

Felix Antonius

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FELIX ANTONIUS

A Roman procurator of Judea, appointed by the emperor Claudius to succeed Cumanus. The event that led to the introduction of Felix into the narrative of Acts was the riot at Jerusalem (Acts 21:27). There Paul, being attacked at the instigation of the Asian Jews for alleged false teaching and profanation of the temple, was rescued with difficulty by Lysias the chief captain. But Lysias, finding that Paul was a Roman citizen, and that therefore the secret plots against the life of his captive might entail serious consequences for himself, and finding also that Paul was charged on religious rather than on political grounds, sent him on to Felix at Caesarea for trial (Acts 21:31–23:34). On his arrival, Paul was presented to Felix and was then detained for five days in the judgment hall of Herod, till his accusers could also reach Caesarea (23:33–35).

The trial was begun, but after hearing the evidence of TERTULLUS and the speech of Paul in his own defense, Felix deferred judgment (24:1–22). The excuse he gave for delay was the continued absence of Lysias, but his real reason was to obtain bribes for the release of Paul. He therefore treated his prisoner at first with leniency and pretended along with DRUSILLA to take interest in his teaching. But these attempts to induce Paul to purchase his freedom failed ignominiously; Paul sought favor of neither Felix nor Drusilla and made the frequent interviews that he had with them an opportunity for preaching to them concerning righteousness, temperance, and the final judgment. The case dragged on for two years till Felix, upon his retirement, “desiring to do the Jews a favor ... left Paul in prison” (24:27). (According to some MSS, the continued imprisonment of Paul was due to the desire of Fe-

lix to please Drusilla.)

Felix was the brother of Pallas, the infamous favorite of Claudius who, according to Tacitus (Josephus, Ann. xiii.14), fell into disgrace in A.D. 55. Tacitus implies that Felix was joint procurator of Judea along with Cumanus before being appointed to the sole command, but Josephus is silent about this. Both Tacitus and Josephus refer to his succeeding Cumanus, Josephus stating that it was at the instigation of Jonathan the high priest. There is some doubt about the chronology of Felix's tenure of office. Harnack and Blass, following Eusebius and Jerome, place his accession in A.D. 51, and the imprisonment of Paul in 54–56; but most modern commentators incline to the dates 52 for his accession and ca 58–60 for Paul's trial. Felix was succeeded, after Nero recalled him, by FESTUS.

The testimony of Acts concerning the evil character of Felix is fully corroborated by the writings of Josephus (BJ ii.13.2–4; Ant. xx.8.5; cf. Tacitus Ann xii.54). Although he suppressed the robbers and murderers who infested Judea, among them the “Egyptian” to whom Lysias refers (Acts 21:38), yet “he himself was more hurtful than them all.” When occasion offered, he did not hesitate to employ the Sicarii (see ASSASSINS) for his own ends, including the murder of the high priest Jonathan (Josephus Ant. xx.8.5). Trading upon the influence of his brother at court, his cruelty and rapacity knew no bounds; during his rule revolts became continuous, marking a distinct stage in that seditious movement which culminated in the outbreak of A.D. 66–70 (cf. HJP, II/2, 174–182). His leaving Paul in bonds was but a final instance of one who sacrificed duty and justice for the sake of his own unscrupulous selfishness.