

## The Subversive Nature of Truth in a Pagan World (Acts 19:21-41)<sup>a</sup>

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-1:02:12

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### Context

1. Paul on his third missionary journey
2. Retracing much of his route on the second journey
3. Focus is not evangelization in new regions, but rather discipleship: building up the newly established churches
4. Found his way to Ephesus, where God opens a lengthy opportunity to teach—lasting over two years
5. Many come to faith, forsaking their involvement in the occult — burning their books on magic

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### Passage (Acts 19:21-41)

[21] When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." [22] So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time. [23] And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. [24] For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. [25] He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. [26] "Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. [27] "So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship." [28] Now when they heard [this], they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great [is] Diana of the Ephesians!" [29] So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions. [30] And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. [31] Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. [32] Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why

they had come together. [33] And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people. [34] But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great [is] Diana of the Ephesians!" [35] And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the [image] which fell down from Zeus? [36] "Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. [37] "For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. [38] "Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. [39] "But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly. [40] "For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering." [41] And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.<sup>1</sup>

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**Foreshadows Paul's "fourth missionary journey," in chains, to Rome — Paul purposed to visit Jerusalem after which he would set his sights on Rome.**

1. **Paul's appeal to Caesar (Acts 15:8,10-11; 26:32; 27:24; 28:19)**
2. **Visit to Jerusalem probably to accompany the proceeds from of the fund which he had organized in the Gentile churches of Macedonia and Achaia for the relief of the poor in Jerusalem (1Cor. 16:1-4; 2Cor. 8:1-9; 2Cor. 9:1-15; Rom. 15:25-28).<sup>3</sup>**

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**Danger of crowd dynamics**

1. . . . *the whole city was filled with confusion (Acts 19:29)*
2. *Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together (Acts 19:32)*
  - A. "Assembly" here is **ἐκκλησία** [*ekklēsia*] - often translated as "church" — not a technical term
3. **Un-channelled energy - fleshly behavior, open to demonic influence**
  - A. . . . *all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:34)*
  - B. This probably took place in the theater of Ephesus, cut out of the western slope of

Mount Pion, which could accommodate as many as 25,000 people.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. Unlawful behavior

- A. City clerk - **γραμματεὺς** [*grammateus*], the chief executive officer of the city
  - I. . . . *the courts are open and there are proconsules. Let them bring charges . . . if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly (Acts 19:38b-39)*
  - II. . . . *we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar . . . this disorderly gathering (Acts 19:40)*
- B. One of their own was able to restore sanity, but Alexander was simply shouted down.
- C. *You shall not follow a crowd to do evil . . . (Ex. 23:2)*

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### Subversive nature of truth

1. **“Subversive” in relation to the present age and world-view dominated by paganism**
2. **Truth undermines sacred cows, often on two levels: 1) economic; 2) power/control**
  - A. Challenges power/control
    - I. Control by church hierarchy such as Eastern Orthodoxy or Roman Catholicism - the NT knows no such hierarchy, pomp and circumstance
    - II. Control by dispensing God's grace: the sacraments and mass of Roman Catholicism - there is only one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus (1Ti. 2:5)— not an institution
    - III. Performance-based religions, such as Islam - salvation is by grace through faith and not of works (Eph. 2:8-9)
    - IV. Secular humanisms' atheistic materialism and its grip and control over education - we are created in God's image with an eternal soul and purpose (Gen. 1:27-27)

V. Various international fraternities, such as masonic orders, which elevate good works and brotherhood over Christian truth: the only way of salvation is found exclusively through Jesus - *Nor is their salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved* (Acts 4:12)

VI. The grip of superstitious beliefs (Acts 14:15)

## B. Challenges economics

### I. Personal economics of the silversmiths such as Demetrius

- a. Made silver shrines, brought no small profit to the craftsmen
- b. Called together the workers of similar occupation

### II. Economics of institutions, principalities, and countries

- a. *So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship* (Acts 19:27)
- b. Annual public festival brought commercial benefit to Ephesus and the surrounding region
- c. Background on Temple of Diana (Roman name, Greek manuscript reads, *Artemis*)
  - i. Goddess of light by night (juxtaposed with Apollo, the luminous god of day) — sometimes associated with *Selene*, the moon goddess
  - ii. Depicted as a mighty huntress — the goddess of the chase, often accompanied by a hind (a deer)
  - iii. “In early times, human sacrifices had been offered to Artemis”<sup>5</sup>
  - iv. In Ephesus, the temple was the site of ceremonial prostitution.<sup>6</sup>

. . . reckoned as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It covered an area four times as large as that of the Parthenon in Athens; it was supported by 127 pillars, each of them sixty feet high, and was adorned by . . . great sculptors of antiquity.<sup>7</sup>

She was undoubtedly a representative of the same power

presiding over conception and birth that was adored in Palestine under the name Ashtoreth.<sup>8</sup>

- v. Known by other names in other cultures: *Astarte* (Phoenicia); *Ishtar* (Assyria).<sup>10</sup>

