

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Acts: The Continuing Earthly Ministry Of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Part VI: The Ministry Of The Universal Church In Its Spread To The Ends Of The Earth, Acts 8:26-28:31

E. Christ's Use Of The Apostle Paul To Spearhead Worldwide Outreach, Acts 14:4-28:31

21: God's Use Of Government Officials To Override Great Human Resistance To His Servants (Acts 19:21-20:1)

I. Introduction

- A. There are times when the human opposition to God's will for a believer becomes too great for he himself to handle, especially when that opposition is fueled by the economic interests of the foes involved!
- B. Paul faced such great human opposition at Ephesus that only God could handle it so Paul could complete His assignments. How God did this is beneficial for our insight (as follows):

II. God's Use Of Government Officials To Override Great Human Resistance To His Servants.

- A. While Paul was in Ephesus (Acts 19:21-22), his ministry that countered idolatry harmed the businesses of the idol craftsmen, creating opposition from a leading craftsman named Demetrius, Acts 19:23-24.
- B. He in turn incited fellow idol craftsmen against Paul, and, in support of Ephesus' famous pagan goddess whose idol they crafted, they began to cry, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians", Acts 19:25-28!
- C. This cry upset the whole city, for it implied someone was threatening their great goddess, but they were confused as to how their goddess had been opposed, and who had demeaned her, Acts 19:29a.
- D. Those who opposed Paul could not locate him, but, recognizing his coworkers, Gaius and Aristarchus, they arrested them as the "villains" and rushed them into the great theater at Ephesus, Acts 19:29b.
- E. Paul wanted to enter the theater, but the disciples, fearing for his life, would not let him, Acts 19:30 NIV.
- F. Some of the officials of the province of Asia, considering themselves Paul's friends, sent him word not to enter the theater, Acts 19:31. Examining this event closely reveals God's use of officials to protect Paul:
 - 1. The "chief" officials mentioned in Acts 19:31 KJV were literally "Asiarchs" (U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966 ed., p. 494, from the word, *Asiarchon*), members of a Greek corporation who were charged with the maintenance and protection of the Caesar cult in Asia, Ibid., Zond. Pict. Ency. of the Bible, p. 330.
 - 2. Not yet aware of the teachings of Christianity, and neither as yet hampered by anti-Christian Roman laws, these pro-Romans respected Paul's Roman citizenship (Acts 16:37), and tried to help him, Ibid.
 - 3. Also, there were "deputies" (Acts 19:38 KJV), better, "proconsuls", to whom the crowd could appeal their case against Paul, Ibid. Secular history indicates these may well have been the "scoundrels" in "Publius Celer and the freedman Helios," so either the Asiarchs or Paul may have known his case before such men could be badly mishandled, and that it was best for Paul to avoid entering the theater where he would be charged and possibly end up in a tragic court case before such vile men, Ibid.!
- G. Things went from bad to worse in the theater: when the Jews implicated Alexander as the culprit to shift the blame from them to the Christians, and the pagan defenders of the goddess Diana realized Alexander was Jewish, they cried for two hours in defensive rage, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," Acts 19:32-34!
- H. The "townclerk" (Acts 19:35 KJV), that is the *grammateus*, "the city's leading official" (Ibid., p. 328), was finally able to still the crowd, claiming: (1) Diana and the meteor Jupiter had sent them from heaven were of course great, not requiring a riot to prove it (Acts 19:35-36); (2) Paul and his team were not pagan temple robbers or god slanderers as the Jews often were (Acts 19:37 with Romans 2:17, 22 NIV); (3) the craftsmen could bring charges against Paul's men before their proconsuls (Acts 19:38-39); and (4) the crowd stood in danger of a reprisal from the feared Roman military for having created a riot, Acts 19:40.
- I. The city's leading official thus dismissed the crowd (Acts 19:41), and Paul said a brief farewell to the disciples before leaving the area and avoiding further legal trouble by traveling to Macedonia, Acts 20:1!

Lesson: When Paul's divine calling was opposed by human opposition too great for him to handle, GOD used GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS to provide PROTECTION and GUIDANCE for Paul.

Application: (1) If countered by human opposition too great for us, may we look to GOD'S use of SECULAR GOVERNMENT that He allows to rule to PROTECT and GUIDE us, Romans 13:1-4. (2) We should TRY to AVOID UNNECESSARY conflicts with known, UNJUST officials, cf. "II, F, 3"!