
a *Grace Notes* course

The Acts of the Apostles

an expositional study
by Warren Doud

Lesson 314: **Acts 19:29-41**

ACTS, Lesson 314, Acts 19:29-41

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Acts 19:29-41**Acts 19:29**

And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.

Gaius and Aristarchus were two of Paul's traveling companions, both from Macedonia. There were probably both Gentile Christians, so this crowd of Greeks is attacking Greeks, not Jews.

Aristarchus later accompanied Paul to Troas (Acts 20:4) and on his voyage to Rome (Acts 27:2). Paul mentions Aristarchus as a fellow worker (Philemon 24) and prisoner (Col. 4:10).

Gaius is not so well known. This Gaius came from Macedonia, but the Gaius who went with Paul to Jerusalem resided in Derbe (Acts 20:4).

The mob grabbed up anyone they could to drag them into the theater; maybe Paul and the other disciples were somewhere else at the time and could not be found.

The theater was a large amphitheater, used for public assemblies, debates, and entertainments. These were common in larger communities. The historian Tacitus says of the emperor Vespasian, "Having entered into the theater of the Antiochians, where it was the custom to hold consultations, the people running together, and being profuse in flattery, he addressed them."

Acts 19:30,31

And when Paul would have entered with the people, the disciples suffered him not.

And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent to him, advising him not to venture into the theatre.

This was a dangerous situation. Paul's Christian friends were concerned for his safety and would not allow him to go into the theater. They steadfastly resisted him in this matter.

A chief of Asia (**asiarchos**), the Asiarch, was a Roman official, wealthy and influential, often responsible for public games. Some translations call them "deputies of the province". There were usually ten such officers in each province. They supervised the funds connected with worship of the emperor, they presided at games and festivals, and they put on their own games and festivals.

The Asiarchs were likely not Christians, but they were level-headed men who apparently had a high opinion of Paul. They knew he would be in danger in the theater and gave him some good advice. Also, they would certainly know that Paul was a Roman citizen and would be looking out for his well being.

Furneaux, "It was an Asiarch who at Smyrna resisted the cry of the populace to throw Polycarp to the lions".

Acts 19:32

Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and most of them did not know why they were come together.

This sounds like some of the public protests and street gatherings that we have in the U.S. these days, characterized by confusion and ignorance, mobs of people who don't have anything better to do, and have an opportunity for some "entertainment" and partying.

The word "assembly" is (**ekklesia**), which usually refers to a church in the New Testament, a place of order and peace. Here, though, the assembly is a riotous mob scene of disorder and confusion.

Acts 19:33, 34

And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defense unto the people.

But when they knew that he was a Jew, all cried out with one voice for about two hours, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

Some Jews in the crowd find a man named Alexander, lead him to the front, and ask him to address the multitude. Perhaps this particular person had made a name for himself as an eloquent speaker. From the Jews and presumably from Demetrius and the artisans he receives information about the purpose of the meeting.

The Jews who were opposed to the gospel probably wanted to clear themselves of any charge of opposing the worship of Artemis. At the same time they want to place Paul and his followers in a bad light (compare verse 9). For that reason, Alexander is about to speak on behalf of the Jews. The conclusion is that this man, a Jew, is in league with the artisans.¹

Alexander motions with his hand to the crowd and asks people to be silent so that he can speak. He intends to absolve the Jews of any accusation that they have shown disrespect to Artemis. Alexander didn't get a chance to open his mouth, as soon as the crowd realizes that he is a Jew they begin to howl, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians."

The people see no difference between the religion of the Jews in the local synagogue and the Christian faith in the house churches. Both the Jews and the Christians refuse to worship the goddess Artemis and therefore are out of step with the general population of Ephesus and the province of Asia. For two hours, the people give vent to their religious feelings and shout their one-line chorus that proclaims the greatness of Artemis. The mob spirit provides the necessary enthusiasm to chant for that length of time. As Alexander is unable to speak, he wisely blends in with the crowd and disappears. But Gaius and Aristarchus remain captives of Demetrius and his fellow workers (19:37-38).

¹ *ibid.*, Acts 19:33,34

Acts 19:35,36

And when the town clerk had appeased the people, he said, You men of Ephesus, what man is there that knows not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?

Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, you ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.

