

## Acts 24 - John Karmelich

I'd like you to notice something about the pace of this book. Acts covers a 20-25 year time frame from Chapters 1 to 19. It then "slows to a crawl", as Paul (the lead character) gets arrested for starting a riot. From Chapter 20 to the end of the book, deal with his arrest and trials because of that incident. So why does God want us to know all these details of what Paul went through? You might recall Acts records a bunch of miracles earlier in Paul's life. Now with no such miracles he goes from one trial setting to the next through these chapters. In this chapter we'll read he had to wait over 2 years in prison for the next trial. Neither this book nor history, tell us anything that occurred to Paul during that time. Which leads back to my favorite question: Why is this in the bible and why should I care?

The first thing I thought of, was in the Gospels they too cover a long time period and "slow to a crawl" to cover the details of the death and resurrection. In effect Jesus didn't fight the charges because it was His destiny to die for our sins. On the other hand, Paul argued for his life and did all he could to extend it as long as possible. That's what we see in this section of the book of Acts. What I believe God wants to teach us is about perseverance when dealing with trials. One thing I have learned over the years as a bible teacher is God likes to put "stuff" in my life to help me relate to the text better. I'll just say I have been dealing with my own trials as of late and it gives me perspective as I do this teaching.

All of that leads to Chapter 24. In this chapter, Paul is on trial before a Roman court. He's been falsely accused of starting a riot in the temple. What it comes down to is the fact the Christian church is now a significant size both in Israel and in nearby countries so the Jewish (non-Christian) leaders wanted him dead as he was key to that growth. After being arrested for that riot and facing a trial before the Jewish religious high council, he's now going to have his first of two trials before Roman leaders in Israel. It's the background setting to this chapter. The lesson for us in this chapter is about facing adversity. It's a reminder that God doesn't want us to be a coward and just accept whatever happens to us. We are to be a witness for Him and that means trying to do the right thing no matter how tough the situation! That's what we see Paul doing in this chapter.

With that said, time for my usual lecture on the chapter details. The last chapter ended with Paul being rescued by Roman soldiers after a failed plan to kill him in Jerusalem. The soldiers took him to the city of Caesarea, a coastal town in Israel that was the Roman headquarters. From the time Paul was first put in jail a few chapters back to this trial was a total of eleven days. As I said these last few chapters have slowed to a "snail's pace" as we get details of Paul's trials in Israel. The lesson isn't about learning what happened historically as much as it is about how to face life's trials and how to deal with. By the way I start my day in prayer and the only thing I ask for myself is for wisdom for to make good decisions and the boldness to be a good witness for Jesus. I figured if Solomon prayed for wisdom and God answered it, then I should do it as well. OK then, back to Chapter 24.

Let me begin by describing the other main character in this chapter: Besides Paul and the Jewish guys who wanted Paul dead, we get the Roman governor of that area named Felix. He's the current ruler in Israel (same office as Pontius Pilate, 25 years apart). History records Felix was born a slave but he got set free. He was a friend of the emperor and got "Pilate's job". The text mentions his wife, a young girl from the Herod family that ruled much of Israel for decades. The text also mentions another character, a lawyer (named Tertullus) who the Jewish leaders hired to present their case.

With that said almost all of the chapter describes Paul on trial before Felix. The lesson for us is about dealing with difficult situations we get in life, and how to be a witness for Jesus while going through a

tough situation. The text opens with Tertullus giving a "windbag" set of compliments to Felix (who is the judge) without saying anything specific. Remember the religious Jewish leaders didn't have a good reason to have Paul killed so they tried to "fake their way" through it. It's a reminder that sometimes in life we have to deal with bad stuff. We must trust God to give us the right words to defend ourselves at such times. This attorney accused Paul of starting a riot. One of the top jobs of a Roman governor was to keep peace in their area. No witnesses came forth to support the arguments. He insulted Christianity with a negative slang term. Since Felix was the governor over this area, and Christianity was common (plus he probably learned about Christianity through his Jewish wife.) Anyway, that attorney Tertullus also accused Paul of messing with temple rules (no non-Jews in parts of it). Again, no witness to make his case and no evidence was given to support his false charges against Paul.

After all of that "waste of time", Paul then got to give his defense. He didn't focus on giving the basics of the Gospel message but focused on his defense. Parts of what Christians and religious Jews believe is woven in his defense as we'll see. Again a point is we're to pray and trust God, when we go through our own tough situations and trust He's guiding the situation for His glory. Of course none of us know what the future will bring. All we can do is deal with a situation the best we can as Paul is doing here. OK then, back to the specifics. After he acknowledges that Felix has been ruling over the area for close to a decade he gets into his defense. Paul knew Felix had a bad reputation and says in effect, "I realize you're in charge, so I'm making my defenses as such!"

Paul then points out there are no witnesses brought to prove the case against him. Paul even states that he didn't have time to organize a riot as he was only there for a few days. Again there's a lack of proof of what is being accused to Paul. A reminder that when we're facing a trial, even if we're innocent of a specific charge, it helps to point out the lack of evidence and not just claim our innocence. He tells the court why he came to Jerusalem (to bring aid to the church). He points out the lack of evidence or any witnesses against him. He then says the only thing he was guilty of was stating that God will judge all people one day. The Jewish leaders there didn't believe in an eternal judgment. Paul mentioned this as he is sure one of the reasons for this trial was his disagreement with those leaders on that classic debate between those who take the bible seriously versus those (like these accusers) who did not.

Bottom line is the trial ends in a stalemate. Felix didn't want to have Paul killed as he was a Roman as well as the fact he was innocent. At the same time Felix needed the cooperation of the Jewish leaders, so he "punted". The next we read is Felix said in effect, "I'm going to stall, and wait for another man to come here before making a decision". Handled like a true politician! Paul was sent back to prison, but he was allowed to have visitors as Felix realized he was innocent.

The last part of the chapter describes Felix listening to Paul again (out of boredom?) with his wife next to him. Paul used that occasion to "pour on the guilt" about the judgment to come. Here was Felix with a young bride he stole from another man. Why do this? There's an old Christian belief that one will not accept payment for one's sins until one first realizes one's a sinner! Realize Felix got this "gig" through corruption and even got his young bride due to corruption. Most of us know of people with hard hearts, but we don't know if they can change until we try. Since Felix was known for corruption, the text says that he hoped he'd get a bribe to "weasel" his way out of this! The last thing we read is Paul was left in prison for two years before his next trial. The text doesn't say why. I think it was simply a test of Paul's faith in God during that time period. In the next chapter we get Paul's next trial before a new guy who replaced Felix.

OK I admit this is a strange story to be placed in the bible. It's here to teach us about patience and trust in God through such trials that most of us face in life in one form or another.

With that said, on the same page where you downloaded this summary is a more detailed lesson on this chapter. That one is on a verse-by-verse basis. To read that, click on one of the other two links on this chapter. If you want, you are always welcome to e-mail me and I hope you like this. Thanks, John