

The Spirit goes into quite some detail in these last few chapters of The Acts. Much of what Paul had preached as he traveled far and wide across the Roman Empire is not published in Acts. Some significant examples of his preaching are found in Acts 13:16-41; 14:14-18; 17:22-32; 19:1-6; 20:18-36; 22:3-22; 23:1-6; 24:10-21; 25:8-11; 26:1-29; and 28:17-29. However, the 14 epistles he wrote in the later years of his traveling and after his imprisonment contain the heart of the gospel he preached and the truth of God underlying it. Incidents of his travels are also found in his epistles even though not mentioned in Acts. One can piece together his stopping points and route from the epistles as well. Details are given in Acts which are not recorded in secular history but are of significance to the purpose of the Spirit in the inspired record of events while Paul was in the hands of the Romans. The scriptures also provide an informative window on every day life in the Roman Empire of those days. Though secular history relates the causes for the replacement of Governor Felix with Festus, the reasons are passed over by the Spirit.

The recorded secular histories that have survived over the centuries are accessible to the curious and largely confirm the inspired record in Scripture by the Spirit. Many times the secular records reveal sordid details of the character and life of prominent persons. As today, the history books and news media thrive on the sordid and spectacular in daily events, hence the popularity of the tabloids and TV programs like them. Over recent centuries the “free press” of the western world has prided itself as the “fourth estate” of a democracy. This, in addition to a President or Prime Minister, a Congress or Parliament, and a Supreme Court. The press, if truly free, tends keep the government open and honest before the voters. But the less wholesome media would have thrived in the days of the Roman Empire as well. Their secular history is every bit as sensational as the tabloids of our day. **Not recommended reading!** Scripture spares us the details that are not edifying for us. Nonetheless Scripture itself can be very graphic, presenting disturbing images of the depravity and cruelty of man when it suits the purposes of the Spirit. He shows us each what we are inside, and in some cases does not spare the reader details of people’s conduct, but it does not “sensationalize” sin. Some Christian novels, movies, etc., and personal testimonials depict sinful acts purportedly in the interest of presenting a stirring witness to God’s grace. But these can do more harm to souls than good. Even the highly publicized “Passion of Christ” so acclaimed for its “realistic” scenes and images contains more disturbing images of the crucifixion than God saw fit to reveal directly in the scriptures. Beware of seeking to go beyond what God has given us regarding evil.

According to secular history Festus had a better reputation than Felix and was a “good governor.” Yet he still fell into the political expediency of seeking to curry

favor with the Jews he was supposed to govern. Politics was a convenient and necessary skill in the severe, heartless, “law and order” authority of Rome. When Christ comes to reign there will be heartfelt, severe law and order but none of the dishonesty and favoritism found in Rome’s government officials. Sadly, ungodly, incompetent and unjust maneuvering of those in authority is too often present today in many human institutions—governments, corporations and even within Christendom—albeit not all.

Paul, while before Festus, was confronted with the governor’s apparent inclination to send him back to Jerusalem to stand before the Jews again. But there was a very real probability of an ambush on the way. God had already used the Romans soldiers to protect him more than once. But there was no assurance that Festus would provide an armed guard as the Chiliarch Lysias had before. This left Paul with a crucial decision. God could protect him if he went back to Jerusalem, as He had already many times. But the Lord had convinced him visiting Jerusalem was not His will. And He had told him he would reach Rome safely and witness for Him there. Paul therefore had apparently set aside his instinct for self preservation and his impulse to resist injustice. With selfish motives tested and set aside, the godly decision became obvious. Paul stood in chains but in all the dignity of a prophet of God. He rebuked the Governor for his cynical unjust proposal and declared he was not unwilling to die if he was guilty of a crime. Since he apparently could not obtain justice before Festus he would go above him. He appealed to Caesar. How better to gain access to the Emperor to confront him with his need for a Savior and testify that Jesus Christ was that Savior. He would be sent to his interview in custody under Roman guard. Yet even the Roman guard could not guarantee safe passage through a violent storm at sea. Only God could, and He would.

However, along with many Jews, Festus apparently knew of Jesus who claimed to be the Christ. Jesus had backed that claim by his perfect life, good works and miracles. He who had been crucified and was now said by the “Christian sect” to have risen from the dead. But Festus was not a believer in the sense of confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and trusting Him for salvation. Paul’s words had an effect upon him but He shrugged it off. He termed the story of Jesus a superstition of the Jews.

But now he was confronted with a dilemma. What charges could he cite when sending Paul to Caesar? He was in danger now of being exposed as a petty politician dicker and bicker with the Jews and neglecting his commission to administer justice on behalf of the Emperor. Just then King Agrippa came to town. Perhaps he could help. When presented the story he became interested and became involved. He would be next to hear the gospel from the prisoner of Christ.