

**"FELIX"**  
**(Acts 23:24)**  
(Chuck Swindoll)

Around AD 50, Felix's predecessor, Cumanus, had made himself an enemy of the Jews. His dispute with the high priest, Ananias, son of Nebedeus, led to a hearing in Rome, where each accused the other of sedition against the empire. Meanwhile, back in Judea, Jonathan, the son of Annas, served as the interim high priest. When Claudius found Cumanus guilty and banished him, Jonathan requested the appointment of Marcus Antonius Felix as procurator.

Felix was a freedman, originally a slave with his brother, Pallas, under the daughter of Mark Antony. Both men rose to prominence after gaining their freedom, with Pallas becoming a secretary of the treasury for both Claudius and Nero. Felix used his family connections and wily politics to skim the surface of scandals without actually getting wet. He somehow managed to make an impression on Jonathan, who now led the Annas crime family in Jerusalem. As a result, he became the only governor on record to have been a former slave.

At first, Felix worked hard to control the growing numbers of brigands in the region, outlaws who used robbery and assassination as tools against Roman occupation. He captured and executed many of them, but not all. Some he kept for his own use. After two years of listening to Jonathan's constant criticism, he arranged to have the interim high priest murdered by the Sicarii, "dagger men," an extremist faction of zealots. Soon, however, the plan backfired. Having done the deed, the robbers used their underworld ties to the procurator to take over the city. One of their leaders was a certain Egyptian false prophet who "stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness" (21:38). Felix cleverly used this revolt as an opportunity to clean up the city, make himself a hero to the Romans, and eliminate the witnesses to his earlier crime. While the Egyptian escaped and was never seen again, Felix killed four hundred of the robbers.

Felix was an opportunist without a conscience. Tacitus described him as one who "practiced every kind of cruelty and lust, wielding the power of [a] king with all the instincts of a slave." He used people and circumstances to accomplish his own agenda, which was to gain greater power and accumulate more wealth. He used Jonathan to get his appointment in Judea, only to have him assassinated. He used brigands to carry out his dirty work and then prosecuted them to vindicate himself. He took bribes and decided disputes based on political expediency instead of justice. He allowed the high priest, Ananias, son of Nebedeus, to carry out his corruption and extortion without interference, and then he used his corruption to fuel the Jews' dispute with Syria for his own political gain.

For unknown reasons, Felix returned to Rome around AD 59, where Jewish delegates brought a complaint against him in court. He would have been convicted if not for another opportune connection. His brother, Pallas, enjoyed the favor of Nero at the time and successfully pleaded for his acquittal.

