

# OpenTheo

## June 23rd: Daniel 2 & Acts 19:21-41

June 22, 2021



### Alastair Roberts

Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the image. A riot in Ephesus.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>). My reflections are searchable by Bible chapter here: <https://audio.alastairadversaria.com/explore/>.

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon ([https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref\\_=wl\\_share](https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share)).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

## Transcript

Daniel, chapter 2. In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams. His spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams.

So they came in and stood before the king. And the king said to them, I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream. Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, O king, live forever.

Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation. The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The word from me is firm. If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins.

But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation. They answered a second time and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its interpretation.

The king answered and said, I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time, because you see that the word from me is firm. If you do not make the dream known to me, there is but one sentence for you. You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change.

Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation. The Chaldeans answered the king and said, There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.

Because of this the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed, and they sought Daniel and his companions to kill them. Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Ariok, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon.

He declared to Ariok the king's captain, Why is the decree of the king so urgent? Then Ariok made the matter known to Daniel, and Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time that he might show the interpretation to the king. Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night.

Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons.

He removes kings and sets up kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and hidden things.

He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter. Therefore Daniel went into Ariok, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon.

He went and said thus to him, Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon. Bring me in

before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation. Then Ariok brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus to him, I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation.

The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen, and its interpretation? Daniel answered the king and said, No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked. But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these.

To you, O king, as you lay in bed, came thoughts of what would be after this, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be. But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind. You saw, O king, and behold, a great image.

This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.

Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors, and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. This was the dream.

Now we will tell the king its interpretation. You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power and the might and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all, you are the head of gold. Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.

And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things, and like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle, as you saw the iron mixed with soft clay.

So they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a

kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold.

A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure. Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him.

The king answered and said to Daniel, Truly your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery. Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon.

But Daniel remained at the king's court. In Daniel chapter 1, Daniel and his companions Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were tested. Through their faithfulness and not eating of the king's delicacies, they were set apart from their fellows, distinguishing themselves from others in their wisdom and understanding.

In verse 17, Daniel in particular was noted for his ability in interpreting dreams and visions. This skill in interpreting dreams and visions, or animancy, seems to be something that Daniel had a recognized skill in, even before the events of chapter 2. Chapter 2 begins a section of the book that runs up to chapter 7. Partway through verse 4, the book shifts from Hebrew to Aramaic, and it continues in Aramaic through to the end of chapter 7. We might observe, as many commentators have, a chiastic symmetry in these chapters. Chapters 2 and 7 deal with four empires, the first the vision of the great statue, and the second the vision of the four beasts.

Chapters 3 and 6 present two tests of faithfulness, the three friends of Daniel and the fiery furnace in chapter 3, and the lion's den in chapter 6. In chapter 4 the proud king Nebuchadnezzar is humbled, and in chapter 5 the proud king Belshazzar is brought down, as in chapter 1 of the book. In chapter 2 there is a test that distinguishes Daniel from others, the test being the interpretation of the king's dream. Daniel, once again, is like Joseph.

He is the faithful man who rises through the ranks, he interprets the king's dream, and through his ascent to high office prepares the way for his people to find refuge in a foreign Gentile land. The events of this chapter occur in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Considering that the training of Daniel and his friends was supposed to last for three years, in chapter 1 verse 5, this dating does raise some questions.

However, when we recognise that the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar most

likely refers to the second full year of his reign, it makes more sense. Daniel's training would have begun in the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar, and then well into the second full year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar has his dream. Troubled by the unsettling dream that he has, Nebuchadnezzar summons the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and Chaldeans.

However, Nebuchadnezzar will not disclose his dream to these persons. They are expected to inform him both of the content of his dream, and also of its interpretation. If they cannot do this, they will be torn limb from limb, and their houses will be demolished.

But Nebuchadnezzar does offer a carrot to go with his stick. If they are able to tell him the dream and give him the interpretation of it, they will be showered with gifts and honour and rewards. Perhaps wondering whether Nebuchadnezzar is playing a cruel joke upon them, or whether he is indeed serious, the Chaldeans repeat their request that they be told the dream.

