

As God's people, we want to be guided by His Word and empowered by His Spirit to look more like Jesus. This Scripture Guide is based on this morning's passage to further equip you with what God's Word says.

Scripture Guide Acts 19:11-41

This section follows Paul and his companions through the events at Ephesus. By the time of the events of vv.11-41, Paul had been in Ephesus for two years, during which he argued with the Jewish leaders in the synagogues before giving up and going to the hall of Tyrannus to debate with Gentiles instead. His stay in Ephesus will reveal three things:

- The power of Jesus over that of foreign deities (here Artemis)
- The social and economic impact of the church
- How Christianity is not meant to send the Roman world into chaos but to redemption

19:11-20 At this time, Paul was doing mighty acts of healing, so much so that even handkerchiefs or aprons he touched were healing people and casting out spirits (vv.11-12). Some Jewish exorcists caught wind of this and started to use Jesus' name in their exorcisms,¹ creating a situation where a spirit does a "reverse exorcism," sending away the sons of the high priest Sceva naked and injured (vv.13-16). The failure of the sons of Sceva indicates that it is not enough just to use the name of Jesus; it requires "knowing" Jesus and being filled with the Spirit. This incident becomes famous to the Ephesians, and "fear fell on them all" as Jesus was praised for his power by the locals (v.17). The local believers are now placed in the spotlight and tell the masses about their practices and beliefs, causing a large amount of local magic users² to willingly burn their books together in a popular city location (vv.18-20). Luke relates that the total value was approximately 50,000 pieces of silver. If Luke is referring to the Greek drachma, a coin with the value of a day's wages, then the modern-day value would be somewhere around 6 million dollars.³ While the followers of Jesus could sell these books to help the poor, it is clear from this story that "the mere existence of magic... is antithetical to the Christian way of life."⁴ This burning is a massive amount of money just wasted in a very public and accessible place, and there are implications against the gods that give them power. It is only natural for other local Ephesians to become very nervous at the potential implications.

19:21-34 Following this incredible event, Paul is even more resolved to go to Rome and to see more pagans turn to Jesus (vv.21-22). However, Demetrius, who worked as a metalsmith, gets together many men from his trade to stir up resentment against Paul. Luke adds that his primary business consists of silver shrines (ναὸς ἀργυροῦς)⁵ of Artemis. He instigates them to charge Paul of causing people to no longer believe in their gods (v.26), disrupting the trade that his kinsmen had gotten their "wealth" (vv.25, 27), and insulting the temple and character of Artemis (v.27). Of the charge of denying their gods, Luke offers no evidence of their claim. Yet, the charge against Paul of damaging the economy is somewhat

¹ Jesus was not the only Jew that was said to perform exorcisms of spirits (here πνεῦμα, spirit and not δαιμόνια, demons). The book of Tobit details an exorcism in Tobit 8:1-3 while Josephus relates that a man of his day named Eleazar could release demons (Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews*. Book VIII, Chapter 2.).

² Ephesus has a famous magical pedigree for this part of the world. Performing magic was well understood at this time to require a device and would also require the right words to say. These words would be sold in books. Rowe, C. Kavin. *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Setting*. 2009. Oxford University Press.

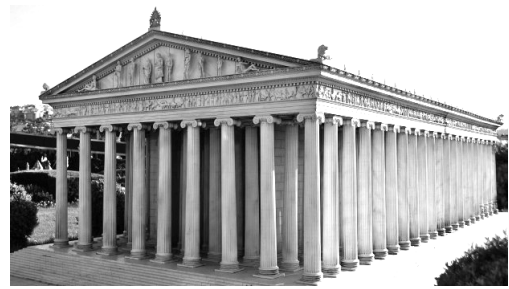
³ *ESV: Study Bible: English Standard Version*. Crossway Bibles, 2016.

⁴ Rowe, C. Kavin. *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Setting*. 2009. Oxford University Press.

⁵ It is somewhat unclear what Demetrius is referring to here. The statuettes would primarily be bought by the wealthy, but his greater point is that Paul is shattering the idolatry-based business (Rowe).

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valid, if not directly intentional. Of the last accusation, it is worth noting how important Artemis is to the Ephesians. This goddess was the city goddess of Ephesus, and her temple was a central business driver, an incredible work of architecture, and a local moral compass.^{6,7} It is only natural then that the crowd would be worked into a frenzy by this charge, taking up yelling, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians (v.28)!" This group creates a riot in the city, dragging two of Paul's companions in the theater, and creates a scene of chaos (vv.29,32). Paul is told not to go by his disciples and leading officers of Asia, likely fearing his safety and worried his presence would worsen it (vv.31-32). The Jews put forth a man named Alexander⁸ to give a defense, but the crowd shouts him down.



The temple of Artemis in Ephesus

19:35-41 The saviors of this story come from unlikely heroes, a clerk of Ephesus and Rome itself. The clerk quiets the crowd by arguing four things: (1) that Artemis's grandeur is known to all, (2) that these men have not blasphemed the goddess, (3) that the court system has been developed for cases like this, and (4) that Rome will interfere with vengeance upon hearing about public disorders (vv.36-40). The fact Paul and his company have not insulted Artemis has already been stated, but the interesting part of this speech is how Luke includes this to make a point. Law and order given by Rome are an aid to Christianity, as Paul writes in Romans 13:1-7. In fact, Paul was aided by Asiarchs back in verse 31. The laws given by Rome permit legal action against Paul and his companions if Demetrius can prove his statements about them. If not, stirring up riots will incur the wrath of Rome, who will set order by force. Yet the clerk's words are nearsighted, as the economic impact of the rejection of idols is still laid as an undercurrent and is not refuted. The clerk is crafty enough to calm the crowd down and let the crowd disperse.

Conclusion

This story shows the "deep and often troubling cultural destabilization inherent to the early Christian mission (Rowe)." People like the magic users will accept the customs and norms of Christianity, while the silversmiths seen in the passage will fear the changing climate and respond with violence. Regardless, Christians through their rejection of idols will inevitably unsettle the world. Ultimately, the kingdom of God will not seek to put the pagan world into chaos, but will choose to restore the world to how it should be. The prophet Jeremiah tells the exiles to "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile...for in its welfare you will find your welfare (Jer 29:5-7)." The kingdom of God will redeem the nations from their sin and replace them with righteousness.

⁶ Pliny the Elder records that the temple of Diana (Artemis) was about four hundred and twenty-five feet in length and two hundred and twenty-five in breadth. He also states that "all of Asia joined" in its building and took one hundred and twenty years to complete. He also affirms the story of the construction of the temple given by the town clerk in verse 35. Pliny the Elder. *Natural History*, Book XXXVII.

⁷ Plutarch records, "The famous Artemis at Ephesus gives asylum and security from their creditors to debtors when they take refuge in her temple." Plutarch. *Morals*. Book XXIII.

⁸ His role in the story and presence here is unclear. He could be a Messianic Jew trying to support Paul or a Jew trying to separate his people from the trouble that Paul has brought.