

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

PERSECUTION AT EPHEBUS

(Acts 19:21-41)

OUTLINE

Key verse - 18

Review of paragraph

Paul at Ephesus - persecution arose - his life threatened - planned to pass through Macedonia and Achaia (21) - Sent Timothy and Erastus before (22) - writes to Corinth - Celebration at Ephesus - harvest season for image makers - hard times for image makers (24-29) - mob aroused (28-32) - attempt to take Paul (29,30) - dislike for Jews (33, 34) - quieted by town clerk (35-41).

1. The development of the aesthetic nature of man will not of itself promote truth or curb violence (23-34).
2. The enemies of truth, when they cannot suppress it by other means, often resort to violence (29-31).
3. The cause of violence is usually the greed for money (25-27).
4. The Author of truth is the protector of its promoter (30, 31, 35-41).
5. The greatest efforts of the enemies of truth result in the greatest victories for Christ (23-29).
6. The man of faith continues to plan for the wide spread dissemination of truth amidst threatened destruction (21).

In the passage before us Paul was still at Ephesus. Persecution arose again and the life of Paul was threatened by another mob. He had been in Ephesus for about three years and was planning to take a journey through Macedonia and Greece in order to visit and strengthen the churches in all the points where he had been before. After that he purposed to return to Jerusalem and then to go farther west to Rome.

WRITES TO CORINTH

When Paul remained at Ephesus he wrote a letter to the Corinthian church in which he answered a number of questions which had been sent to him, and in which he gave some very sound and practical advice about a number of things in the conduct of the church.

In this letter he said that he would tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost: **“But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost”** (I Corinthians 16:8). His reason for remaining at Ephesus was that **“For a great door and effectual is opened unto me”** (16:9).

CELEBRATION AT EPHEBUS

The month of May was an important date in Ephesus, as well as at Jerusalem. The Ephesians called this month, the Artemision, or Diana’s month. Everything that man could devise was done to make it a season of joy in honor of Artemis (Diana). People from all the surrounding cities and provinces gathered in Ephesus to witness the games and the races and to pay their tribute to the great goddess, Artemis. It is remarkable how the excavations which have been made at Ephesus in recent years have confirmed the narrative in the Acts concerning the worship of Artemis and the shrines made in her honor. The chariot races, the wrestling, boxing, gladiatorial contests and fights with wild beasts were all a part of the religious festival. The plays were written and the actors performed in honor of their goddess. Paul had, for the third time, witnessed the great processions and heard the shouts in honor of their goddess; therefore, he would know well what it meant upon this occasion when he heard the sound of the trumpet, the boom of the drum, the clash of cymbal and saw the great crowd press out of the Magnesian gate of the city. The priests and priestesses of Artemis would come in procession with slaves playing music and others bearing aloft under canopies statues of the great goddess. As they passed along the people would wave their hands and cry, “Great Artemis! Great Artemis of Ephesus!”

Through the streets they made their way into the theater - large enough to seat twenty-five thousand people - where a play was performed in honor of Artemis. Then an image of the goddess was borne out on the shoulders of men, so that the shouting crowds might see her likeness, and back again into the great temple which was built for her worship. The temple was a most magnificent white structure. It is said that it was two hundred and twenty years in building; that it was four hundred and twenty-five feet long, two hundred and twenty feet wide, and supported by one hundred and twenty seven pillars of Parian marble each of which was sixty feet high. Each of these pillars had been furnished for the temple by a different prince. The carved capitals of the pillars were overlaid with gold. When the worshippers climbed the marble steps which surrounded the temple they went barefoot through the massive cypress doors into the great hall which contained many statues. The covering of the holy place was overlaid with gold. It rested on costly pillars of green jasper. Behind an embroidered curtain the goddess Artemis was concealed. They said she had fallen from heaven, sent down by Jupiter. The facts seem to be that she was a roughly carved image of no beauty and that the original image was never shown to the people. The four days while the festival lasted was the harvest season of the image makers. All through the year in booths and in the marketplace men sat, moulding and carving and hammering. They were making little shrines of Artemis with her lions couched by her side. One sculptor was carving them out of pure marble, another molding them of clay, others who were silversmiths sat by their little forges and with hammers and anvils made little silver images of Artemis. This was an important industry in Ephesus, for these shrines were sold, not only in Ephesus on the feast days, but all up the Lycus, Caistor and Meander valleys at places like Sardis, Philadelphia, Pergamos, Thyatira, Hierapolis, Laodicea and Colossae, for all Asia worshipped Artemis of Ephesus.

