

Acts 19:38

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another.

Analysis

Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man—The town clerk redirects from mob violence to legal process. The conditional *εἰ μέν οὖν* (ei men oun, 'if therefore indeed') introduces proper procedure: if Demetrius has legitimate grievances (*λόγον*, logon, 'a word, a case'), there are appropriate venues. **The law is open** (*ἀγοραῖοι ἀγονται*, agoraioi agontai, literally 'court days are conducted') refers to regular sessions of the proconsular court.

And there are deputies (*ἀνθύπατοι*, anthypatoi, 'proconsuls')—likely referring to the proconsul's representatives since there was technically one proconsul of Asia. **Let them implead one another** (*ἐγκαλείτωσαν ἀλλήλοις*, enkaleitōsan allēlois, 'let them bring charges against one another') is the proper legal term for formal accusation. The clerk's point: you have courts, use them—mob justice is illegal and dangerous under Roman rule.

Historical Context

Roman legal system in provincial capitals like Ephesus was sophisticated. Regular court sessions (conventus) were held where provincials could bring grievances before the proconsul or his delegates. This provided structured justice and protected Roman order. The town clerk's appeal to legal process reveals how early

Christianity benefited from Roman law's relative fairness—Paul frequently used legal appeals to protect himself and advance the gospel (Acts 16:37, 22:25, 25:11).

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How should Christians engage with legal and governmental systems, even when those systems are not Christian?
2. What does this passage teach about God's providence in placing the early church within the Roman legal framework?
3. When facing opposition, how can we distinguish between standing firm on gospel truth and wisely using available legal protections?

Interlinear Text

εἰ	μὲν	οὖν	Δημήτριος	καὶ	οἱ	σὺν	αὐτῷ
if	Wherefore	G3767	Demetrius	and	G3588	which are with	him
G1487	G3303		G1216	G2532		G4862	G846
τεχνῖται	πρός	τινα	λόγον	ἔχουσιν	ἀγοραῖοι	ἄγονται	
the craftsmen	against	any man	a matter	have	the law	is open	
G5079	G4314	G5100	G3056	G2192	G60		G71
καὶ	ἀνθύπατοί	εἰσιν	ἐγκαλείτωσαν	ἀλλήλοις			
and	deputies	there are	let them implead	one another			
G2532	G446	G1526	G1458	G240			

Additional Cross-References

Acts 13:7 (Word): Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

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