

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 93

Sha'ul's Third Missionary Journey ~ Part 4

Note: To examine the graphics in this series, click on them for a pop-up version.

As we delve back into **Sha'ul's Third Missionary Journey**, we find that his first letter to the **Corinthians** did not receive the immediate response he might have expected. In the meantime, the historical record in the **Book of Acts** takes us back to **Sha'ul's** final days in **Ephesus**.

Luke shows that the **Gospel** was opposed not only by nonbelieving **Jews** but also by nonbelieving **Gentiles** acting on their own without **Jewish** instigation. However, **Luke** reports events in the history of the spread of the **Gospel** and gives examples of the kinds of problems that arose from all three relevant groups—**Jews**, **pagans**, and the ruling **Romans**.

From their earliest days as a church, these Christians had put up with hostility from those who worshipped other gods (Acts 19:23–41)

~ Kendell Easley

Silversmiths Incited

²³ It was at this time that a major furor arose concerning the Way. ²⁴ There was a silversmith named Demetrius who manufactured from silver objects connected with the worship of the goddess Artemis, and he provided no small amount of work for the craftsmen. ²⁵ He called a meeting of them and of those engaged in similar trades and said, "Men, you understand that this line of business provides us our living. ²⁶ And you can see and hear for yourselves that not only here in Ephesus, but in practically the whole province of Asia, this Sha'ul has convinced and turned away a considerable crowd by saying that man-made gods aren't gods at all. ²⁷ Now, the danger is not only that the reputation of our trade will suffer but that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will come to be taken lightly. It could end up with the goddess herself, who is worshipped throughout the province of Asia and indeed throughout the whole world, being ignominiously brought down from her divine majesty!"

Demetrius' real motive, greed, is to be concealed for propaganda purposes by a veneer of civic pride. The flavor of his empty rhetoric is faithfully reproduced in v. 27. Verses 28–29 (below) show that the scheme worked: the rabble was roused.

Riot Ensues

²⁸ Hearing this, they were filled with rage and began bellowing, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹ Soon, the whole city was in an uproar. As one man, the mob rushed into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Sha'ul's traveling companions from Macedonia. ³⁰ Sha'ul himself wanted to appear before the crowd, but the talmidim wouldn't let him. ³¹ Even some of the officials of the province, friends of his, sent a message begging him not to risk entering the theater. ³² Meanwhile, some were shouting one thing and others something else because the assembly was in complete confusion, and the great majority didn't even know why they were there. ³³ Some of the crowd explained the situation to Alexander, whom the Jews had pushed to the front. So Alexander motioned for silence, hoping to make a defense speech to the people. ³⁴ But as soon as they recognized that he was a Jew, they began bellowing in unison, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" and they kept it up for about two hours.

As soon as they recognized that he (Alexander) **was a Jew**. As in Philippians (16:12–13 and 16:20–22), antisemitism was at home among these pagans. **Pagan** antisemitism is not directed specifically only at **Sha'ul** or his version of **Judaism** but at all **Jews** and at **Judaism** generally.

The Town Clerk Calms the Crowd

³⁵ At last, the city clerk was able to quiet the crowd. "Men of Ephesus!" he said, "Is there anyone who doesn't know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of the sacred stone which fell from the sky?"

The temple of the great Artemis. Artemis is the same as Diana in the Roman pantheon; Ephesus was the center of Artemis's worship. This temple was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Perhaps the *sacred stone* was a meteorite.

³⁶ Since this is beyond dispute, you had better calm down and not do anything rash. ³⁷ For you have brought these men here who have neither robbed the temple nor insulted your goddess.

³⁸ So if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and the judges are there—let them bring charges and countercharges. ³⁹ But if there is something more you want, it will have to be settled in a lawful assembly. ⁴⁰ For we are in danger of being accused of rioting on account of what has happened today. There is no justification for it, and if we are asked, we will be unable to give any reasonable explanation for this disorderly gathering." ⁴¹ And with these words, he dismissed the assembly. ¹

Sha'ul Leaves Ephesus

20 ¹ After the furor died down, Sha'ul sent for the talmidim and encouraged them, then took his leave and set out on his way to Macedonia. ²

An evaluation of Paul's own life leads one to realize that this "quiet" does not mean a sheltered life but rather a freedom from the turmoil that threatened to thwart his ministry. A good example is the disquiet of the riot in the very city that he was writing to, Ephesus (Acts 19:23–41), which the rulers finally quieted.

~ George R. Knight

In our next post, we will begin to dig into **Sha'ul's Second Letter to the Corinthians**. Stay tuned for more insights and revelations.

¹ Acts 19:23–41.

² Acts 20:1.