HARD TIMES FOR IMAGE MAKERS

On this year the demand for images of the goddess was decidedly less. When the silversmiths and other makers of shrines first heard of Paul in Ephesus they had simply sneered. The Jews had been in Ephesus for many years but they had made no perceptible impression upon the demand for the shrines of Artemis. This Jew, however, was more aggressive and more effective and people were turning away from the worship of Artemis by the score.

When the silversmiths saw that their trade was falling off they began to talk about the cause. They noticed that the people were believing what Paul said that these gods made with hands were no gods. So Demetrius, one of the leaders of the silversmith's guild, called together some of the workmen of his own craft and pointed out to them that their trade had fallen off. He said, it is because this Paul has turned multitudes of people from the patronage of our business. Not only is our trade in danger, he said, but to make his case appeal to the masses, he declared that the great goddess Artemis is likely to be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

The crowd was thus aroused to fury; they poured out into the street shouting, "**Great is Diana of the Ephesians**" (19:28). They probably took advantage of the hour when the crowd was marching in the procession toward the theater. The crowd had turned into a mob, most of whom did not know what the tumult was all about, but were trying to show their loyalty to Artemis. Those who were leaders of the mob, if they had caught Paul, would have torn him limb from limb.

Paul would have hastened into the theater to clear up the matter and exonerate his friends, had the disciples and some friendly Asiarchs not prevented him. The disciples wanted to protect him and the Asiarchs, who financed and were responsible for the festival in honor of Artemis, knew that they would have to answer to the Roman officials for any serious disorder. They probably knew that Paul was a Roman and the Emperor might deal with them severely if he were harmed.

The Jews, seeing that they were blamed, put forth one of their number, Alexander by name, possibly the coppersmith, who gave the usual salute indicating that he wanted to speak. When the mob saw that he was a Jew they began to shout with more vehemence than ever, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" No one could get a hearing for about two hours, so terribly did the mob rage and shout.

Finally the town clerk, a ruling official similar to the mayor of a city, secured a hearing, and, after praising their goddess secured quiet. He then spoke warning them against mob violence. He said, you have no legitimate charge against these men whom you have brought here. They "**are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess**" (Acts 19:37). Let Demetrius and the others take the matter to law if they want to try to make out a case against them. We are in danger, he warned, of being called to account by the Roman authorities for the uproar of this occasion. Then he calmly dismissed them and advised them to go to their homes. He spoke with tact but also with authority, for he had behind him the Roman soldiers.

THE AESTHETIC NATURE NOT A SUFFICIENT GUIDE

The development of the aesthetic nature of man will not of itself promote truth or curb violence. The center of thought in Ephesus, at the time Paul was there and for many years past, had been the goddess Artemis and her magnificent temple. The people of the city took up the study of art and the making of shrines. This became a great industry in the city. Yet the people were no better as a result of it. Beauty and art will not of themselves improve character. It is sometimes said that where art is developed and men become admirers of the beautiful they will become better; they will be uplifted and turned away from thoughts and ways that are evil. If this were true how came about the period in the history of the church which is called the Dark Ages? In that period art was studied and developed to a remarkable degree in Europe. The Roman Catholic and the Greek Catholic churches promoted it. Beautiful cathedrals were built, and these were filled with statues and pictures which are still admired by the world. But notwithstanding the making of images and the painting of madonnas, popes, kings and saints the world grew sinful and the age grew dark.

