1 Kings 18:26**); and in recent decades the followers of Adolph Hitler in Germany reinforced Hitler's propaganda with similar chants in unison. Then, as always, it was a device of ignorance and prejudice. The truth cannot be drowned out by any such noise; although, of course, it may win a temporary victory.

Into the theater ... This was an immense open-air auditorium capable of holding 50,000 people, or at least, as some suppose, 25,000.

Gaius and Aristarchus ... A Gaius (**Acts 20:4**) was Paul's companion, but was there said to have been of Derbe; Paul baptized a Gaius in Corinth with his own hands (**1 Corinthians 1:14**); and a Gaius was Paul's host in Corinth when Romans was written (**Romans 16:23**); and the apostle John addressed his Third Epistle to Gaius. This was a common name, however; and any certain identification of all or any of these as the same person is precarious.

Aristarchus ... was a Thessalonian (**Acts 20:4**), thus also a Macedonian; and from other references in **Acts 27:2**; **Colossians 4:10**, and **Philemon 1:1,24**, it appears that he continued with Paul through thick and thin:

He continued through good report and evil report, through persecution, violence, shipwreck, imprisonment and bonds, to the latest moment on which the light of Bible history shines. Blessed servant of Christ; blessed fellow-servant of his chief apostle!
[35]

The reason for seizing these two fellow-workers of Paul was likely that of doing them bodily injury.

ENDNOTE:

[35] A. C. Hervey, op. cit., p. 119.

Verse 30

And when Paul was minded to enter in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.

Paul may have intended to divert the danger threatening Gaius and Aristarchus, hoping also, no doubt, to address the multitude. However, the danger that Paul would be killed was so great that the disciples restrained him from doing anything so rash.

Verse 31

And certain also of the Asiarchs, being his friends, sent unto him and besought him not to adventure himself into the theater.

The Asiarchs were men of the highest rank, being invariably chosen from among the wealthiest of the people. "They were ten in number, representing the ten cities of Proconsular Asia; they presided over all sacred rites."^[36] One of the requirements of their office was that they should provide at their own expense the public games in honor of the gods and the deity of the emperor.

Significantly, these counted among their number friends of the apostle Paul, indicating the impact of the gospel at the highest level of Ephesian society.

ENDNOTE:

[36] Ibid.

Verse 32

Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was in confusion; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. And they brought Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made a defense unto the people. But when they perceived that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

This was a providential interruption of any effective movement against Paul that the mob leaders might have had in mind. Evidently the Jews, who were also opposed to images, were afraid that the hostility of the mob might overflow against themselves also; and presumably, the purpose of the Jews in thrusting forward Alexander to make a speech was that of dissociating the Jews from the Christians. The mob, however, refused to hear him, there being much prejudice against Jews also; and to drown out Alexander, they shouted for two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." Such an effort would have dissipated much of the fierce energy of the crowd, opening the way for the dismissal of the unruly throng by the highest official in the city, a little later.

Verse 35

And when the town-clerk had quieted the multitude, he saith, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there who knoweth not that the city of the Ephesians is temple-keeper of the great Diana, and of the image that fell down from Jupiter?

Quieted the multitude ... This in all probability would have been impossible until the frenzy of the mob had so thoroughly vented itself in the inane tribute to Diana, covering more than two hours.

The town-clerk ... This was the city secretary, or scribe; and, according to Hervey, "was an office of first-rate influence among the Greek cities of Asia."^[37] The glimpse of the office afforded by Luke's narrative here makes this certain. The possibility that the office of proconsul was held jointly at that time by two people makes it likely that he was the highest authority in the city at that moment.

Temple-keeper ... The town-clerk quickly catered to the prejudices of the mob. The title "Neoceros," meaning temple-sweeper, or temple-keeper, was held in the highest esteem by cities thus designated; and the use of it here tended to palliate and diminish the savage passions of the mob.

ENDNOTE:

[37] Ibid., p. 120.

Verse 36

Seeing then that these things cannot be gainsaid, ye ought to be quiet, and, to do nothing rash.

Having procured their attention by a few well-chosen remarks, the town-clerk proceeded to call for order, pointing out that such an outburst could cause the city to lose some of its privileges.

Verse 37

For ye have brought hither these men, who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess. If therefore, Demetrius, and the craftsmen that are with him, have a matter against any man, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls: let them accuse one another.

Neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers ... A marvelous insight into Paul's method of preaching appears quite incidentally here. He did not blaspheme pagan deities, nor indulge any violent or destructive operations against the pagan temples. As Boles observed, "He preached positive truths, rather than making a direct attack on their error."^[38]

Robbers of temples ... This expression is unique to the New Testament, except for Paul's use of the verb in **Romans 2:22**, in which he accused certain Jews of robbing temples; and, as Murray said:

Since the town clerk at Ephesus defends Paul and his colleagues against any such charge as robbing temples, we cannot suppose this wrong was one to which the Jews were entirely immune.^[39]

There is no way that we can accommodate to the notion of Ramsay that "'robbers of temples' is a mere mistranslation."^[40] The word used in the Greek text is "temple-robbers."^[41]

There are proconsuls ... Critics have been quick to point out that the Greek cities had only one proconsul each; but, as Blaiklock noted:

A Roman knight and a freedman had murdered the proconsul (shortly after the accession of Nero) and administered his estates in Asia. If these villains assumed temporary proconsular authority, the plural is accounted for, and the date fixed. It must have been A.D. 54.^[42]

Again, the absolute and invariable accuracy of the sacred historian is attested.

^[38] H. Leo Boles, op. cit., p. 313.

^[39] John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Publishers, 1968), vol. 1p. 83.

^[40] Sir William M. Ramsay, op. cit., p. 226.

^[41] *The Nestle Greek Text with a Literal English Translation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), p. 557.

^[42] E. M. Blaiklock, op. cit., p. 65.

Verse 39

But if ye seek anything about other matters, it shall be settled in the regular assembly.

The regular assembly ... The assembly in progress was an illegal assembly, having all the characteristics of a mob; and by such a reference the town-clerk cast a serious reflection upon the entire riot. Illegal assemblies were punishable by the Roman authorities.

Verse 40

For indeed we are in danger to be accused concerning this day's riot, there being no cause for it: and as touching it we shall not be able to give account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

One has to admire the intelligence, tact, and ability by which the town-clerk achieved a dispersal of such a mob. First, he pointed out that the whole city might be "in danger" for tolerating such an illegal uproar; but then he softened his reference to the riot by calling it a "concourse." This indicated that he was willing to convey some semblance of legality to the mob by naming it a concourse instead of a riot; then, moving still further to legalize the outrageous gathering, he "dismissed **THE ASSEMBLY**!" In context, that town-clerk's actions bore the stamp of genius. Once more, the providence of God had preserved the life of the dauntless apostle, saving him and protecting him, without his so much as opening his mouth. How wonderful are the ways of the Lord.

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