

Acts 26 - John Karmelich

In my last lesson I stated that this part of the book of Acts "slows to a crawl". Paul (the main character) deals with being on trial essentially because the Jewish leadership didn't like what he preached. I keep thinking about the fact the first 19 chapters of this book covers a 20-25 year history. Chapters 20 to the end of the book (Chapter 28) covers a relatively short time period as they appear to discuss every detail of Paul's trials (other than a two-year period when he was locked up with nothing said about that). I am pondering why does God want us to know the "blow-by-blow" history of his life? How come the book doesn't give the same level of detail of other parts of his life? My answer is, as most of us know, when we're in a trial, it feels like an eternity. At the same time we need to be mentally sharp to deal with the trials we face in life. God doesn't expect perfection but He does want us to do our best in the situations that to be honest, are difficult to deal with! One of my favorite expressions about God is, "He gave us a brain and expects us to use it".

With that said, we're in the middle of this endless series of trials that Paul faced after being arrested for (in essence) preaching the Gospel and being falsely accused of violating Jewish and Roman law. We've already read in previous chapters of Paul arguing in front of Jewish and Roman audiences as he tries to "save his neck" by explaining the truth of what he did in spite of false accusations. In Chapter 25, Paul deals with a new Roman leader over Israel. Once again he's facing false accusations over what he was accused of doing two years earlier. I wondered why did the Jewish leadership hold this grudge against Paul? He's been locked up for roughly two years at this point. Again why hold a grudge so long as to still want him dead? I believe it's because they saw him as a leader of the growing Christian movement and if he was executed it might discourage that movement! Whatever their motivation, those religious leaders in Israel still wanted Paul dead and still held a grudge which is the reason for this next trial.

OK John, too bad for Paul. Why should I care about any of this stuff? I have my own life to live and I am not facing any great trial at the moment. The first answer is sooner or later we'll all face trials. The biblical perspective is helpful. For what it's worth I'm dealing with my own trial at the moment and I'm praying for wisdom daily to start my day and make the best decisions I can. Still I'm human and I have lost sleep over my trials and hopefully I'll laugh about it years later. Still going through things like that is tough on anybody and I'm positive Paul was no exception. In this chapter, we don't read of any great miracles other than the "hand of God" working in the background to guide Paul. Remember when Paul first got saved in Act 9:15, a prophet said told him he'd will preach Jesus to many of the rulers. We are now roughly 20 years after that prediction and it's playing out here. It doesn't mean we are all called to preach to government rulers. However, all of us are called to be a witness for Him no matter what!

With that said, time for the chapter details. The last part of Chapter 24 dealt with Paul being on trial in the Roman judicial system. The leader was a man named Felix. He had the same job as Pontius Pilate 25 years after him. The historian Josephus (who lived there then,) wrote negatively about Felix saying he was corrupt. In this trial Felix knew Paul was innocent, but also knew the leaders in Israel want him dead. Instead of releasing Paul for those false charges (causing a riot was the main one), Felix in effect "punted" by leaving Paul in jail. Chapter 24 ended in effect by saying Paul spent two years under house arrest (a lighter form of jail). Nothing is written about those two years, but I'm sure Paul found ways to preach Jesus and speak to other believers.

That leads us to Chapter 26. It's now 27 years since Jesus rose from the dead. A new Roman governor was in charge named Festus. He died two years after assuming that office but Josephus effectively said he was a good man and much better than the one before or after him. Because Festus was new to Israel

he went up to Jerusalem (it's uphill from Caesarea) after being in Israel for only three days. I'm sure he had to hear all about Jewish rituals and customs and now the Jewish leaders did things. As I stated, the religious leaders still had a hatred in their heart for Paul. (A horrible thing to hang on to hatred!) They wanted another trial of Paul and explained their history with Paul and the Christians to Felix.

What Felix didn't know but is recorded in the text is the Jewish leaders were planning an ambush when Paul was to be brought back to Jerusalem. The city of Caesarea was where the Roman soldiers for that area were based. The Jewish leaders wanted Paul brought up to Jerusalem so they could kill him!

Here's an example of God working in the background of our lives: Felix didn't know of this plot. It's a reasonable request on the surface for Paul to be brought back to Jerusalem to face his accusers. It was only by God's providence that Felix said, "I'll meet you half way". Felix decided to have the trial back in Caesarea and the Jewish officials could come there to present their case. Realize that during all this, Paul is still "rotting away under house arrest" and didn't know any of this. Then Paul was told he must get ready for another trial in effect the day Felix got back (it's about 60 miles between the two cities).

So Paul after sitting around and waiting for two years, now had to think fast, realizing the hatred of the Jewish leaders, said in effect, "I'm on trial in a Roman setting, so as a Roman citizen I'd want to appeal my case to a higher court". Felix knowing almost nothing about Judaism decided, "OK Paul, let's have a trial here, but I got to bring a neutral expert on your religion in the room to help decide the case". I'll get Herod here. (The bible has a bunch of Herod's, all of whom were descendants of the one who was the ruler in Israel when Jesus was born.) This Herod was a ruler over an area east of Israel. This Herod married a Jewish girl so Felix brought him there to hear Paul's case. Realize that for Paul to go on trial in the Roman court, first the charges have to be filed locally and the case heard, before it's appealed up to the emperor for a final decision. My point is the trial in the next chapter is essentially a preparation for Paul's case to be tried at the "Supreme Court" of Rome. The trial itself is in the next chapter. What we get in this chapter is essentially the story between the trial before the previous Roman ruler and the trial before the current one that takes place in the next chapter.

Gee John, this is all interesting ancient history. It sounds like a good courtroom drama. Other than the fact it's in the bible, why should I care about any of this? Why all of these details? I'm convinced all of this is here to remind us that when we go through our own trials in life, God's still there. He is guiding our lives and is still in charge. What has given me peace through the tough trial I'm dealing with at the moment is my faith that Jesus is God and He's still guiding my life for His glory. I don't know why I'm dealing with all the things I'm dealing with, but I believe God is sovereign, He's guiding my life for His glory. I don't know what the future holds. I just know that I have to make the best decisions I can with the "cards I'm dealt" and go forward trusting that He's guiding me for His glory. To complain or worry about things is normal but not productive. Trusting Him through all the trials we face gives us peace in the midst of whatever storms we face in life. Hope all of that helps. I like the idea that, "If I'm going to worry, why pray, and If I'm going to pray why worry".

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