Ephesus was a part of the Greek world. Not only in Ephesus and Athens, but in various cities and provinces where the Greek people lived they were noted for their fine art. It is sometimes said that the art of Greece has never been surpassed. Whether or not this be true, it is evident that it was studied and greatly developed in all Hellas. Yet we have seen how corrupt Athens and Corinth were, and Ephesus was little, if any, behind in the corruption of morals. Beauty of character will come when the Spirit comes to us and gives new hearts. Then, and not till then will the old evil and violent nature be taken away. John Ruskin was a great student of art and yet he said: "If I have accomplished anything in the world I owe it to the verses of Scripture my mother instilled into me when I was on her knee." In speaking of the source of his ability he does not so much as mention the great artists whom he had studied and admired.

In Japan a native mother asked the head of a mission school if only beautiful girls were admitted. "Oh no," the missionary answered, "we take any who desire to come." "But," protested the mother, "all your girls are very beautiful." The teacher answered, "We tell them of Christ, and seek to have them take him into their hearts, and this makes their faces lovely." The mother replied, "Well, I do not want my daughter to become a Christian, but I am glad to send her to your school to get that look on her face."

ENEMIES DETERMINED TO SUPPRESS TRUTH

The enemies of the church, when they cannot suppress truth by other means, often resort to violence. The idolaters of Ephesus had no doubt opposed the teaching of Paul in their conversation with one another and in various ways all the time that he had been in the city. Their verbal opposition, however, did not serve to prevent the growth of the Christian religion. When it grew mightily and prevailed so as to affect and injure their business in the making of shrines they decided to resort to force to rid their city of these undesired teachers of religion. Demetrius as their leader had no difficulty in arousing the silversmiths guild to violence. As in several other places where Paul had been, they thought the quickest and most effective way to be rid of him was to kill him.

The Christian world shudders, even after these years, at the thought of the attempt of the Boxers in China to expel and destroy the Christians of that ancient land. During the year nineteen hundred there were one hundred and eighty-eight missionaries and children who suffered martyrdom in China because the Great Sword Guild had watched the steady gains of Christianity and had decided that they would put a stop to its existence by force.

The Turks have attempted to root out the Christian religion many times in Turkey. They have witnessed the Armenians prosper and the followers of the Christian religion increase, and they have resolved upon one desperate measure after another until they have slain the Christians by the thousands and even millions in their determination to destroy Christianity. I remember when a boy that the world was stunned by the reports of the Armenian and Christian massacres, and since that time there have been many atrocities which have taken place in that dark land.

The enemies of Christ put Him to death in their effort to stamp out Christianity; Saul of Tarsus went forth like a madman killing and thrusting men into prison with the same object in view. The enemies of Paul kept up the same bitter opposition and we need not be surprised if it has not ceased today.

After his conversion Paul never returned violence with violence. The Christian soldier fights not with sword and implements of war. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but they are more mighty than if they were. They have partially won in almost every nation of the world, and are rapidly sweeping on until the day shall come when all nations shall honor the sceptre of King Jesus and when sword and battle axe shall be put away forever.

Not long ago some one made the statement that Great Britain and the United States together could whip the world. Another immediately asked: "What do they want to whip the world for?" Then another added the suggestion that these two great nations could save the world. Seven-eighths of the missionaries who are at work today in non-Christian lands have been sent out by Britain and America. It is far more honorable to try to save the world than to defeat the world.

VIOLENCE CAUSED BY GREED

The cause of violence is usually the greed for money. The first reason which Demetrius mentioned to his fellow-craftsmen why Paul should be silenced was that their business was in danger. They had already suffered a decrease in trade. They agreed that they would not sit by and see the image making industry destroyed and the bread taken from the mouths of the silversmiths. The argument that the goddess Artemis might be despised was put forth to catch the ear of the public. The real and underlying reason on the part of the promoters of the persecution was the greed of gain.

The first rebellion in the United States, under the administration of Washington, is known as the Whiskey Rebellion. The disturbance began in 1791 when a tax was imposed upon whiskey. In western Pennsylvania the opposition grew until it broke out in open rebellion. The militia of four states had to be called out to put it down. The promoters of the liquor traffic have always opposed law and regulation.