But the king is not going to budge. If they cannot tell him his dream, they have condemned themselves. Quite dismayed by this point, the Chaldeans speak to the king again.

He is asking something impossible of them. There is no one who can tell the king his dream. The expert astrologers, diviners, magicians and sorcerers can at most interpret the dream.

They cannot disclose the contents of a dream that they themselves have not received. Only the gods can do that, and they don't dwell with men. The expert interpreters and diviners have to figure things out from the limited information that they have.

What the king demands of them is entirely beyond their abilities and scope of competence. This episode seems to reveal a deep distrust between Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans. Nebuchadnezzar perhaps thinks that the Chaldeans are charlatans.

They don't really have knowledge, they are just good at bluffing and making things up. If they really had the deep knowledge, wisdom and skills that would justify their influence in the Babylonian court, they would be able to perform the sort of feat that he is demanding of them here. By their confession that they can't perform what is being asked of them, they are condemning themselves.

The king therefore commands that they all be killed. Nebuchadnezzar seems to be radically re-evaluating the composition of his court. Despite his great power and his recent pivotal victories, this might portray a sort of insecurity at the heart of his regime.

When the news of Nebuchadnezzar's decree reaches Daniel, who is included among the wise men, Daniel requires a stay of execution. He is, he claims, able to show the

interpretation of the dream to the king. As we have already noted, Daniel was already known for the interpretation of dreams and visions.

This claim is not a complete bolt from the blue. In light of verse 24, Daniel's request of the king is probably not delivered to the king directly, but through Arioch. Having made this request, Daniel returns to his house and he relates the matter to his three companions, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

In the first chapter he had spoken for all of them. In this chapter he asked them to intercede for and with him. In the next chapter they will be tested by themselves.

Having prayed for knowledge of the mystery, Daniel receives a vision that night in which the dream of Nebuchadnezzar is revealed to him. While we as the hearers of this chapter know that Daniel now knows the contents and the interpretation of the dream, neither of them have yet been revealed to us. The tension of the chapter is built up by a sort of poetic interlude.

Within it Daniel praises God for his revelation of mysteries. This break in the forward movement of the narrative heightens the tension. We're still waiting to hear what the dream means.

It slows the pace of the chapter down, but most importantly it reveals the message at the heart of the chapter about the Lord's uniqueness, the fact that the Lord is the true one who rules in the affairs of men. He alone is absolutely sovereign. This will be manifested in the interpretation of the dream, but it's also seen in the way that the Lord reveals this.

Seen against the backdrop of the Chaldeans' claim that disclosing such a dream was impossible, the Lord's revelation of the contents of Nebuchadnezzar's dream to Daniel is a manifestation of his power and sovereignty. Furthermore, it's a sign that, in contrast to the gods that the Chaldeans believed in, the Lord is active and involved in and speaks into the affairs of men. Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, might remind us of the figure of Potiphar who occupied a similar position in the regime of Joseph's pharaoh.

Arioch speaks for Daniel to the king. Paul Tanner suggests that Arioch was a glory grabber, attempting to gain extra favour for himself with the king by bringing Daniel to him. However, we should consider the risk that Arioch is taking at this time.

If Daniel fails to disclose and interpret the king's dream, he too would be put dangerously out of favour with the king. He's likely putting his neck out for Daniel at this point. Already in chapter 1 we saw that Daniel gained favour with key figures in the court and here again it seems, as in the case of Joseph, that the Lord giving favour to Daniel in the sight of others enables him to come before the king to save his life and to save also the lives of the wise men.

Daniel has two names. His Hebrew name is Daniel, presumably the name that he received at his birth. However, the chief of the eunuchs in chapter 1 gave him the name Belteshazzar.

Here we are told once again that Daniel's name was Belteshazzar. James Jordan has suggested that these names are not used interchangeably. Rather, the name Daniel highlights the fact that Daniel is the servant of God, Belteshazzar that he is the servant of the king.

To the king's question whether he is indeed able to disclose and interpret the dream, Daniel's initial response is rather unpromising. He starts by accentuating the negative. No wise men, enchanter, magicians or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked.