### III. The truth taught by Paul: *they are not gods which are made with hands* (Acts 19:26)

- a. Related to the second commandment: *You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness [of anything] that [is] in heaven above, or that [is] in the earth beneath, or that [is] in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. . . .* (Ex. 20:4-5a)
- b. Basic monotheism - only one God, not an idol
  - i. . . . *Alexander . . . wanted to make his defense to the people. But when they found out he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians”* (Acts 19:33b-34)
    - Notice how the Jews were also threatened along with Paul
      - The Way was still viewed as a Jewish sect
      - Christianity and Judaism share the Old Testament, the ten commandments, and the same monotheistic God who cannot, and must not, be represented by images
  - ii. . . . *the [image] which fell down from Zeus* (Acts 19:35) — housed in the temple at Ephesus
    - **ΔΙΟΠΕΤΟΥΣ** [*diopetous*], fell: from Jupiter (KJV); from the sky (ESV); from heaven (NASB, NET)
    - A meteorite, possibly with a crude representation approximating the multi-breasted Diana?
    - Image of Diana, possibly carved from ebony?
    - “The upper part of her body was completely covered with rows of breasts to signify that she was the mother of all life. . . . she impersonated the reproductive powers of men and of animals and of all other life.”<sup>11</sup>
    - The city clerk may have made mention of its origin to exempt it from Paul's teaching concerning man-made idols—in that it's source was not of this world

**3. If you are a Christian — attempting to walk in obedience to Christ — you will be subversive (actually corrective) within our increasingly pagan culture**

- A. Inevitable collision with the schemes of the “god of this age” under who's sway the world operates (2Cor. 4:4)
- I. F.F. Bruce, “This disturbance, . . . arose out of the threat which the gospel represents to all pagan worship . . .”<sup>12</sup>
  - II. Christianity is not a spiritual belief system of personal and private devotion—it operates in the real world and has profound influence upon individuals, institutions, societies, and even nations.
    - a. “Shoe-leather” Christianity — there is no other kind
    - b. Theology is not an abstract, esoteric subject: it has huge implications in the real world
- B. No need to say anything directly against opposing moral or world-views
- I. The city clerk, in defense of Paul and his companions: . . . *these men . . . who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess* (Acts 19:37)
  - II. *But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of [them] all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.* (2Ti. 3:10-12)
  - III. Living the truth, even if we attempt to restrict it to our personal lives, will bring persecution — because any representation of the truth also communicates judgment of that which is false
    - a. Our refusal to go along with the crowd *is* the convicting power of the Spirit on ungodliness
      - i. *And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin . . . of sin, because they do not believe in Me* (John 16:8-9)
      - ii. This conviction is primarily through the body of Christ, Whom the Spirit indwells and empowers in Christ's absence
    - b. Here: Diana and her images are irrelevant and have no value
    - c. Refusal to “do X” implicitly communicates judgment to those who *do*
    - d. *For we [have spent] enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the*

*Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with [them] in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of [you]. (1Pe. 4:3-4)*

- i. Why do they speak evil of us?
- ii. Because we are “not of this world” — we are aliens
- iii. Like Israel among the pagan nations of old, once we are born again, we will never again "fit in"
  - *What you have in your mind shall never be, when you say, 'We will be like the Gentiles, like the families in other countries, serving wood and stone.'* (Eze. 20:32)

#### C. We are the aroma of life and of death

- i. *Now thanks [be] to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one [we are] the aroma of death [leading] to death, and to the other the aroma of life [leading] to life. And who [is] sufficient for these things? (2Cor. 2:14-16)*

#### D. Are we willing to be salt and light? Are you willing?

- i. *Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great [is] your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all [who are] in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Mat. 5:11-16)*
  - a. For My sake - not just when we *testify about Christ*, but when we *live as Christ* — when we live according to our identity as His body in His absence
  - b. If the salt loses its flavor . . . a lamp under a basket — how does this happen? Intimidation, compromise, embarrassed for Christ, concerned about our reputation

c. What is seen: our good works — which often amount to our refusal to participate in bad works

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Endnotes:

1. [NKJV](#), Acts [19:21-41](#)
2. [Ref-0653](#), 372
3. [2](#)
4. [Ref-0653](#), 376
5. [Ref-0185](#), Gods, False
6. [Ref-0485](#), Diana;Artemis
7. [Ref-0653](#), 374
8. [Ref-0185](#), Gods, False
9. [Ref-0485](#), Diana;Artemis
10. "She may, however, be identified with the Cybele of the Phrygians whose name she also bore, and with several other deities who were worshipped under different names in various parts of the Orient. In Cappadocia she was known as Ma; to the Syrians as Atargatis or Mylitta; among the Phoenicians as Astarte, a name which appears among the Assyrians as Ishtar; the modern name Esther is derived from it. The same goddess seems to have been worshipped by the Hittites, for a female deity is sculptured on the rocks at Yazili Kaya, near the Hittite city of Boghazkeui."<sup>9</sup>
11. [Ref-0485](#), Diana;Artemis
12. [Ref-0653](#), 373

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Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0185** Merrill F. Unger, R. K. Harrison and Howard Frederic Vos, *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988).
- Ref-0485** Orr, J., M.A., D.D. (1999). *The International standard Bible encyclopedia : 1915 edition* (J. Orr, Ed.). Albany, OR: Ages Software.
- Ref-0653** F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988).



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### Links Mentioned Above

- a - See [http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts\\_by\\_Tony\\_Garland/69\\_Acts\\_19\\_21-41/index.htm](http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/69_Acts_19_21-41/index.htm).
- b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.