

The Local Church: the Pillar & Support of Truth; Ephesus, the Religious & Economic Center of Asia Minor; Demetrius v. Paul; the Worship of Artemis

1 Timothy 3:15 - But if I am delayed, I write for the purpose that you may know how one ought to habitually conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

1. The local church is described by Paul as the “pillar and support of truth.” The word “pillar” is the noun **στῦλος, stulos**, “support” is the noun **ἑδραῖωμα, hedraiōma**, and “truth” is the noun **ἀλήθεια, alētheia**.
2. The latter half of the verse refers to the “house of God” as “the church of the living God, the pillar and support of truth.”
3. The phrase, “the church of the living God,” is described as the “pillar and support of the truth.”
4. In the first century this was a statement that could have caused Paul and the church at Ephesus to lose its 501(c)(3), not-for-profit status – again. Paul had already had a run-in with the power brokers of Ephesus during his third missionary journey in A.D. 54. Ten years later in A.D. 64 he writes this Epistle to Timothy.
5. To appreciate the application of Paul’s reference to the “church of the living God” and his description of it as the “pillar and support of truth,” we need to examine the background of the religious life in Ephesus.

EPHESUS (Ἔφεσος). The city of Ephesus lay at the mouth of the Cayster \kā-is'-ter\ on the western coast of Asia Minor. The river valley of the Cayster was a highway into the interior, the terminal of a trade route that linked with other roads converging and branching out toward the separated civilizations of the East. This is why Ephesus was chosen by the early Ionian colonists from Athens as a sight for their colony. (p. 325)

Deepening economic depression and decline must have been a feature of Ephesus’ life over the last century B.C. The city turned to the equivalent of her tourist trade. Multitudes came to visit the temple of Artemis lä'r-ta-mis\ (p. 326)

The general impression left with the archeologist and historian, who peer into the crowded past of the great city, is that the guild-master [Demetrius, the silversmith of Acts 19:23] was not unjustified in his claim that “all Asia [Asia Minor] and the world [hyperbole]” (Acts 19:27) revered the Ephesian Artemis. As the guild master by implication admitted, the temple was the core of Ephesus’ commercial prosperity. Around the great shrine, to which worshipers and tourists poured from far and near, tradesmen and hucksters found a living, supplying visitors with food and lodging, dedicatory offerings, and the silver souvenir models of the shrine that the guild of Demetrius was most interested in making and selling.

Paul was, in fact, assaulting a stronghold of pagan religion, together with the active life and commerce associated with a vast heathen cult, in a key city of the central Mediterranean and a focal point of communication.¹ (p. 327)

6. One of the biggest businesses in Ephesus in the first century A.D. was the silver trade. The influx of tourists to visit and worship at the temple of Artemis provided a major source of income for the silversmiths' union and Demetrius was the union boss for these artisans.
7. The worship of Artemis was the dominant religion in Ephesus during Timothy's tenure in Ephesus. Its history can be traced as far back as the eleventh century B.C. when Codrus \käd'-ras\, king of Athens, founded a colony near the shrine of the goddess.
8. The level of emphasis on the worship of Artemis in first-century Ephesus is dramatized by Paul in Acts 19. The cultural situation in the city at that time gives us necessary background for this passage:

Artemis of the Ephesians

Acts 19. Artemis of Ephesus was a tremendously popular deity; in fact, the Greek traveler Pausanias \paw-sā'-nē-as\ stated that she was the god(dess) most worshipped in private devotions in the Mediterranean world. Her cult idol was unusual—a stiff, elongated body with legs bound together in mummy-like fashion. The upper half of the front torso was covered with protuberances resembling human breasts, so that she was sometimes called the “many-breasted Artemis.” She wore a necklace of acorns, for the oak tree was sacred to her, and on her breastplate appeared the signs of the zodiac.

On her head rose a high crown, often topped with the turrets of the city of Ephesus. This crown may have concealed a meteorite “which fell from heaven” (Acts 19:35). Frequently her skirt was decorated with rows of animals, an indicator of fertility, and along the sides were bees, depicted as both actual insects and as priestesses, adorned with crowns and wings. Artemis herself was known as the queen bee, and her castrated priests were called “drones.”

The first idol to Artemis was said to have been carved of wood and set in an oak tree at Ephesus by the Amazons. The sanctuary was soon surrounded by a village as it became the site of pilgrimage. On the site one temple succeeded another in size and splendor, until the final shrine was considered one of the wonders of the ancient world. Thousands of personnel served within the immense confines of the sanctuary, and huge sums of money were entrusted to the keeping of Artemis. As a result the temple complex became the major banking center of Asia. Not only was Artemis the guardian deity of Ephesus, but she also figured as savior goddess in inscriptions. The dead were entrusted to her care, and she was thought to have lent her assistance to women in childbirth. Secret rituals known as “mysteries,” portraying both birth and death, initiated her devotees.