One can imagine the king becoming quite angry, wondering whether Daniel is merely wasting his time. However, Daniel's statement of what is impossible with man is calculated to set things up for a confession of the power of God. The true God, the God of heaven, is revealing mysteries to the king, in particular what will happen in the latter days.

The latter days here are a reference not to the final days of all history, but rather to the latter days of the old covenant administration. Daniel begins to recount the dream, but not before making another confession of the Lord's part in revealing the truth to him. Daniel is a renowned ennaïromancer, an interpreter of dreams and visions, but it is not on account of his superior skill that he is able to reveal the meaning of this dream to the king.

Rather, his recounting and interpretation of the dream will be an authenticating witness for the king. The fact that King Nebuchadnezzar has the dream, and Daniel also receives the knowledge of the dream, also provide two distinct witnesses to this revelation, to make it more sure in our minds too. The images of a great terrifying and lofty statue, we might again think of the Babel themes that are playing out in this book.

The reference to the land of Shinar back in chapter 1 alluded to Genesis chapter 11 and the story of the tower of Babel and its builders. They were attempting to build a great empire that gathered together all the peoples of the world in one, and also to join together heaven and earth with a great tower. As we shall see, this statue seems to be motivated by a similar ambition.

The image is described historically moving down from the head towards the feet. Perhaps we are supposed to see this as a sort of descent from heaven to earth. The movement is from precious metals down.

Gold is the most precious metal, silver next, bronze next, and then iron after that. That

iron is then admixed with clay at the very bottom. As a movement from precious metals down, it might be compared to the temple which moves from gold in the most holy places, to silver for some of the brackets of the tabernacle for instance, to bronze in the courtyard, and then to iron for the gates.

James Jordan suggests that this statue might be a sort of humaniform temple. In addition to that progression, there is a movement into greater hardness. From gold to silver to bronze to iron may seem like a decrease in glory, but it's an increase in might.

It's also a movement of metals into more useful and powerful metals. You can do far more with iron than you can with gold. Furthermore, it's an image of extension.

Gold and silver are rare, bronze and iron are not as rare, and clay is extremely common. This could be seen as an extension out into the world. The statue is trying to gather up all the materials of the world to become comprehensive in its composition.

It's a movement into alloyed, and then finally admixed materials. It starts off with the purity of gold and silver, then has the alloy of bronze, and then moves into this brittle mixture of clay and iron. It's a single composite statue.

The statue starts at the top and moves down, cumulatively working through the different kingdoms. Perhaps when Satan brought Christ up on a high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of earth at a glance, he was showing him something like this, a great visual symbol of the unity of successive empires over time, each empire taking on characteristics and continuing something of the life of its predecessors. Peter Lighthouse suggests that we might also take note of the movement into greater diversity within the statue itself.

The great head has a unity, whereas the chest and arms have two sides. Likewise, the middle and the thighs have different parts to them. The legs of iron end in feet with ten toes.

Most commentators note the literary connections between chapter two and chapter seven, and the way that the vision of the four beasts in chapter seven might help us to interpret this vision in chapter two. Chapter seven verses three to seven read as follows. And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another.

The first was like a lion and had eagle's wings. Then as I looked, its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. And behold another beast, a second one, like a bear.

It was raised up on one side, it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth, and it was told, Arise, devour much flesh. After this I looked, and behold another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back, and the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, terrifying and



dreadful and exceedingly strong.

It had great iron teeth. It devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

The final beast seems to connect with the bottom of the statue. It has feet, it's connected with iron, and its ten horns seem to connect with the ten toes. The vision then seems to speak of four successive empires as a unity.

God has given Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom, and he is establishing in Nebuchadnezzar and these successive empires a great and powerful structure that he will later overthrow. This great human image is given a sort of Adamic, comprehensive dominion over the children of man, the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens. Different theories have been advanced for the identity of these different kingdoms or empires.

Typically liberal scholars have identified these empires as Babylon, Media, Persia and then Greece. While there is some variation on the point, generally conservative scholars have identified these empires as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and then Rome, Medo-Persia being counted as a single empire rather than two successive ones. Ernest Lucas in his commentary challenges this conservative interpretation.

