

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

L. God's Protection From Humanly Overwhelming Opposition

(Acts 19:21-41)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 351. We can thus learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the book of Acts.
- B. Acts 19:21-41 records how Paul faced humanly overwhelming opposition to his physical welfare and to the credibility of his apostolic ministry, but how God sovereignly protected him and his ministry. We view the passage for our insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. God's Protection From Humanly Overwhelming Opposition, Acts 19:21-41.

- A. After Paul had experienced great progress in discipling at Ephesus (Acts 19:8-20), he planned to pass through Macedonia and Achaia again before traveling to Jerusalem and then on to Rome, Acts 19:21. Paul thus sent Timothy and Erastus ahead into Macedonia while he remained for a while at Ephesus in Asia, Acts 19:22.
- B. Apparently Satan meant to block Paul's having great ministry success in Rome like he had in the notable city of Ephesus, so he set about to destroy the apostle with humanly overwhelming opposition, Acts 19:23-30a:
 1. Luke wrote that at that time a great disturbance arose about the Christian faith, Acts 19:23. The trouble began with a silversmith named Demetrius made silver shrines of Artemis of the Ephesians (the KJV noun "Diana" was the Roman counterpart of Artemis), and she was "a many-breasted goddess of fertility" likely based on "a meteorite" that had fallen in the area with the shape resembling "a woman with many breasts (cf. 19:35)," Ibid., p. 411. Demetrius gathered together the other silversmiths and workmen of similar trades to protest the threat to their business that Paul's preaching had created against idols, Acts 19:24-27a.
 2. Demetrius added that the **temple** of the goddess Artemis at Ephesus might be viewed as trivial, deposing her from her magnificence as worshiped by Asia and the entire "Roman world" (*oikoumene*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 563-564; Acts 19:27b). This speech hit a nerve, for that temple "was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world." (Ryrie S. B., KJV, 1978, ftn. to Acts 19:27)
 3. These words infuriated the craftsmen, so they began to cry out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19:28 ESV) The city was filled with confusion, so they caught two of Paul's travel companions Gaius and Aristarchus and dragging them, rushed into the theater with Paul wanting to go with them, Acts 19:29-30a!
- C. However, God sovereignly protected Paul and the other believers from certain death by the mob, v. 30b-41:
 1. First, fellow believers and some "Asiarchs," officials "in charge of the community's political and religious welfare," friends of Paul urged him not to enter the theater, Acts 19:30b-31 ESV; Ibid., B. K. C., N. T.
 2. Most of the crowd did not even know why they were there, so the Hebrews who were monotheists and strongly opposed idols, "thrust Alexander to the front" to "issue a disclaimer," that is, to explain that the "reduction in Artemis' idol business was not their fault!" (Acts 19:32-33; Ibid., p. 412)
 3. However, when the crowd realized that Alexander was a Hebrew who was trying to make a defense of the Hebrews to them, the crowd's "anti-Semitism took over," with "the mob" refusing to listen to him, "and they chanted in frenzy for about two hours, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19:34 ESV; Ibid.)
 4. The "chief executive officer of the city" (*grammateus*) then came on stage, so the crowd quieted down to hear him speak, Acts 19:35a; Ibid. (a) He argued that Artemis [the meteor] who fell down from heaven, was *not* man-made, so why should they be upset over Paul's preaching against man-made idols, Acts 19:35b-36; Ibid. (b) He added that Gaius and Aristarchus and Paul by application were not temple robbers (like the Hebrews) or slanderers of their goddess (Acts 19:37), so if Demetrius and the other craftsmen had a complaint, they could use the court system to bring appropriate charges, Acts 19:38-39. (c) Meanwhile, the official declared that they should cease making a disturbance, for they were in danger of arousing the lethal reprisal of Rome for rioting, so he successfully dismissed the crowd, Acts 19:40-41.

Lesson: When spiritual opposition to Paul's ministry exploded into a humanly overwhelming city-wide riot against him and his coworkers, God sovereignly used other believers, Asiarchs, unwise action by unbelieving Hebrews, the city's chief executive officer and fear of a lethal Roman reprisal for rioting to protect Paul and his coworkers!

Application: May we rest assured that even if we face humanly overwhelming spiritual opposition in performing God's ministry assignments for us, our omnipotent God will sovereignly protect us while we serve Him.