

Who is Felix in the Bible?

Antonius Felix was formerly a slave but was promoted by Claudius Caesar to the office of governor. The Roman historian Tacitus described Felix as “cruel, licentious, and base.” While in Judea, Felix was attracted to Drusilla, a daughter of Herod Agrippa I. The fact that Drusilla was already married made no difference to Felix. He enticed her away from her husband, Azizus, and they later married.

Felix was the governor of Judea and Samaria when the apostle Paul was arrested in Jerusalem for preaching the gospel (Acts 23:35). Because a mob was planning to kill Paul before he could come to trial, the Roman commander hustled Paul away in the night, accompanied by two hundred soldiers, to Caesarea so that his case could be heard by Governor Felix (Acts 23:23-24).

When Paul arrived in Caesarea, Felix the governor read an explanatory letter from the Roman commander who had sent Paul there, asked what province Paul was from, and then postponed his hearing until Paul’s accusers could be present (Acts 23:33-35). Five days later, a company arrived; it included Ananias the high priest, some Jewish elders, and a hired lawyer named Tertullus. Once the proceedings had begun, Tertullus and the Jewish leaders accused Paul of being a troublemaker who had attempted to desecrate the temple (Acts 24:5-6). Given his turn to speak, Paul politely denied the charges against him. He also pointed out that his actual accusers, Jews from Asia, were not present and that he had not been found guilty of any crime before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17-21).

Felix was well informed about this new sect of Jesus’ followers called the Way, and when he heard that Paul’s case involved questions of religion, he adjourned the hearing until

the Roman commander who had arrested Paul could be present (Acts 24:22). Paul's words must have intrigued Felix, because a few days later he summoned Paul to hear more of his teaching. Felix and Drusilla both "listened to [Paul] as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus" (Acts 24:24). But when conviction came through Paul's words, Felix grew afraid and ordered him to stop talking. Although he gave Paul some freedom by allowing his friends to tend to his needs, Felix kept Paul in jail for two years, ostensibly waiting for a more "convenient" time (Acts 24:25). In reality, Felix was hoping for a bribe from Paul, but one never came. When Felix was replaced as procurator, he left Paul in jail for his successor, Porcius Festus, to deal with.

It could be that another reason Felix left Paul in jail was that he was reluctant to pronounce judgment on a man who was clearly innocent. Or possibly he did so to please Drusilla. A fear of political backlash from the Jews was also a factor (Acts 24:27). Upon his loss of the governorship, Felix was summoned to Rome where certain of his former Jewish subjects accused him of cruelty and corruption. Felix was found guilty but was spared the death penalty.

Felix is representative of many people who are intrigued by the gospel but recognize that surrendering to it means loss of status, power, or control of their own lives. Like Felix, many know on a deep level that what they are hearing is truth, yet their stubborn pride refuses to accept it. Judas Iscariot may have been one of those people. He was in close association with the Son of God for three years, witnessing miracles, healings, and other supernatural events. Yet in the end he chose to walk away. Mere exposure to truth does not necessarily enlighten the heart, and Felix is a good example of that (Ephesians 1:18; 1 Corinthians 1:18).