

Chapter 19

Notes from Interpretation Commentary and Bible Study – John Knox Press
and from New Interpreter's Bible Commentary Acts Abingdon Press.

A riot in Ephesus.

If there had been a tourist bureau in Ephesus in Paul's day, it would have included a must see list – the street magicians and the temple of Artemis, the goddess of fertility.

As the Interpretation Bible study invented:

“Street Magicians: No tour would be complete without stopping downtown and seeing some of the many street magicians plying their trade. Do you have a disease that needs curing or a curse to place on that certain enemy back home? The magicians of Ephesus can take care of your every magic need. Our city is well known for magic that in many parts of the world the word Ephesian is synonymous with magician.”

The Temple of Artemis was also world renown. The statue of Artemis was said to have fallen from heaven and was on display in the temple. That set up a need to sell tourist trinkets, like replicas of the statue. People to then set up their own shrine at home.

That was Ephesus – the Ephesus Paul visits on his third missionary journey.



Chapter 19 begins with baptism as with any good Christian message. Baptism is all important. Have you been baptized in the Holy Spirit? No in John's baptism of repentance.

Jesus' baptism is different and conveys power, forgiveness, and delivers the Holy Spirit, God's very presence with the people.

Paul baptizes and lays hands on the people. He explains that John's baptism prepares the people for Jesus. Luke is not suggesting that everyone be baptized twice, but is emphasizing the baptism in the Spirit in Jesus' name.

Apollos and his friends are what we may term seekers today. They come to the synagogue and Priscilla and Aquila teach. Soon Paul enters the picture and gives the baptismal instruction.

Which leads to the need for Luke to show the people the power of the Holy Spirit.

Which again leads Paul to stir things up. You can see that he is beginning to develop a reputation. He and his followers have been said to be turning the world upside down.

Seems to me people who have been oppressed are the first to rejoice when the world is turned upside down.

Paul after the explanation of baptism, shows the power of the Spirit, where even his cast off clothing heals, casts out demons and puts the magicians to shame.

So what do the magicians do – instead of abracadabra, they start using Jesus' name. They soon realized that the power of God was greater. So great was the power that they gather up their spell books – expensive spell books and burn them. God's power is so great. God's word prevails.

So, Paul overcomes the power of magic and overthrows the magicians, one of the attractions of the city.

So you can see where this is leading for those who worry that their great god Artemis will be usurped.

They oppose Paul. Demetrius knows it's all about the money. He fears. The Temple may have been one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world but Paul may have the power to overthrow Artemis.

Of course he and his fellow sales people are not dumb. They know it is best to turn the people to a discussion of the great Artemis rather than center their discussion on their income.

They gather a crowd. Stir up the people. We are known for Artemis, let us not forget this.

I bet to some degree a little civil unrest was also a nice distraction from the everyday mundane life of the ordinary citizen.

In this time of civil unrest – how many of us admit to turning on the tube every evening to see what riot is happening next. Most of us are glad it is not happening in our town, but we watch. Almost like watching a car wreck.

Some of Paul's compatriots are brought out into the crowd, but Paul seems to be absent. Text says his fellow believers would not let him go. One has to wonder if he is finally thinking of his safety and the next places he desires to go.

The voice of reason and calm comes from who is in essence a town clerk. He says if you have a grievance take it to court

He also reminds them that the Romans won't put up with civil unrest.

In the end his words calm the crowd.

Seems to me this is a story that rings true through all the ages. Money is a driving motivation. As Willimon says in his commentary "Artemis, the multi-breasted, bountiful earth mother, was a goddess of banking and protector of debtors; and thus her worship was a syncretism of idolatrous religious devotion and economic interest... and she had her devotees in every town, even today"

Like Paul we choose our battles , even in church. Maybe especially in church.

The first 18 chapters have painted a picture of the early church in Acts, but chapter 19. The first 18 chapters tell a story of a people sharing, caring, living differently. Chapter 19 is a story of greed, selfishness, and self preservation.

How silly the Ephesians are to think of only Money.

We have choices.