

**The Attackers: Black Sheep: Demetrius: Aristarchus Interrogated about Paul's Whereabouts; Aquila & Priscilla Sequester Paul: the Divine Decree Protects Paul Starting with the Edict by Claudius that Expelled the Couple from Rome; the Three Meet in Corinth & become Friends, Acts 19:30; 2 Cor 1:8; Rom 16:3-4; the Contribution of the Asiarchs: Roman Officials, Friends of Paul, Who Repeatedly Warned Him Not to Go to the Theater, v. 31**

25. All we know about Gaius is that he was from Macedonia. Aristarchus on the other hand is mentioned on several occasions in Scripture. He was a native of Thessalonica (Acts 20:4) and, following the events in Acts 19, he accompanies Paul to Rome (Acts 27:2) where he was imprisoned with him.
26. Knowing Aristarchus was with Paul, the mob wanted him to reveal the apostle's whereabouts. Apparently Aristarchus did not know since Paul was never apprehended by the mob.
27. Paul happened to be quite ill at the time and was staying at the home of Priscilla \pri-sil'-a\ and Aquila \ak'-wi-la\, Jewish refugees and tent-makers living in Corinth whom Paul had evangelized while working with them (Acts 18:1-3).

**Acts 18:1** - After these things he [ Paul ] left Athens and went to Corinth.

**v. 2** - And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius [ Roman emperor from A.D. 41-54<sup>†</sup> ] had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them,

**v. 3** - and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers.

28. When Paul left Corinth for Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila went with him and secured a residence in the city. When Paul fell ill, he was taken in by this loyal couple to convalesce.
29. When the riot broke out, news reached the home of Priscilla and Aquila informing them of the silversmiths' anger over Paul's preaching. It is possible that the report included the capture of Aristarchus and Gaius.
30. Although suffering from a serious illness, Paul insisted on going to the theater to address the mob with the gospel of Christ.
31. The proper rationale for Paul should have been, "Why am I sick and in bed at this particular time?"
32. It was God's perfect timing to debilitate Paul so that he would not expose himself to danger, possible injury, and even death at the hands of an anger-wrought throng of men motivated by monetary lust and religious fanaticism.
33. Consequently, we read in:

**Acts 19:30** - And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him.

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<sup>†</sup> Aquila and Priscilla were expelled from Rome by the edict of Claudius in A.D. 52, the same year that Paul arrived in Corinth during his second missionary journey. The three met since they, according to Acts 18:3, were each in the tent-making business. Aquila and Priscilla responded to Paul's presentation of the gospel and the three became close friends. In A.D. 54, the couple accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey from Corinth to Ephesus where Aquila and Priscilla remained as citizens of the city. Paul spent the years A.D. 54-57 in Ephesus.

1. Even though weak physically, Paul remains steadfast spiritually. The phrase “wanted to go” indicates his intent is to objectively address his adversaries with a clear presentation of the gospel.
2. The Greek word translated “wanted” is the present middle participle of the verb **βούλομαι (bouílomai)**, a word that expresses a mental disposition of thought that motivates physical action. Paul desires to go evangelize and teach.
3. Paul is not emotional about this. His mental state is the exact opposite of the mob’s. Had he reacted to the riot with emotion the verb would not have been *bouílomai* but **θέλω (thélo)**, which refers to emotional reaction that causes one to spring into action and in certain cases to do so without regard to the consequences.
4. Paul is sick for a reason. Had he gone to the theater the results would have most likely resulted in injuries that would have hampered his duties as an apostle or even his death.
5. God prevented Paul from going into harm’s way with respect for the completed canon, the establishment of local churches, and the furtherance of the gospel in the first century.
6. God accomplished His desire by the actions of surrogates. The disciples that prevented Paul from going to the theater are Priscilla and Aquila, a conclusion reached by comparing two passages of Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:8 and Romans 16:3-4:

**2 Corinthians 1:8** - We do not want you to be unaware, fellow believers, of our affliction which came to us in Asia [ specifically **Ephesus** ], that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life.

**Romans 16:3** - Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,

**Romans 16:4** - who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

7. Priscilla and Aquila were willing to sequester Paul in their own home while an unruly mob sought him for evil purposes. The couple prevented Paul from leaving his sick bed to confront them.
8. The application of one’s spiritual gift must function under the power of the Holy Spirit. Once a person realizes his spiritual gift, he may often leap at every opportunity to put it into action. Spiritual common sense becomes an important counterbalance to this.
9. Paul’s rationale to go and preach the gospel to the union workers of Ephesus was noble in thought but irrational in application.
10. These men were driven by economic concerns to protect their livelihoods and defend the religion that provided them great prosperity. They were heathen; if they were ever to have objectivity toward the gospel of Christ, it was not operative on that day.
11. If Paul had traveled from the home of Priscilla and Aquila and walked down the thoroughfare of the Acadian Way to the Great Theater in his debilitated condition, the maddened mob could have easily killed him. There was a clear and present danger and God did not want Paul on duty that day!

