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*The Priscilla Diary*

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# C H A P T E R 1

Twenty-four thousand men screaming at the top of their lungs as they rushed through the streets of Ephesus, crying out “*Megale he Artemis Ephesian!*” is a sight not to be forgotten. It was the greatest riot in the five hundred-year history of the city, and it all had to do with Paul!

Alas, Paul did have ways of getting into trouble—none more than that spring day in Ephesus.

I have often been asked, “Were you there when the riot happened?” Yes, I was there; however, being a woman, I was not in the amphitheater. I missed seeing over twenty thousand men foolishly shouting . . . about *what* I did not know! Neither did they!

This riot occurred during the Games of Artemis. (These games are held once every two years in Ephesus.) This is a time when people from all over the empire come to watch great athletes from dozens of nations pit themselves against one another.

What started the riot? Even to this day, no one really knows. Early one morning, though, just about the time the games were getting underway, the guild of the silversmiths met together near the city theater. The meeting was led by

Demetrius, the largest seller of silver in Asia Minor. It was a grim meeting. The previous twelve months had been bad for sales of idols. All present knew why. Hundreds of magicians and tricksters had burned their books of dark magic in a bonfire in the marketplace! The people of Ephesus, as well as visitors, had stopped buying these men's idols in large numbers as they had in previous years. Many local magicians, as well as the ordinary citizens of Ephesus, had turned away from superstitions—all because of words spoken by Paul.

As Timothy reported in his diary, "When anyone in the market asked Paul about magic, he denounced it. And then he denounced all the magicians in the city. 'They are frauds,' he declared. Paul's words came to receptive ears, for deep in their hearts most everyone in the city already knew that. Nonetheless, they managed both to see the magicians as frauds and at the same time depend on them."

Now that the games had begun, would sales continue to fall? *This* was the central topic of the guild.

But why the riot?

By tradition, on the opening day of the games, a huge procession of people march from the Temple of Artemis down to the city's north gate. The procession then enters the city by way of Marble Street, which is just at the base of the theater, and winds its way up the hill, then past the city hall. From there the procession passes out of the city through the Magnesia gate, where the parade ends.

The guild was meeting near the main entranceway to the great amphitheater, which is located on Market Street, at the center of the city.

The members of the guild were becoming rowdy and belligerent, a result of hearing a highly inflammatory speech made by Demetrius. Here is that speech. You might say that this is the source of the riot:

Gentlemen, you know that our wealth comes from this business. As you have seen and heard, this man Paul has persuaded many people that handmade gods aren't gods at all. And this is happening not only here in Ephesus but throughout the entire province! Of course, I'm not just talking about the loss of public respect for our business. I'm also concerned that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will lose its influence and that Artemis—this magnificent goddess worshiped throughout the province of Asia and all around the world—will be robbed of her prestige!

When the speech ended, the agitated silversmiths moved into the streets crying out: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

Those in the parade joined in shouting the chant. Some onlookers thought this was the signal for the beginning of some athletic contest inside the theater. In good humor, they joined in the chant *and* moved into the amphitheater. But the silversmiths were not in a kind state of mind. Someone among them called out: "Let us bring the troublemaker here! He should be easy to find; he is always either in the market or at the school of Tyrannus."

Several in the guild rushed through the streets crying, "Where is Paul of Tarsus?"

Then began the confusion. Some thought these silversmiths were chasing a robber. Others thought the city fathers had called a special meeting in the theater. (Such assemblies always began with the chant, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.") Hearing the clamor, people in the marketplace, out of curiosity, followed those entering the theater. What everyone saw was men rushing toward the theater. In the theater, the chanting grew louder.

Those who ran to the school of Tyrannus looking for Paul found only Tyrannus. He was giving his morning lecture on the teachings of Plato. But their search for Paul was not wholly

in vain. They found Gaius of Derbe and Aristarchus of Thessalonica. The two men were summarily dragged through the streets toward the theater. By now those in the marketplace—crowded with visitors—were certain something extraordinary was taking place. Hearing the chant “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” and seeing men being dragged through the streets heightened their curiosity. Who could resist the mystery? (Further, Gaius’s loud protest only fueled that curiosity.)

Soon the entire marketplace, for absolutely no reason, took up the chant. The chant, in turn, echoed out across the city. The crowd grew in number. By now Aristarchus and Gaius had been dragged into the theater and up onto the stage. Gaius, kicking and screaming, had to be lifted off his feet and carried onto the stage.

“Enemies of Artemis are here!” someone shouted. And so the senseless chant grew even louder. That did it. Almost every man in Ephesus was soon on his way to the center of the city.

Regardless of who entered the theater, each took up the chant. Most were smiling. After all, Gaius was providing quite a show.

I might mention that at that particular time the theater was still under construction, not to be finished until the same year as the destruction of Jerusalem. Slaves who had been working at the construction site ran in terror.

The theater had been carved out of the side of a hill. The top entrance provided one with a view that stretched from Ephesus out to the glistening Aegean Sea.

The acoustics within the amphitheater were excellent, and the chant was reverberating across the city and out into the countryside. By now men were closing up their shops, farmers were leaving their fields, and the marketplace was vacant as men ran toward the amphitheater. Homes, too, began to

empty. As far out as the port, men were rushing toward the amphitheater, all taking up the chant.

