

About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. ²⁴ A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. ²⁵ He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: 'You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. ²⁶ And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. ²⁷ There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.' ²⁸ When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' ²⁹ Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's travelling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theatre together. ³⁰ Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. ³¹ Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theatre. ³² The assembly was in confusion: some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. ³³ The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defence before the people. ³⁴ But when they realised he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' ³⁵ The city clerk quietened the crowd and said: 'Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? ³⁶ Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. ³⁷ You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. ³⁸ If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. ³⁹ If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. ⁴⁰ As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it.' ⁴¹ After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

Last week we saw how miracles and Paul's daily preaching added large numbers to the church in Asia. The sorcerers who came to faith burnt their expensive scrolls and abandoned their old practices. This week we see the business consequences of people abandoning belief in Artemis and fewer tourists coming to the huge temple to worship and buy figurines of Artemis. If we have been to a religious tourist site, we know there will be shops and stalls full of religious knickknacks. Tradesmen are cashing in on visitors who believe that buying souvenirs, figurines and other religious artifacts will help them in some way and remind them to worship the deity for which the place is famous. Tourism existed in the Roman world as did pilgrimages. Ephesus' huge temple was a tourist attraction and the image of the goddess was believed to have fallen from the sky. How huge can be seen from its ruins – 425 feet long with 125 columns which was four times larger than the Parthenon in Athens, twice as long and twice as wide.

The makers of silver figurines of the goddess and temple models had had enough. Trade was on a downward spiral. Demetrius the silversmith blamed Paul for the loss of earnings, and loss of faith in the worship of the goddess. His words began by complaining about loss of business... *You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business...* and then cleverly he complained on behalf of the goddess who was losing respect and worshippers.

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Having whipped up the crowd, they decided to chant support for their goddess. ²⁸ *When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'* ²⁹ *Soon the whole city was in an uproar.*

Those who felt threatened by a change in their livelihood and a change in the old order of things decided to demonstrate their support of the old order. Humanity has always sought to appease gods by worship, presenting gifts to temples and priests, and buying objects to venerate at home. Greeks had a series of gods and goddesses whose behaviour was often dubious, but nonetheless they were believed to be able to help those who worshipped them. Artemis was the great mother goddess, a fertility goddess, to whom people prayed when they wanted offspring for themselves, their livestock and protection.

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The crowd gathered in the city's amphitheatre – a large open space still there – to sort out the problem. They don't go out into the streets to demonstrate, but go into the theatre which was a public space where people could be addressed by the people on the stage. Either for entertainment or for politics. Greeks as we will see weren't irrational people but every crowd has people who join it to see what is happening without having a clue as to what the issues are. There seems to have been some disorder to begin with, and the Christians seized – Gaius and Aristarchus were foreigners from Macedonia, which made them victims. Gaius hosted Paul in Corinth (Romans 16:23). Paul was advised to avoid the crowd as things could get nasty given the people there were opposed to Christianity. This isn't the first time that Paul is advised to stay away from angry opponents. It says something about Paul: he always wants to preach Jesus in front of any crowd – hostile or not! A crowd is an opportunity to have an audience! This ends badly sometimes as we have seen in Phillipi when he was imprisoned for allegedly advocating non Roman customs, less badly in Corinth because the Roman governor was having no nonsense from Jews arguing about religion, and now with a big crowd whipped up to support Artemis there was some real danger that they people might harm Paul. But then things turned in another direction, because some Jews saw their opportunity to oppose Christianity.

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We don't know who this Alexander is or if he is the same Alexander the coppersmith mentioned in Paul's second letter to Timothy (4:14) ¹⁴ *Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. ¹⁵ You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.* In this case the Jews put forward Alexander to defend themselves, because people knew Paul was Jewish and they might confuse his beliefs with their own. It says something about the Greeks that the crowd can be "motioned for silence". This isn't just a mob without any manners... it is a relatively civilised for some of the time though like most mobs, they can be lured into mindless chanting when the mood takes them. However as soon as the mob realised that Alexander was a Jew like Paul, he didn't get to speak and was drowned out by the crowd chanting for two hours. Mass hysteria in crowds is common... going on for two hours seems excessive to us, but once this kind of thing gets going it takes on a path all of its own, leading to continuous chanting in support of the home goddess (it would be a home football team today, where drunken supporters are quite capable of shouting for two hours in support of their team) against both Jews and Christians alike. Eventually things must have quietened down to allow the city clerk to speak.

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This nameless clerk is rational: he supports the goddess and that Ephesus guards her temple. We also hear that the image of Artemis fell from heaven. Apparently it was a small black image of the multi breasted Artemis sent down by Zeus to Ephesus. But then he says that they should calm down and not do anything rash because Gaius and Aristarchus hadn't done anything. He advises Demetrius to use the official channels to deal with grievances, and to act legally. Asia was a Roman province and the Roman authorities had ways of dealing with rioters that would be unpleasant. The threat of Roman action meant that the crowd which must have been tired of all that chanting and shouting saw sense and went home. Many there probably wondered what all the fuss had been about. Luke

describes a lot of detail in this chapter to show how following Jesus has consequences on people who haven't yet accepted Jesus as saviour.

If this story happened today, what would it look like?

There are in India today Hindu nationalists who get a crowd together to burn down churches and attack Christians. The same happens in Pakistan where crowds of Muslims will attack Christians. The motive is usually economic... someone wants to get something, steal something, compensate for a loss that allegedly has been caused by Christians. However to whip up a crowd, another issue is usually used to hide the true motives of the people seeking to harm the people that they want to steal from or punish in some way because of something that happened. They will hide this as the true motive and claim that Christians have denigrated their beliefs. Hatred of Christians is like hatred of Jews. It is spiritually guided by the devil who uses people. People once under the control of evil no longer behave rationally and go with the flow of whoever is whipping up the crowds. **For evil to flourish, all that is required is for good men to do nothing.**

What is this story saying to us today?

Who puts thoughts into our heads? We are what we think, and constantly our minds are assaulted by opinions, half truths, entertainment and falsehoods so that it is hard to filter truth from lies, what is good from what is bad, right from wrong. We now live in an age where identity politics pits sections of society against each other so that no rational argument is possible because emotions, experience and feeling override reason. Mob rule has nearly always resulted in wrong rule. Silencing criticism with censorship and claims that certain things can no longer be either said or even thought comes from the devil. The first thing the serpent said is "did God really say that?" to cast doubt on truth. Silencing truth goes one step further. Shouting down anyone with chants and slogans results in truth being silenced.

Could the story make a difference to my life, and if so, how?

We have seen demonstrations of people in the streets shouting slogans, waving placards and generally being obstructive to anyone in their way. None are in any mood to listen to reason. Joining in a crowd to make a point results in publicity, but the crowd has to be considerate of others and not be obstructive and dismissive of those who have other views. Christians can walk silently through the streets of Canterbury on Good Friday and worship in the Longport market area without causing any nuisance to others. Contrast this with other processions that block roads, obstruct people going about their daily lives and make a lot of noise that will annoy others. Will things that you do as a Christian annoy others? If so, consider whether Jesus would be alongside you as you annoy others!