12. Illness prevented the apostle from exercising his spiritual gift at a time when he needed to remain secluded. This was not a time to intervene into the problems typical of the devil's world, but rather to allow God to take care of the details.
13. Beware of Operation Overthink. When circumstances threaten the fulfillment of an objective, we often intensify our efforts when in reality it is not God's will that will do so.
14. There was also another group of people who did not want Paul to go to the theater, a group referred to as the Asiarchs:

**Acts 19:31** - Also some of the Asiarchs [masculine plural of Ἀσιάρχης (*Asiárchēs*): rulers of Asia ] who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater. (NASB)

15. The Asiarchs were in Ephesus on the occasion of the festival of Artemis, a month-long celebration held each May. During this time there are all sorts of activities associated with the idolatrous worship of Artemis.
16. The Asiarchs were members of a group of wealthy families throughout the Roman Province of Asia. Some isagogics regarding these men will be helpful in understanding how they are involved with Paul:

The Asiarchs ...were bound together in a league for promoting the cult of the emperor and Rome. Their headquarters were at Pergamum, where their chief temple was erected about 29 B.C.; other temples were erected in honor of the ruling Caesar at Smyrna and Ephesus. Every year an Asiarch was elected for the entire province, and additional Asiarchs were elected for each city that has a temple honoring the emperor. The title was probably borne for life by officers in the league; so in Paul's day there could have been a number of Asiarchs in Ephesus. Like similar leagues in the other provinces, the Asiarch was a quasi-religious organization with certain political functions. While it did not have political authority, it served Rome's interests by securing loyalty to Roman rule. That some of these men were friendly to Paul and gave him advice in such an explosive situation suggests that imperial policy at this time was not hostile to Christianity. Luke had an apologetic purpose in stressing their action, for, as Haenchen says,<sup>2</sup> "A sect whose leader had Asiarchs for friends cannot be dangerous to the state."<sup>3</sup>

17. The Asiarchs in context were ten men that were elected in an election that included the Roman Province of Asia. Each was to contribute the amount of money necessary to underwrite dramas performed at the theater.
18. In addition, there were the annual Ephesian Games, musical concerts, and oratory competitions. These men were all in town and as it turned out were fortunately friends of Paul.
19. W. J. Conybeare \kän'-u-beer\ and J. S. Howson provide a detailed background on the men referred to as the Asiarchs:

<sup>2</sup> Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1982), 578.

<sup>3</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1981), 9:503–504.

The whole month of May was consecrated to the glory of the goddess; and the month itself received from her the name of Artemision. The Artemisian festival was not simply an Ephesian ceremony, but was fostered by the sympathy and enthusiasm of all the surrounding neighbourhood. From the towns on the coast and in the interior, the Ionians came up with their wives and children to witness the gymnastic and musical contests, and to enjoy the various amusements, which made the days and nights of May one long scene of revelry. To preside over these games, to provide the necessary expenses, and to see that due order was maintained, annual officers were appointed by election from the whole province. About the time of the vernal equinox each of the principal towns within the district called Asia chose one of its wealthiest citizens, and, from the whole number thus returned, ten were finally selected to discharge the duty of *Asiarchs*.

The games of Asia and Ephesus were pre-eminently famous; and those who held there the office of 'Presidents of the Games' were men of high distinction and extensive influence. Receiving no emolument from their office, but being required rather to expend large sums for the amusement of the people and their own credit, they were necessarily persons of wealth. Men of consular rank were often willing to receive the appointment, and it was held to enhance the honour of any other magistracies with which they might be invested. They held for the time a kind of sacerdotal position; and, when robed in mantles of purple and crowned with garlands, they assumed the duty of regulating the great gymnastic contests, and controlling the tumultuary crowd in the theatre, they might literally be called the 'Chiefs of Asia.' (p. 428)

Some of the Asiarchs, whether converted to Christianity or not, had a friendly feeling towards the Apostle; and well knowing the passions of an Ephesian mob when excited at one of the festivals of Asia, they sent an urgent message to him to prevent him from venturing into the scene of disorder and danger. Thus he reluctantly consented to remain in privacy, while the mob crowded violently into the theatre, filling the stone seats, tier above tier, and rending the air with their confused and fanatical cries. From the elevated position of the theatre at Ephesus, we may imagine that many of the seats must have commanded an extensive view of the city and the plain, including the Temple of Diana [Artemis].<sup>4</sup> (p. 430–31)

20. When the Asiarchs realized that the mob wanted Paul brought to the theater, they knew his life would be in grave danger. These men are then said to have "urged him not to venture into the theater" (Acts 19:31).

21. The word "urged" is the imperfect active indicative of the verb **παρακαλέω (parakalēō)**: "to warn; to advise against."

The word [**parakalēō**] overwhelmingly expresses a personal and often emphatic concern. When the speaker does not desire anything for himself but desires something for the person addressed, the meaning *encourage* arises; negatively *warn/advise against*, Acts 19:31; it then easily develops into *friendly, encouraging comfort*.<sup>5</sup>

22. The imperfect tense is ingressive which stresses the beginning of a continuous action and should be translated "began warning," or "began advising against."

<sup>4</sup> W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (repr., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 428, 430–31.

<sup>5</sup> Johannes Thomas, "παρακαλέω," in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 3:24.

23. The grammar makes clear that Paul had to be persuaded to stay away from the theater; the wealthy rulers of Asia were obviously engaged in a lengthy exchange with Paul before he agreed to stay put.
24. These men were officials throughout Asia and therefore were quite capable of discerning the seriousness of such an uprising.
25. The conclusion drawn was that Paul's life would be in certain danger should he leave the protection of Pricilla and Aquila's home.

**Acts 19:31** - Also some of the Asiarchs, rulers of Asia, who were friends of Paul's, sent to him and began to repeatedly warn and advise against him venturing into the theater. (EXT)

26. The scene now shifts back to the theater where we find the mob is disarray.