Now this town clerk is a politician that I can admire! He is level headed, very reasonable, and can deal with real issues by providing practical advice and solutions.

The town clerk was a sort of mayor of the city. He served as an intermediary between the Roman government and the city council of Ephesus. He had authority, and better yet, this man was respected by the people; when he moved forward to speak, the people became calm and were ready to listen to reason.

The town clerk knows his people and begins by addressing them as "men of Ephesus." He continues by stating an obvious truth which he skillfully puts in the form of a rhetorical question. With this question (to which he expects a negative answer) he deftly bypasses the issue raised by Demetrius and his fellow workers. The town clerk asks whether anyone is not acquainted with the fact that Ephesus is the guardian city of the temple of the great goddess Artemis. The answer, of course, is "no".

"Therefore," he says, "since these things are undeniable, you must be calm and not do anything that is rash." The town clerk states these facts as incontrovertible evidence and then deftly invites the citizens to display dignity and proper decorum. By starting a riot in Ephesus, the people exhibited conduct that was the "reverse of the standard of a Greek gentleman." With well-chosen words he challenges them to resort to reason and to use common sense.

Acts 19:37

For you have brought here these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor blasphemers of your goddess.

Throughout this entire ordeal, both Gaius and Aristarchus have been captives of the mob of craftsmen. The town clerk was likely acquainted with these men, knew that no charges had been pressed in the civil courts, and understood that Demetrius had provoked a riot. Accordingly, the town clerk argues for the release of the two captives because of lack of evidence against them. They are neither temple robbers nor blasphemers.

As aliens in dispersion, Jews observed this rule: "Let none blaspheme the gods which other cities revere, nor rob foreign temples, nor take treasure that has been dedicated in the name of any god." Even if Gaius and Aristarchus are Gentiles, not Jews, they have not robbed the temple treasury in Ephesus and they have not spoken blasphemous words against Artemis.

The town clerk overlooks the fact that the Jewish and Christian teachings exalt the living God over against lifeless idols. An able statesman, he disregards glaring inconsistencies in the interest of peace and order. However, if Demetrius wishes to question his advice, the town clerk has a recommendation for him and his men.

Acts 19:38,39

Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another.

But if you inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly.

In front of all the people, the town clerk tells Demetrius and the artisans how to proceed in case they have a complaint against Gaius and

Aristarchus.² How humiliating for the members of the craftsmen's guild! Everyone knows that civil suits should be brought before the magistrates when the courts are in session. Demetrius first loses control of the mob; next, he loses face when he is told to go to the courts and see the proconsuls.

In Roman government, both the civic and the imperial courts are the places where arguments are settled, in the presence of either the city councilmen, magistrates, or proconsuls. Here, the town clerk gives his audience a general directive: "Let the plaintiffs and the defendants go to our courts, where they can press charges in legal assemblies." The clerk uses technical terms, "bring charges" and "legal assembly." As a man of law and order, he stresses that charges must be pressed before a legally constituted court that convenes at stated times. By these statements he implies that the present gathering lacks every appearance of legality!

Acts 19:40,41

For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.

And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

"For indeed, we are running the risk of being accused of rioting, concerning today's events; and because there is no legal reason for it, we would have a hard time accounting for these actions (to the Roman authorities, in particular)."

For the rioting, it is the general population of Ephesus, not the Christians, who have to take responsibility and face the consequences. The town clerk points out the predicament. The word "concourse" means "uproar" and has the additional meaning of conspiracy.

² *ibid*, Acts 19:38,39

The meeting in the theater has completely changed now, from an unruly mob scene to a public meeting. The town clerk adjourns the meeting!

Roman Provincial System

from “The Life and Epistles of St. Paul,” by W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson.

Roman Provincial System

From the time when Augustus united the world under his own power, the provinces were divided into two different classes. The business of the first Emperor’s life was to consolidate the imperial system under the show of administering a republic. He retained the names and semblances of those liberties and rights which Rome had once enjoyed. He found two names in existence, the one of which was henceforth inseparably blended with the Imperial dignity and military command, the other with the authority of the Senate and its civil administration. The first of these names was “Praetor,” the second was “Consul.” Both of them were retained in Italy, and both were reproduced in the Provinces as “Propraetor” and “Proconsul.”³ He told the Senate and people that he would relieve them of all the anxiety of military proceedings and that he would resign to them those provinces where soldiers were unnecessary to secure the fruits of a peaceful administration. He would take upon himself all the care and risk of governing the other provinces, where rebellion might be apprehended and where the proximity of warlike tribes made the presence of the legions perpetually needful.