The whole business and the opposition to regulation and taxation is the greed for money. In those parts of the world where prohibition has gone into effect the liquor interests are more or less in rebellion. They have evaded and broken and defied the law in every imaginable manner in order to save their outlawed merchandise or to profit on it by illegal sales. It has even caused international complications and friction because ships have broken the law of the nation into whose harbors they sail.

The war in China may have several causes, but evidently one of the principal causes was the greed of some of the war-Lords. The immediate object seemed to be the rich city of Shanghai and with it the control of the opium trade from which a vast amount of money is exacted.

When the truth of God prevails and the lust of greed is overcome it will put an end to the making of implements of war. It will bring an end to Sabbath traffic and to every business that ministers to pride, vanity, vice, luxury or ambition. There is much talent that goes into the production of songs, fiction, licentious tales, gambling, and theaters which is worse than wasted. If all the wealth and genius that is now wasted were employed to advantage the world would be made better.

Every earnest Christian wishes that better conditions might prevail. But so long as the sinful nature of man holds so large a place in the world as it does today we may expect bitter and often violent opposition to the promotion of various moral and religious reforms.

THE AUTHOR OF TRUTH ITS PROTECTOR

The author of truth is the protector of its promoter. Paul was protected from the mob at Ephesus. It is true that Paul had been given up for dead by his enemies at one time before this when he was at Lystra, but he revived and went right on with his missionary work. Gaius and Aristarchus seemed to be in more imminent peril at this time than was Paul. They also were protected and preserved in the great work which he so loved.

When Paul had been at Corinth, before he came to Ephesus, he had been threatened and dragged before the judgment seat. He was visited by God in a vision and told that he should remain there and continue in the work for no man would set on him to hurt him. The protection of Providence was manifest in a most striking manner in the life and work of Paul.

Elisha was wonderfully protected. When besieged by an army God revealed to him the fact that there was an angelic host about him which outnumbered and exceeded in power those who came to take him. The protecting power of God was more frequently manifested in the life of Paul than it was in the life of Elisha.

If we are doing God's work, following the guidance of His Spirit and where He wants us to be, we are in the safest place in the world so far as we are concerned. Mr. D.L. Moody used to say that he never worried about missing a train because he was once saved from a wreck because he had missed the train that he intended to take. If the present writer had been enabled to take a train which he had intended to take not long ago he would have been in a train that was wrecked.

Every day God is watching over us and in innumerable ways of which we know not he is keeping us and guarding us. He keeps us as we go out and come in. He that keepeth Israel never slumbers nor sleeps.

Concerning an experience in the New Hebrides Islands when the natives tried their best to destroy his life, John G. Paton wrote as follows: "We committed ourselves in hushed prayer to God and watched them knowing that they could not see us. Immediately the glare of a light fell into the room. Men passed with flaming torches; and first they set fire to the church all around, and then to a reed fence connecting the church and the dwelling house. In a few minutes the house, too, would be in flames, and armed savages waiting to kill us on attempting to escape. As Mr. Paton started out of the house his co-laborer, Mr. Matthieson, held him back saying, "Stop here and let us die together! You will never return!" Paton responded, 'be quick, leave that to God. In a few minutes our house will be in flames and then nothing can save us.' The savages yelled in rage and urged each other to strike the first blow, but the invisible One restrained them. I stood invulnerable beneath his invisible shield, and succeeded in rolling back the tide of flame from our dwelling house. At this dread moment occurred an incident which my readers may explain as they like, but which I trace directly to the interposition of my God. A rushing and roaring sound came from the south like the noise of a mighty engine or of muttering thunder. Every head was instinctively turned in that direction, and they knew from their previous hard experience that it was one of their awful tornadoes of wind and rain. The mighty roaring of the wind, the black cloud pouring down its unceasing torrents, and the whole surroundings awed these savages into silence. Some began to withdraw from the scene, all lowered their weapons of war, and several terror struck, exclaimed, That is Jehovah's rain! Truly their God is fighting for them and helping them. Let us away! A panic seized upon them, they threw away their remaining torches, in a few minutes they had all disappeared in the bush, and I was left alone, praising God for His marvelous works." God is our protector and truth will prevail.

Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever
on the throne, -
Yet the scaffold sways the Future, and
behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping
watch above His own."

- *This Present Crisis*, Lowell.

ENEMIES YET VICTORY

The greatest efforts of the enemies of truth result in the greatest victories for Christ. This season in Ephesus, about the time of Pentecost, was the time of the annual festival in honor of the goddess Artemis. The city was crowded with ardent worshippers. The cry that was raised in honor of the goddess and against Paul aroused a mob which surged through the streets ready to seize and put an end to him. Paul speaks later of having fought with beasts in Ephesus. This was likely the occasion. It is possible that Paul was thrown into the arena and forced to fight with wild beasts, but the statement is more likely figurative.

These fanatics in Ephesus were like wild beasts. A hooting, yelling, surging, fighting mob cannot be outdone in beastliness by wild animals.

The twenty-second Psalm which speaks of the suffering of Christ, says that many bulls compassed Him, strong bulls of Bashan beset Him round. They gaped upon Him with their mouth as a ravening and roaring lion. Thoughtful interpreters of Scripture do not regard this as being literal. They think of it as referring to the cruel men who surrounded Christ and put Him to death. So in the case of Paul fighting with beasts at Ephesus it possibly refers to the cruel and bloodthirsty nature of the men who opposed him.

The supreme effort of the enemies of Paul did not harm him in this instance. It resulted in a great victory for Christ. Rather than hindering the work it opened up the way for greater and more far-reaching work in that city and province.

J.R. Miller once told of how a Brahmin compared the Christian missionary to a mango tree. "It puts forth its blossoms and then weights its branches with fruits. For itself? No, for the hungry who come to it for food. By and by the tree is assailed with clubs and stones. Its leaves are torn and its branches are bruised and broken. It is stripped bare. But does it resent this cruel treatment and refuse to yield fruit another year? No, next year it is more fruitful than ever. So it is with the Christian missionary," said the Hindoo.

When Mr. Nathan, a Jew, was converted, he hurried home to tell his father and mother. They were horrified and cast him out of their house. His father said: "Get out of my house, and never darken my door again until you retract those words." He then wrote to his mother telling her of the joy that had come to his heart, and he received this reply: "You are no longer a son of mine. I have cast you out of my heart with a curse." He met his sister on the street and she turned her face from him. His brother reported him dead. "Then," said Mr. Nathan, "I prayed to God and said, O my Father, I'll have to give it all up. Father has driven me from his house, mother has cast me out of her heart, sister turns her face from me, and brother reports me dead. Then this promise flashed through my mind: **'When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up'** (Psalm 27:10), and I clung to that promise for dear life, until I saw my father, mother, and sister converted to my Saviour, and expect yet to see my brother a follower of the meek and lowly Jesus." How often the greatest efforts of the enemies of truth result in the greatest victories for Christ!

FAITH PRESSES ON

The man of faith continues to plan for the widespread dissemination of truth amidst threatened destruction. This was one of the crises in the life of Paul. One might think that he would say, I have escaped by a very narrow margin at this time, I will be quiet and cautious hereafter and not run any risks lest the enemy should take my life. If such a thought ever found an entrance to the mind of Paul it never found utterance from his lips. If Satan tempted him, and I suppose he did tempt him with just such suggestions, he did not yield for a moment. Even in the midst of such surroundings Paul planned to go on farther than ever before with his glad tidings of the Gospel of Christ.

He said he wanted to revisit the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, then go back to Jerusalem and after that on to Rome. Yes, and his plan kept on enlarging, for not a year after this he wrote from Corinth, when writing a letter to the Romans: **“Whosoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company”** (Romans 15:24), that he wanted to go on beyond Rome into Spain.

