

A LESSON FROM ANTONIUS FELIX

Antonius Felix was the Governor of Judea who is mentioned 9 times by name in Acts 23 - 25. Here is a brief summary of what we know of him:

- He was a former slave who became the freedman of Antonia, the mother of the emperor Claudius.
- Through the influence of his powerful brother Pallas, also a freedman, he was appointed Governor of Judea.
- The influence of freedmen upon the emperor raised scorn among the aristocrats.
- Tacitus, the historian, described him as “a master of cruelty and lust who exercised the powers of a king in the spirit of a slave” (Histories 5:9)
- He was protected from his corruption by his brother’s influence with the emperor.
- Guerilla operations under his rule were so prevalent that it took 470 troops to escort Paul safely from Jerusalem to Caesarea (Acts 23:23).
- Within 15 years these guerilla bands mounted a full scale rebellion against Rome which resulted in the complete destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
- Felix enticed his “wife” Drusilla away from her royal husband, Aziz of Emesa.
- Paul reasoned with him about “righteousness, self-control, and judgement to come” (Acts 24:25).
- Felix stopped Paul’s preaching and told him to wait for a time when it would be “convenient” for the governor to hear him (Acts 24:25).
- Felix also hoped to get a bribe from Paul (Acts 24:26).
- The emperor Claudius (age 59), married his 34 year old niece, Agrippina. She is thought to have poisoned Claudius in A.D. 54, and installed her young son Nero as emperor.
- Two years after Paul was imprisoned Nero recalled Felix from his position, and Porcius Festus became the new governor (Acts 24:27).
- Nothing more is known of Felix. As far as we know he never became a Christian.

Imagine, if you will, the thrill of being Antonius Felix. He arose from slavery and became one of the most powerful men of his generation. For a brief period of time he escaped any penalty for his unbridled indulgence. He could steal the wife of another man with impunity and satiate his lust without fear of punishment. Like Satan before him, he made himself like the Most High (Is. 14:14). In his deluded mind he considered himself like God. He had the power of life and death over his subjects. With a simple command he could put a stop to any preaching about righteousness, self-control, and judgement. The Sovereign of the Universe, and everyone else, would have to wait in line until it was “convenient” for him to call them into his service.

One day, as you know, Antonius Felix had his rendezvous with destiny. A special envoy from heaven stood in his presence. The Creator of the Universe extended to him the right to become a child of God by faith. Antonius Felix was offered the opportunity to become a joint heir with Jesus Christ of eternal treasures. When Felix faced the consequences of eternal Judgement he was temporarily afraid (Acts 24:25). For a brief moment in time the door of his heart was slightly ajar. But then, intoxicated by his own power and importance, he traded eternal treasure for fifteen minutes of earthly fame. In a very short time the emperor Claudius would be dead, and the earthly power of Felix would vanish like a vapor. Antonius Felix, teaches from his grave the lesson of the ultimate absurdity. He expected God to be inconvenienced so that he wouldn’t have to be.