These were his professions to the Senate; but the real purpose of this ingenious arrangement

³ It is important, as we shall see presently, to notice Dio Cassius’s further statement, that all governors of the Senate’s provinces were to be called Proconsuls, whatever their previous office might have been, and all governors of the Emperor’s provinces were to be styled Legati or Propraetors, even if they had been Consuls.

was the disarming of the Republic and the securing to himself the absolute control of the whole standing army of the Empire.⁴ The scheme was sufficiently transparent; but there was no sturdy national life in Italy to resist his despotic innovations, and no foreign civilized powers to arrest the advance of imperial aggrandizement. Thus it came to pass that Augustus, though totally destitute of the military genius either of Cromwell or Napoleon, transmitted to his successors a throne guarded by an invincible army, and a system of government destined to endure through several centuries.

Hence we find in the reign, not only of Augustus, but of each of his successors, from Tiberius to Nero, the provinces divided into these two classes. One the one side we have those which are supposed to be under the Senate and the people. –The governor is appointed by lot, as in the times of the old republic. He carries with him the lictors and fasces, the insignia of a Consul; but he is destitute of military power. His office must be resigned at the expiration of a year. He is styled “Proconsul” and the Greeks, translating the term, call him “anthupatos,” which our English translators has rendered by the ambiguous word “deputy.” Acts 13:7, “The deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus.” Or, “Gallio was the deputy of Achaia.” Acts 18.

On the other side are the provinces of Caesar. The governor may be styled “Propraetor” or “ANTISTRATEIGOS”, but he is more properly “Legatus” or “PRESBUTEIS” – the representative or “Commissioner” or the Emperor. He goes out from Italy with all the pomp of a military commander, and he does not return until the Emperor recalls him.⁵ And to

⁴ cf Seutonius and Dio Cassius.

⁵ All these details are stated, and the two kinds of governors very accurately distinguished in the 53rd Book of Dio Cassius, ch. 13. It should be remarked that EPARXIA (the word still used for the

complete the symmetry and consistency of the system, the subordinate districts or these imperial provinces are regulated by the Emperor's "Procurator" (EPITROPOS), or "High Steward." The New Testament, in the strictest conformity with the other historical authorities of the period, gives us examples of both kinds of provincial administration. We are told by Strabo, and by Dio Cassius, that "Asia" and "Achaia" were assigned to the Senate; and the title, which in each case is given to the Governor in the Acts of the Apostles, is "Proconsul." The same authorities inform us that Syria was an imperial province, and no such title as "Proconsul" is assigned by the sacred writers to "Cyrenius Governor of Syria," (Luke 2:2) or to Pilate, Festus, and Felix, the Procurators of Judea, which was a dependency of that great and unsettled province.⁶

Dio Cassius informs us, in the same passage where he tells us that Asia and Achaia were provinces of the Senate, that Cyprus was retained by the Emperor for himself, along with Syria and Cilicia. If we stop here, we naturally ask the question, and some have asked the question rather hastily, how it comes to pass that St. Luke speaks of Sergius Paulus by the style of "Proconsul." But any hesitation concerning the strict accuracy of the sacred historian's language is immediately set at rest by the very next sentence of the secular historian, in which he informs us that Augustus restored Cyprus to the Senate in exchange for another district of the Empire, a statement which he again repeats in a later passage of his work. It is evident, then, that the governor's style and title from this time forward would be

subdivisions of the modern Greek Kingdom) is applied indiscriminately to both kinds of provinces.

⁶ The word invariably used in the NT is HEIGEMON. This is a general term, like the Roman "Praeses" and the English "Governor", as may be seen by comparing Luke 2:2 with 3:1 and observing that the very same word is applied to the offices of Procurator of Judea, the Legatus of Syria, and the Emperor himself.

"Proconsul." But this evidence, however satisfactory, is not all that we possess. Inscriptions, which could easily be adduced, supply us with the names of additional governors who were among the predecessors or successors of Sergius Paulus.