The Seleucids and Ptolemies were mixed in marriage which led to the weakness of the kingdom, which he argues is connected with the fourth beast and with the feet of this great image. He argues that the small horn that arises in chapter 8 would have to be distinguished from the horn in chapter 7. For more liberal commentators there is also the problem of predictive prophecy. If you don't believe that divine prophecy concerning the future exists, then clearly the book of Daniel is going to present some problems in parts.

James Jordan interprets the two horned ram with the horn that becomes larger as Medo-Persia and the goat is identified as Greece in chapter 8 verse 21. This would seem to resolve at least one of Lucas' concerns. As Tanner points out, there is no distinct empire of Media that followed Babylon.

The empire was given to the Medes and the Persians in chapter 5 verse 28 and it is the laws of the Medes and the Persians that are described in chapter 6 verse 8. The description of the destruction of the image might remind us of the description of the destruction of the wicked in Psalm 1 verses 4 to 5. The wicked are not so but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. One of the great questions concerning the meaning of this dream is what ends at the time of the downfall of the statue, particularly if we see the feet referring to the Roman Empire.

The Roman Empire continues to be a thing well into the 5th century AD. This would seem to present problems for interpretations that see the stone growing into the mountain as

a description of Christ and the growth of his kingdom. Over four centuries after the death and resurrection and ascension of Christ, the Roman Empire is still there.

Rather it seems to me that we need to understand these things from their spiritual aspect. These great successive empires play a role prior to the ascension of Christ that they do not do afterwards. The God of Heaven gives the kingdom, the power, the might and the glory not to Nebuchadnezzar and his successors but to Christ and his kingdom.

The Roman Empire may continue to be on earth but it has been stripped of the spiritual role that it once played within the world. The mantle of the great cosmic kingdom has been laid on another's shoulders and even before it has risen in its height, this shift has decisively occurred. Later in the book of Daniel, Daniel will receive a vision in which he sees a sort of metallic man which I think we should identify with the great angel of the covenant, with Michael, with the second person of the Trinity.

Daniel chapter 10 verses 4-6 On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, that is the Tigris, I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Euphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude. This figure is the true metal man who will take the place of this former statue.

The gradual growth of the stone into the mountain might remind us of passages like Isaiah chapter 2 verses 2-3 It shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established at the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills, and all the nations shall flow to it. And many people shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Behind the image of the stone toppling the giant statue we might see David and Goliath. Now another stone of David, the stone of the Messiah, is going to topple another giant, this giant statue that represents all the empires of the world. As an uncut stone it would also be associated with the altar which was formed of uncut stones.

Altars were associated with mountains, a place of communion with God, of raising up the earth to God's presence. Cut from the mountain might also remind us of the tablets of stone of the law that the Lord himself originally cut. Most importantly, the mountain that fills the earth is an image of comprehensiveness.

It joins heaven to earth in its height, and it unites the whole world in its scope. The four corners of the altar represent the four corners of the world, and the four winds of heaven. Here the great mountain is a similar image of comprehensiveness.

Jesus refers similar imagery to himself in Matthew chapter 21 verses 42 to 44, relating the image of the stone with the foundation of a temple. Jesus said to them, Have you never read in the scriptures, The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes.

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him. With the king's dream and Daniel's disclosure of the dream and its interpretation, the dream is made certain, it will surely come to pass.

Nebuchadnezzar falls on his face in response. Nebuchadnezzar as the head of gold falling on his face represents in his individual person the later toppling of the great statue itself. Through the Lord's demonstration of his sovereignty, through the revelation of the dream and its interpretation to Daniel, he made known his power to Nebuchadnezzar too.

Nebuchadnezzar, rewarding Daniel as he had promised, lifts him up and makes him the ruler of all the province of Babylon and chief among Babylon's wise men. At Daniel's request, the king also raises up Daniel's three companions, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, here referred to as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, their Babylonian names. A question to consider, the great metallic statue, gold, silver, bronze, iron and mixed with clay, was finally brought down with an uncut stone, juxtaposed with the other materials, what significance might we find in the uncut stone? Acts chapter 19 verses 21 to 41.

