

Acts 19:21-41

Staying on Track

Introduction: When the Gospel gets moving in a city, the spiritual forces of wickedness get upset. They'll do anything they can to derail God's work and get the believers to lose their focus. In the same way, when the Gospel takes root in a person's life, the adversary will try to distract, discourage or derail that person in any way possible from the track God has for his or her life.

Staying on track is essential in fulfilling God's plans for our lives.

In the second half of Acts 19 we're going to see how Satan attempted to use demonically influenced people to get Paul off track in his ministry and how the apostle had to exercise remarkable restraint in order to stay on track.

I. Paul Made Plans Influenced by the Spirit	19:21-22
II. Adversaries Opposed Paul Influenced by Demons	19:23-27
III. An Uproar Arises	19:28-34
IV. The Uproar Subsides	19:35-41
V. Paul's Life Stays on Track	20:1

I. Paul Made Plans Influenced by the Spirit	19:21-22
---------------------------------------------	----------

- A. Paul had a Spirit-directed plan and began to take action by sending Timothy and Erastus ahead. He knew that being heavenly minded was the way he could do the most earthly good. He made his decisions based on the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The New Living Translation puts it as follows:

Acts 19:21 (NLT) Afterward Paul felt impelled by the Holy Spirit to go over to Macedonia and Achaia before returning to Jerusalem.

- B. *I must also see Rome* First mention of Rome in Paul's plans. He will get there by the end of the book, but not in the way that he's hoping.
- C. *Macedonia* was the region of Philippi and Thessalonica. *Achaia* was the region of Corinth. Here's what Paul wrote to the Corinthian church some time prior to this:

1 Corinthians 16:5-9 (NKJV) ⁵Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia). ⁶And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go. ... ⁸But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. ⁹For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

- D. We are now going to find out what those adversaries are up to:

II. Adversaries Opposed Paul Influenced by Demons 19:23-27

- A. Why do I bring up demonic influence? Wherever idolatry holds sway, there is going to be a lot of demonic influence. Idolatry absolutely ruled in Ephesus. Again writing from Ephesus to Corinth Paul connected the two – idols and demons:

1 Corinthians 10:19-20 (NKJV) ¹⁹What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? ²⁰Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.

- B. Later writing back to Ephesus Paul makes the following point:

Ephesians 6:12 (NKJV) For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

- C. Understanding the idolatry of Ephesus:

- i. Diana (Greek “Artemis”) was the chief goddess of Ephesus. She was the goddess of fertility and goddess of the hunt. Her temple at Ephesus was one of the wonders of the ancient world. It contained a large statue of Artemis and four big, bronze Amazon women. One Roman historian, Pliny the Elder, said that this temple took 120 years to complete. Dimensions: 425' x 225', or 95,625 sq. ft. It had 127 columns 60' tall. By comparison, the Parthenon on the acropolis in Athens was about ¼ the size. Link to more information: [Temple of Artemis](#)
- ii. Diana dominated the religious culture of Ephesus and all of Asia Minor more than anything that we've ever seen here in the USA. You might compare it to the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico, but then imagine something even more pervasive than that. It combined religious devotion with tradition, heritage and patriotism. For certain people it was also the source of a sizable income. One of those was a man named Demetrius.

- D. 19:23-27 Demetrius calls together the various guilds or trade unions involved in the business of idolatry. He calls a meeting of the UIW – the United Idol Workers. He points out the possibility that they're going to lose a lot of money, because people are going to quit buying the idols that they make. That's certainly a good way to rile them up. He then channels their collective anger straight into their mutual loyalty to Diana: “This isn't just about money (though that's obviously a pretty big issue); this is about 'goddess and country' and the dignity of our very way of life.”

- v.26 *almost all Asia* Compare v.10 all who dwelt in Asia. Demetrius, it's worse than you thought!

