

# The Riot in Ephesus



## Ice-Breaker

What can you make by using your own hands?



## Scripture Passage

Acts 19:23-41

<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 craftsmen. <sup>25</sup>He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know 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 man-made gods 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 rushed as one man 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 pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd 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: "Men 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 be quiet 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 fellow craftsmen 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 today's events. 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.



## Bible Study

1. Why would Demetrius rally people against Paul (vv. 25-27; see 17:24-29)? Since this temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, what businesses would Paul be affecting?
2. Consider the crowd (vv. 32-34). What do they see and hear? Why are they there? Why are the Jews trying to get a speaker to represent them? Why would Alexander be shouted down?
3. How do the concerns of the city clerk and Demetrius compare?



## Reference Notes

**19:24 A silversmith.** The silversmith trade made a great deal of money through the manufacture and sale of models of the goddess Artemis. Artemis was a goddess who combined belief in the Roman virgin goddess Diana with an Asian fertility goddess. The center for her worship was in Ephesus where an image of her (probably a meteorite; see verse 35) was placed in a temple that was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In the spring, there was a festival in her honor marked by crowds flocking to Ephesus for a celebration that included orgies and general carousing.

**19:29 Gaius and Aristarchus.** These men were among those who accompanied Paul when he left Ephesus (Acts 20:4). Unable to find Paul (see Acts 17:6), the crowd grabbed two of his associates to accuse. **the theater.** While this was the usual place for public meetings, it would have been appropriate in this case since the great temple of Artemis could be clearly seen from it!

**19:30-31** Both the Christians and some of the officials (these were the asiarchs, the chief citizens out of whose ranks the officials of the Roman cult of emperor worship were elected for one-year terms of office) urged Paul not to go into the theater for fear of his safety. The protection of the asiarchs is another example of official Roman protection and tolerance of Paul (see Acts 18:14-17).

**19:33-34** The Jews, perhaps to disassociate themselves from the charges being made against Paul, tried to have one of their number (Alexander) make a statement. However, since the Jews were well known to be against idolatry as well, he was shouted down by the crowd before he could even speak. Second Timothy, believed to have been written by Paul to Timothy while Timothy was in Ephesus at a later time, refers to an "Alexander the metalworker" who caused Paul a great deal of difficulty (2 Timothy 4:14). It may be that Alexander was a worker in the same trade as Demetrius (v. 24).

**19:35 city clerk.** This was the highest ranking official in the city accountable to the Roman provincial government for what happened in Ephesus. Not wanting to be charged with rioting which could lead to penalties for the city, he worked to quiet down the crowd and dismiss them.

**19:37 robbed temples.** Wealthy people would deposit treasures at temples for safekeeping in light of the sacred nature of the place.

**19:38 proconsuls.** Provinces that did not require troops to maintain order were administered by the Roman Senate through a proconsul. Typically, there was only one at a time over a given area; but in the autumn of A.D. 54 the Emperor Nero, who had just ascended to the throne, had the proconsul of Asia poisoned by Celer and Aelius who served as co-proconsuls until their replacement arrived in the summer of A.D. 55 (Williams). This may indicate that this event happened in the spring of A.D. 55.

**19:39 legal assembly.** The people could gather for meetings to discuss issues that concerned them, but they were to be held at set times and with a set procedure. Such an irregular, chaotic meeting as this one could lead to Roman suppression of their right to assemble. The crowd, mindful of the implied warning, dispersed.



## Caring Time

1. Success, money and independence are some cultural idols. What others come to mind? How has your faith affected your relationship to idols?

2. Could Demetrius have become a Christian and kept his business? Can you think of situations today where someone in a respectable trade would be forced to choose between that trade and Christ? How have your business dealings been affected by your faith?
3. Many people, even believers, would find it difficult to do what Paul did. Do you think Paul was happy? Why or why not?
4. What began as Artemis-worship became Artemis-business. How can Christians fall into the same trap and make Jesus-worship into Jesus-business?