Now after these events Paul resolved in the spirit to pass through Macedonia, Achaia, and go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while. About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the way, for a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsman.

These he gathered together with the workmen in similar trades, and said, Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth, 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, 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. When they heard this they were enraged, and were crying out, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. So the city was filled with a confusion, and they rushed together into the theatre, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel.

But when Paul wished to go among the crowd, the disciples would not let him, and even some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theatre. 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. Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward, and Alexander motioning with his hand wanted to make a defence to the crowd.

But when they recognised that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians. 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, seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess.

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. But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly.

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. And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly. At the end of Acts chapter 19 Paul is still in Ephesus, where he has been for a few years now.

The hearer might even be wondering if he will settle in Ephesus for the long term, expanding his influential school there. However, Paul's eyes now turn to the next stage of his mission. He is primarily a travelling missionary, not a settled teacher.

His plan is to pass back through Macedonia and Achaia, and then go back to Jerusalem. The purpose of this itinerary seems to be in part one of gathering a collection for the saints in Jerusalem. He has already delivered aid to Jerusalem back at the end of chapter 11.

It was at this juncture that Paul seems to have written 1 Corinthians. He describes his travel plans in more detail in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 verses 1-12. Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.

On the first day of every week, each one of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.

I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on

my journey, wherever I go. For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.

But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work is open to me, and there are many adversaries. When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him.

Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers. Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity.

This time seems to have been an important epistle writing period for Paul. During the conclusion of his time in Ephesus, he wrote 1 Corinthians. After leaving Ephesus and passing through Macedonia, he would write 2 Corinthians.

At some point on the return leg of his journey to Jerusalem, he would write Romans. Romans chapter 15 verses 23-28 gives further indication both of the time of its writing, of Paul's further travel plans at the time, and also of the purpose of the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.

At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints, for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem, for they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them, for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. The collection for the saints in Jerusalem was a concrete expression of the unity of the Church, of the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles.

There might have been few if any Gentiles in the Church in Jerusalem, but such a gift was a way of expressing the bond that existed between the different parts of the Church of Christ. This was one of the reasons why Paul's missionary journeys, his epistle writing, and his gift collecting were so essential. They knit together churches scattered throughout the empire, establishing a unified and communicating network where otherwise there might have been isolated and divergent groups.

It is interesting, however, that in the book of Acts we do not have the same emphasis upon the collection for the saints in Jerusalem as we do in the Pauline epistles. This might be surprising. One can imagine that an emphasis upon the collection for the saints in Jerusalem would bring the story full circle.

It would be a way of expressing the way that the Gentiles were being included in the pattern of giving to each other and supporting each other that was so emphasised in the pattern of life of the Jerusalem Church. It would also underline the unity of Jew and Gentile in a single body supporting each other, confirming the message of the Jerusalem Council. The fact that this theme is present but very clearly put to the background might be an indication that the themes that Luke foregrounds are of extreme importance in his mind.

Only a theme of such prominence and significance might explain why these themes are not so emphasised. Paul sends Timothy and Erastus ahead to prepare the way for him. This is particularly important because they need to prepare the gift of the churches, to give the churches time to gather something together.

Paul's expression of his need to go to Jerusalem and then on to Rome might remind us of the geographical destiny that was marked out for the church's mission at the beginning of the book of Acts. Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. It might also remind us of Christ's purposeful movement towards Jerusalem in the Like his master, Paul has a destiny to fulfil and that destiny involves travel to two key destinations.

Paul's success and the success of the Way, the name for the early Christian movement at the time, leads to disturbance in Ephesus. The Jews had opposed him earlier when he had been teaching in the synagogue but now persecution is instigated by pagan idolaters. Paul is largely absent from this particular episode which focuses upon Demetrius and the mob that he forms, literally the Ekklesia, a chaotic parody of the true assembly of the people of God.

We might, as Darrell Bach notes, have an allusion to this event in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 8-10. Bach, along with other commentators, observes that Luke seems to have particularly robust sources for the events in this section, with a seemingly strong local knowledge. The unrest that we read of at the end of this chapter is similar to other events that we read of in first century settings.