Scarcely had the uproar ceased in Ephesus until Paul started out to go through Macedonia and carry out this great plan. The opportunity to visit Rome seemed now open. While Paul was in Ephesus Claudius Caesar died and Nero took the throne. Claudius had driven all Jews from Rome. Nero had not yet manifested bitter opposition to the Gospel, so Paul was glad of a possible open door to reach the great central city of the world. He believed that from Rome the Gospel would radiate out by all roads farther than from any other city in the world. He sought to bear the Gospel to the large centers of influence. Though they were centers of influence for evil when Paul entered them, he knew that if the people were converted they would be just as important centers for the dissemination of the Gospel.

When Horace Tracy Pitkin was killed by the Boxers in nineteen hundred, he was thinking of and praying for the dissemination of the Gospel in China. These are his last recorded words, spoken to his Chinese helper while the mob was swooping down upon the missions. “Laoman, tell of mother of little Horace to tell Horace that his father’s last wish was that, when he is twenty-five years of age, he should come to China as a missionary.”

Mrs. E.J. Cooper was another who survived the perils of the Boxers, but as a result of the terrible exposure and hardships exchanged the martyr’s cross for the victor’s crown in Ying-shan. Just before her death she said to her husband, “If the Lord spares us I should like to go back to Lu-ch’eng if possible.” Her husband, writing to his mother, after quoting those words, said: “Devoted soul! Denied by her Master of doing the work so near to her heart, she never turned in purpose and desire to win some of the Chinese for Christ” (*A Thousand Miles of Miracle in China*, p. 353).

Amidst perils, and even in death, the man and woman of faith keeps on hoping and planning for the mighty progress of the Gospel in the dark and wicked centers of the earth. And how wonderfully the Lord answers, and in what unexpected ways.

At the time of the persecution in Korea when the native Christians were charged with conspiracy against the government this is told by Miss Montgomery of one of them. “Among the members of one of the churches that was in the center of the police accusations was a young Korean who had been at home from the Waseda University, Tokyo, but within a month when he was put in jail as a suspect. He was placed in a cell by himself and he grieved because he was restrained from speaking to the other prisoners, as his fellow Christians, who were not in solitary confinement, were doing. Soon he was banished to one of the neighboring islands. When he was released, after the breakdown of the persecution, he said, with a shining face, ‘Just think, I have been longing for a chance to speak of Christ and mourning because I could not speak in jail.

Then God sent me off to an unevangelized island where there was plenty of work to do for Him, and the government paid my fare.’“

Paul continued to work, pray and plan for larger work for Christ. Later he went to Rome and the government paid his fare. Paul preached with less hindrance than if he had been a free man. He was protected by Roman soldiers and no man could hinder him. No group of men dared to attack and mob him. Let us keep on working, praying and planning for the growth of the church of Christ though there may be many things in the way. Mobs, prisons, chains, hatred, enemies without or within cannot stop the forward march of the church of Christ which shall one day lay claim to all from the least to the greatest.

May God give us faith to pray and to labor for the hastening of that glorious day! May He speed the fulfillment of His glorious promises!

QUESTIONS (Acts 19:21-41)

1. How long was Paul in Ephesus?
2. Where did he plan to go after leaving Ephesus?
3. What was Paul’s reason for remaining so long at Ephesus (I Corinthians 16:8)?
4. Why were the silversmiths angry at Paul?
5. What celebration in honor of Diana was likely going on at this time?
6. How large a place did Diana hold in the life and worship of Ephesus?
7. Had the Jews who lived in Ephesus before Paul made any perceptible effect on the sale of images?
8. What was the secret of Paul’s influence?
9. Why do many members of a mob rage when they do not know the cause?
10. What place has money in appealing to the masses today?
11. Was Paul ready to desert his companions when there was danger?
12. How did the opinions of Demetrius and the town clerk differ concerning what Paul had said of their gods?
13. Why is not the aesthetic nature of man a sufficient guide?
14. Did the development of art serve to raise the morals of Greece?
15. What is the most important factor in the beauty of life and character?
16. What example does Paul give us about returning violence?
17. How may we best overcome the lust of greed?
18. Where is the safest place for the Christian?
19. How long does threatened danger stop the plans of the man of faith?
20. What assurance have we that God will protect us as he did Paul?

~ end of chapter 34 ~

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