The book of Acts (19:23-41) records the first of many confrontations between the followers of Christ and those of Artemis.²

¹ E. M. Blaiklock, “Ephesus,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible*, Merrill C. Tenney, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 2:325-27.

9. With this background we have a historical understanding of Acts 19, a passage that helps explain the impact Paul's closing phrase in 1 Timothy 3:15 had on Timothy and what it should have on us in the twenty-first century.

SYNOPSIS OF ACTS 19:23-41: CHRIST V. ARTEMIS:

Acts 19:23 - At that time there arose no small stir about that Way [a term used to describe Christianity or its doctrine of salvation].

PRINCIPLE: Paul encounters an attack by Demetrius, union boss of the silversmiths' union in Ephesus. The workers production of silver reproductions of the idol of Artemis was a major source of income for not only union members but also the city. They did not like the theology of the "Way" and were determined to run Paul and his associates out of town.

Acts 19:24 - For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines [the image of Artemis in the temple] of Artemis, brought a great deal of business to the craftsmen.

PRINCIPLE: Because Christianity rejects idols, as did orthodox Judaism, the impact of Paul's two-year ministry in Ephesus had resulted in a huge loss of sales to the silversmiths. However, Paul never denounced the sale of the idols, he just taught doctrine and those who were positive to his teachings quit buying them. Nevertheless, Demetrius decided to take positive action against Paul since this loss of sales was due to his message.

Acts 19:25 - He called together the members of the various trade unions in the city and said, "Men, you know that our prosperity comes from this business.

v. 26 - "And you see and hear that this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, not only in Ephesus but in practically all of Asia [Asia Minor], by saying, that gods made of hands are not gods at all."

PRINCIPLE: Demon influence and demon possession in Ephesus had enabled businessmen in Ephesus to make a big living off of Artemis. Here is an example of how one's temporal security trumps eternal security: "Our prosperity comes from this business." Paul was not the real culprit. Paul "persuaded" the citizens of Ephesus to believe in Christ by an accurate presentation of the gospel. It was positive volition and then application of doctrine that was changing the culture of Ephesus. Demetrius informs us that Paul's message was having great impact not only in Ephesus but also throughout almost all of Asia Minor. The tourist trade was also being affected by the gospel.

² "Artemis of the Ephesians," *NIV Archaeological Study Bible: An Illustrated Walk through Biblical History and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 1808.

Acts 19:27 - "There is danger not only that this business of ours will come into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be regarded as nothing, and she whom all Asia and the world worship will suffer the loss of her greatness."

NOTE: Demetrius is busy rousing the rabble and is therefore a politician, a person who after acquiring power will go to any length to keep it. Note the man's order of priorities concerning the crisis: (1) business, meaning money, will be lost (2) the temple of Artemis will be disregarded, and (3) the goddess Artemis will lose her greatness.

The thing that motivates almost every argument is money and power or the loss of either. The idol Artemis is the source of Ephesian prosperity, "You know that our prosperity comes from this business," said Demetrius in verse 25. But if the source were something else, Demetrius and the businessmen of Ephesians would instantly shift their loyalty to it.

What brought in the money was the tourist trade that came into the city to worship at the temple and Artemis was the goddess that they so worshipped. So what's the most important thing? Business. What draws the business? The temple. What about the temple gives it its attractiveness? The shrine of Artemis. If the shrine was built for Apollo, Artemis's mythological brother, the businessmen would have been fine with that.

In order to generate fear of economic downturn, Demetrius uses hyperbole to rally the crowd: "Artemis ... whom all Asia and the world worship." This is over the top. There are Christians in Asia Minor so not all worshipped Artemis. To assert that she is worshipped throughout the world is ludicrous. There were many other idols that were worshipped in these other places.

NOTE: It didn't matter which god or goddess was worshipped as long as it brought in the tourists. The city benefitted in that it was the fortunate home of the temple of Artemis. Anything that harms this arrangement was considered a problem to be dealt with. Artemis was fine if she pulled in the customers. But any other idol of equal celebrity would have been acceptable.

When you understand the wealth that was invested in the heathen temple of Artemis then you come to realize how easy it has been for our Congress, without blush or apology, to glibly pass an annual budget of over three trillion dollars.