It is entirely believable in its context. The disturbance is provoked by the concerns of Demetrius and other Ephesian craftsmen that the success of Paul's labours are threatening the success of their trades, which depend heavily upon the demand from a now decreasing pool of idolaters. A host of commercial enterprises rested upon the cult of Artemis or Diana as she was known in Roman religion.

Her temple in Ephesus was tremendously large. According to some estimates it was four times the size of the Parthenon and much larger than a football pitch. Her cult was hugely influential and the commerce surrounding it correspondingly immense.

Support for the cult of Artemis in Ephesus seems to have arisen in part from the falling of

a meteorite in the region, as the town clerk notes in verse 35. Demetrius is a silversmith and he makes silver shrines of Artemis. Perhaps his construction of idolatrous things through silver might be contrasted with the way that the disciples destroyed a vast quantity of books that were worth an incredible amount of silver, in the verses preceding.

Demetrius gathers together the craftsmen and the workmen and rouses them to action by alerting them to the fact that their trade is going to suffer if Paul's mission succeeds. The more that Paul gains followers, the more that demand for their services, for their products, will diminish. So much of the commerce of the city depends upon the cult of Artemis and the civic pride of the place also.

He is concerned that not only will there be less demand for their products, they may even start to come into general disrepute, people starting to look upon the worship of idols and the trade that surrounds them as something to be rejected as false and depraved religion. Given the success that Paul had been having in the region, this was not an entirely unreasonable fear. The response of the craftsmen and the workmen is anger, and the commotion that they cause spreads throughout the city so that all sorts of people are joining in, in a movement that they do not entirely understand.

They rush to the theatre and take with them Gaius and Aristarchus, who had been Paul's companions from Macedonia. One of the things that is revealed here is the mercenary character of both pagan and Jewish worship, so much that presents itself as piety is really about business concerns, about the service of mammon. What's also happening here is an anticipation of the riot that will occur in Jerusalem when Paul is taken in the temple, presumably because he has defiled it when he has done no such thing.

The disciples surrounding Paul do not allow him to go into the assembly in the theatre, while people would not be able to prevent him going to Jerusalem, where they knew that he faced imprisonment. Here they do have success. Paul has friends also among the Asiarchs, rulers of the city, who also persuade him not to go into the theatre.

Recognising the parallels between this account and the story a few chapters later of Paul being taken in the temple, we might see some sort of parallel being drawn between the temple and the theatre. In the confusion and the commotion, many in the crowd do not know why they have been assembled. Some of the crowd put forward a Jew named Alexander, who wants to make a defence to the assembly.

It is not impossible that this Alexander was the same Alexander the coppersmith that Paul refers to in 2 Timothy 4, verse 14, a man who according to that text caused him much harm. However, as Alexander is recognised to be a Jew, he is considered by the general crowd to be aligned with Paul. Like Paul, he is a Jew who opposes the idolatry of the city.

Their response is to cry out in support of Artemis for almost two hours. Finally, the town clerk is able to bring some quiet to the situation. He settles the crowd and delivers a speech.

As he points out, neither Paul nor his companions had committed sacrilege. They did not blaspheme Artemis. Paul and his disciples did not have an iconoclastic approach to pagan artefacts.

They were respectful and they kept the peace. Paul had friends among the authorities of the city, among the Asiarchs. Throughout the epistles of the New Testament, the posture of Christians in society is described as one of keeping peace, of not causing nuisance, of not being busybodies, of being at peace with people around and seeking to be held in high repute by all.

The anger of Demetrius and the other craftsmen are without grounds. If they had any reasonable grounds for complaints against Paul, the courts are open. They can go to them.

However, they are the ones causing a disturbance. They are the ones that are really the threat to the city. The city of Ephesus enjoys a free city status and if it has commotion and riots like this, it may find that status severely curtailed.

Demetrius and his companions are the ones that are really putting the city at risk. A question to consider. Reading this account, how can it help us to understand the way in which the Church did and did not turn the world upside down?