It was a sight to see *and* hear. Women and children were asking what the noise was all about. No clear answer was forthcoming. The only thing most people really knew was that their local goddess was receiving a very loud chant! (This disturbance marked the very first time the unfinished theater was filled.)

The confusing incident was fast becoming a comedy! When Timothy discovered that the whole episode had to do with Paul, he muttered, “Oh no! A *crowd*. If Paul hears there is a crowd, he will try to speak to it!” With that Timothy set out in a fury to find Secundus. (The other brothers were out in the towns and cities around Ephesus preaching to the young churches they had recently raised up.)

Once Timothy located Secundus he said, “Secundus, there is some sort of a melee, a huge crowd, in the theater. Help me find Paul. When you do, sit on him if you must, but do not let him get near the theater. Send for others to help you. It may take all of us to stop Paul, but whatever it takes, do not let Paul go inside that theater!”

Secundus understood immediately. He set out for the port, as he had heard Paul might be there.

Because of Timothy’s efforts, a dozen brothers were soon scurrying through the streets desperately trying to find someone who knew *exactly* where Paul was. Having at last found him at the harbor, they discovered he was oblivious to the fact there was a riot going on in the city. Like many others, Paul thought the commotion had to do with the games.

True to his ways, when Paul heard that Gaius and Aristarchus had been dragged into the amphitheater, that a large crowd had assembled, and that he himself was the center of the disturbance, Paul determined to enter the theater and

address the crowd. Whether or not the young men could have prevented him we will never know. It was my dear husband, Aquila, who stopped Paul. Aquila is a very quiet man. He rarely offers an opinion, and when he speaks, men listen—even Paul! Aquila stepped right in front of Paul, looked him straight in the eye and said: “You will not go into the theater.” That is all Aquila said.

Paul tensed, then relaxed, not uttering a single word as a rejoinder. Paul knew, as did the other men, that if Aquila felt that strongly, even Paul would yield to his words.

While this hidden scene was going on, yet another scene was unfolding at the Jewish synagogue.

Alexander, one of the Jewish leaders, heard that the theater was filled with men screaming their allegiance to Artemis and that Paul was the cause of the commotion. Alexander decided to go to the theater and address the throng, with the view that he would let the men of Ephesus know that the local Jews, particularly the ones of the synagogue, were *not* followers of Paul. Alexander had misjudged the hour. He saw this as a perfect time to let the entire city know that Paul was a foreign Jew and a renegade. It was not to be so.

When Alexander entered the theater, he immediately stepped onto the stage and raised one hand for silence. The crowd exploded! They instantly recognized his Hebrew dress. And Hebrews did *not* worship Artemis. The chant turned into a threatening scream. Alexander and those with him made a hasty retreat. The chant rolled on.

I was by then standing just outside the theater, hoping to hear some word of the fate of Gaius and Aristarchus. The ground was literally shaking under my feet. I feared for the lives of both our dear brothers.

At last, word of the demonstration reached the ears of the *asiarch*, or mayor. He was, at that moment, at the temple. The

asiarch had already sent a messenger to find out what the unscheduled assembly was about, but as the thunderous roll of men's voices increased, he decided not to wait for a reply.

By the time he reached the theater the asiarch had some vague idea of what had provoked this unseemly outburst. He paused, took a deep breath, and stepped onto the stage. He was immediately recognized and then was met with an ovation of approval. He raised his hand; the assembly fell silent. He then uttered words that every man in the stadium fully understood.

Should the Romans hear about this riot, Ephesus could very well be run over with armed Roman soldiers. Worse, our freedom could even be taken away from us.

As I reflect on this event, I now realize that it was no small mercy that the arch asiarch was Paul's friend!) Luke was in the stadium watching the entire incident. Later Luke chronicled the asiarch's words:

At last the mayor was able to quiet them down enough to speak. "Citizens of Ephesus," he said. "Everyone knows that Ephesus is the official guardian of the temple of the great Artemis, whose image fell down to us from heaven. Since this is an indisputable fact, you shouldn't be disturbed, no matter what is said. Don't do anything rash. You have brought these men here, but they have stolen nothing from the temple and have not spoken against our goddess. If Demetrius and the craftsmen have a case against them, the courts are in session and the judges can take the case at once. Let them go through legal channels. And if there are complaints about other matters, they can be settled in a legal assembly. I am afraid we are in danger of being charged with rioting by the Roman government, since there is no cause for all this commotion. And if Rome demands an explanation, we won't know what to say."

The asiarch then proceeded to dismiss the assembly. The stadium emptied almost instantly.

“You two—are you well enough to return to your home?” the asiarch asked of Aristarchus and Gaius.

“I am not,” replied Gaius, trying to imitate Paul’s bravado after being beaten and imprisoned in Philippi.

“Whatever your condition, if you can walk, I urge you to leave!”

Aristarchus whispered to Gaius: “Let us go quickly. You are *not* a Roman citizen, and I see no evidence that you are about to receive an apology.”

Gaius, cut, bleeding, and seriously injured, managed to hobble to my home.

In the meantime, Paul knew instinctively that he was spending his last hours in Ephesus. That night all the believers in Ephesus came together in one place to hear Paul’s last words and to bid him farewell.