

Unstoppable Kingdom

Globally: Schemes of the Enemy

Acts 19:21-41

Every great story must establish an antagonist: something or someone for the readers to really dislike. And, as we have read through the book of Acts, you may be tempted to make an enemy out of the Jewish leadership that stoned Stephen, beat Paul, or killed James. Or maybe the Romans who have resisted the message of the Gospel, or those who deserted the mission because it got too hard. But those are not the true antagonists of the Book of Acts even if they have served to disrupt (or try to disrupt) the Unstoppable Kingdom.

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.” **1 Peter 5:8-9 - People are not the enemy, Satan is.**

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places.”
Ephesians 6:11-12

Main Idea:The Unstoppable Kingdom has an Enemy that is Always on Attack

In this text, we will see four common schemes of the devil in his relentless opposition to the Unstoppable Kingdom of God!

“Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” 22 *And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.* 23 *About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way.* 24 *For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen.* 25 *These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth.* 26 *And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods.* 27 *And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.”* 28 *When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”* 29 *So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul’s companions in travel.* 30 *But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him.* 31 *And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater.* 32 *Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.* 33 *Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the*

crowd. 34 *But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”* 35 *And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, “Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? 36 Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash.* 37 *For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess.* 38 *If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another.* 39 *But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly.* 40 *For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.”* 41 *And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.”* **Acts 19:21-41**

Four Common Schemes of the Devil seen in Acts 19:21-41

I. False Identity & Financial Idolatry – Acts 19:21-28

Paul’s preaching was so effective that it caused a major disruption to those who made their living and found their identity in pagan worship.

The Temple of Artemis was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World along with the great Pyramids of Egypt. There were approximately thirty temples to this goddess, but the one in Ephesus was by far the largest and wealthiest. In addition to being the center of worship for the cult, the temple was a symbol of civic identity and the primary driver of economic luxury. This is why Demetrius the leader of the silversmiths tied the religious implications to both money and identity!

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” **Ephesians 2:10**

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” **Matthew 6:24**

“The gospel is always at its most controversial when it comes into conflict with economic interests.” **John B. Polhill**

Imagine someone leading so many people to Christ in a drug-infested neighborhood that nobody wants to buy drugs anymore. How long would it be before the drug-dealers attack the church or Christians responsible?

The Kingdom of God threatens all other kingdoms. Always has and always will. One of the greatest schemes of the devil is to lure people into a false identity that they desire more than Christ or lure them into financial idolatry that they defend against the kingdom of Christ. He has been doing it forever!

II. Mindless Fears and Misplaced Fury – Acts 19:29-32

Based on the accusations of Demetrius, a mob began to form in loud opposition to the preaching of Paul and followers of the way. But, there was a little humor in Luke’s description of what was happening.

“So the city was filled with confusion, and they rushed together into the theater...Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.”

Acts 19:29a, 32

Another fascinating and overwhelming ancient construction in Ephesus is the theater. Nearly 25 thousand people could fit in that place and all indications are that it was packed for the riot against Paul.

“In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” **2 Corinthians 4:4**

Like these Ephesians, so many people are fearful or furious, but do not really know why. They remain in that state because the enemy has used someone to convince them to be so, and it has devastating effects on both physical and spiritual health. This is politics 101.

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” **Luke 12:32 - This is our King!**

III. **Cowardly Behavior and Compromised Beliefs - Acts 19:33-34**

The Jewish leadership sent Alexander up to the stage to try to distance themselves from the preaching of Paul. In a sense, they tried to cozy up to the locals by assuring them that they weren’t like those “bad” religious guys!

“Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

Acts 19:33-34

So many believers have tried to get the world to like them by distancing themselves from people and positions the world finds offensive. They compromise the gospel, the Bible, and the Kingdom to win the world’s affections. But it never works because the enemy will never accept anything other than complete apostasy from Christ! Jesus tried to make this clear...

“If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.”

John 15:19-20

We must get comfortable with the reality that cowardly behavior and compromising beliefs will never win the affection of the world.

IV. **Fleeting Kingdoms and Foolish Leaders – Acts 19:36-41**

The town clerk can be accurately described as the mayor figure. He was very influential because he was the primary link between the town and the Roman Empire. When he spoke, people listened. And he basically articulates a strong position on religious pluralism and claims the rioters are the ones

acting illegally with their “unlawful assembly.” In fact, most of the book of Acts will show how Paul and the early Christians never were found guilty of breaking Roman law (Jewish law, definitely). Is that good? Of course. Did it last forever? Not at all! Paul leveraged it as long as he could for the Kingdom!

“This man is a Roman citizen...Paul said, ‘I am a citizen by birth.’”

Acts 22:26, 28- Paul used his Roman citizenship, but understood its limitations!

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” **Matthew 22:21**

The cult of Artemis is gone, and her majestic temple lies in ruins. They have found clay images of Artemis and the temple, but not much silver because it would have been melted down and sold during the times of looting over the generations. The Roman Empire fell over 1,500 years ago and has never been rebuilt. Like every other empire in human history, it is merely a relic of the past whose memory is only kept alive by archeology and historic research. The synagogues in Ephesus are gone, the Temple in Jerusalem is gone, Demetrius is gone, the town clerk is gone, and today Ephesus is primarily known and visited by Christians following the footsteps of Paul. Amazing!

We have an enemy. Now that we know how he works, we can counteract his activity in our hearts and communities. There’s only one way to resist false identities and financial idolatry, mindless fears and misplaced fury, cowardly behavior and compromised beliefs, as well as fleeting kingdoms and foolish leaders.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” **Matthew 6:33**

Sources and Further Reading Opportunities:

- *CSB Study Bible* – Trevin Wax, General Editor (2021)
- *The Bible Exposition Commentary* – Warren Wiersbe (1996)
- *The New American Commentary: Acts* – John B. Polhill (1992)
- *Acts: Bible Study Commentary* – F.F. Bruce (2017)
- *Acts for Everyone* – N.T. Wright (2008)
- *Acts: The Church Afire* – Kent Hughes (1996)
- *Acts* - John MacArthur (1994)
- *Acts* – K.O. Gangle (1998)
- *The Kingdom of God* – Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1992)
- *The Message of Acts* – John Stott (1994)
- *Kingdom First* – Jeff Christopherson (2015)