III. An Uproar Arises

19:28-34

- A. 19:28 This uproar begins with all those present at the UIW meeting, but it soon spreads into the city and people rush into the city theater. This large amphitheater in Ephesus could hold up to 25,000 people (bigger than our Fieldhouse downtown):

[Picture: Theater in Ephesus](#)

This kind of confusion is not caused by the Holy Spirit.

James 3:13-16 (NKJV) ¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. ¹⁶For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

- B. 19:30-31 Paul really wanted to go into that theater. It took a bunch of Christians, or “disciples” (v.30), and some of the “officials of Asia” (Greek *Asiarchs*, v.31) to discourage him from going in. They were wise enough to see what Paul couldn't at this moment – that getting drawn into the middle of this uproar might throw Paul's life off track.
- i. Why would Paul want to jump into this big tumult? We have to understand what it meant to Paul to be an apostle. He was called to preach the Gospel and he took that responsibility very much to heart. This is really one of Paul's best qualities. If he saw a crowd gathered, he immediately saw it as an opportunity to tell them about Jesus. He didn't like to miss opportunities. This made him effective in his ministry.
 - ii. We should therefore appreciate the restraint he shows in listening to the counsel of the Christians and the Asian officials. This was becoming a mob scene, which they knew would eventually subside. Furthermore, the whole thing was instigated by Demetrius slandering Paul. If Paul got into the middle of this there's no telling what would happen to him. One thing's for sure, his whole life could be thrown off track and his ministry could easily be neutralized. The counsel of his Christian friends was truly in his best interest. It was wise for him to listen. Back to that passage in James:

James 3:13-18 (NKJV) ¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. ¹⁶For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. ¹⁷But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. ¹⁸Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

- C. 19:33 *Alexander* was not a Christian but he was a Jew. The Jews put him forward possibly to pile accusations on the Christians at this point. It backfired. The crowd knew the Jews were also monotheists and the uproar actually got worse. Fortunately, Paul was not in the middle of it, because he listened to the counsel of godly friends.

IV. The Uproar Subsides

19:35-41

- Have you heard of the old man who said his favorite Bible verse was “It came to pass”? That's a weird favorite verse, but he explained it like this. I know if it came to pass, then it didn't come to stay.” By the way, “It came to pass” appears 176x in the Bible.
 - A. 19:35 *The image which fell down from Zeus* Many scholars now believe this image was made from a meteorite that fell from the sky.
 - B. 19:37 *nor blasphemers of your goddess* The city clerk is talking about Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions. It's interesting, and probably instructive, that the Christians were not known for blaspheming the goddess. They were known for not worshipping idols, but they were not known for picketing at the temple of Diana or any other focused anti-Diana ministry.

V. Paul's Life Stays on Track

20:1

- In the end Paul did exactly what he had purposed in the Spirit to do way back at the beginning. Read 19:21-22 again. Paul was a guy that knew how to stay on track.

Conclusions:

Staying on track in the Christian life is essential. The Christian life requires focus, determination, faith and reliance upon the Holy Spirit's power. In Paul's case he needed heed the counsel of his Christian friends who together advised him not to do something that he thought was very good. Your adversary wants to distract you, discourage you and derail you in any way possible from the plan God has for your life. He'll use an old friend who tempts you with an invitation to do the old things, engage in the old activities. The devil can use stress, discouragement, debt, unemployment, grief, fatigue – any number of things to neutralize you, get you operating in the flesh rather than the Spirit and get you to lose your focus. His goal is to keep you from fulfilling God's Spirit directed plans.

Staying on track is essential to fulfilling God's plans for our lives.

Closing prayer:

Father, please help us to discern Your Spirit-directed plans for us, those things that would please You, those things that would be in agreement with Your Word and the specific gifts and calling that You have given us. Then help us to see clearly when our adversary is trying to distract us and thwart Your purposes. Help us to resist him and help us by the strength Your Spirit gives us to stay totally faithful to You. Help us to stay on track and ultimately see Your plans fulfilled. In Jesus's name, Amen.