

VOICES FROM HEAVEN AND HELL

by

J. MARCELLUS KIK

Copyright © 1955

edited for 3BSB by Baptist Bible Believer in the spirit of the Colportage Ministry of a century ago

~ out-of-print and in the public domain ~

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"GOD Gave Me No Convenient Season"

by **Antonius Felix**

"My name is Antonius Felix. At one time my brother, Pallas, and I were slaves. But we were freed by Antonia the mother of Emperor Claudius. My brother Pallas was an attractive fellow and very clever. He became the favorite of Emperor Claudius and later of Emperor Nero. It was through the influence of my brother and Jonathan the high priest that I was appointed as procurator of Judea.

"My name is Felix. It means '*happy*.' But my name is a lie. I am miserable and live amongst the miserable. Through no great fault of my own I am a dweller in hell. I am condemned forever to a life of woe and misery. My soul is in torment. But here is an account of my life as procurator over the Province of Judea.

"My predecessor in office, Cumanus, was not very successful in keeping down the bands of robbers and assassins which roamed throughout Palestine. The Jews complained about him to the Emperor. Claudius removed him from office. Then through the influence of Jonathan the high priest of the Jews and also that of my brother Pallas, I was appointed to be governor over Judea.

"This fellow Jonathan, the high priest, thought that he could interfere with the way I governed simply because he helped in my appointment. I hated his interference. He thought that I should not accept gifts from those who came up before me for judgment. But why should I not profit from my office? It was the common practice of all judges to be influenced by gifts. Jonathan talked about justice but who in the Empire of Rome believed in justice? That high priest became troublesome because of his insistence, on justice. So I fixed him by bribing his best friend Doras to hire a band of robbers to assassinate him. This they did cleverly. They pretended they were going to worship GOD in the Temple. They had daggers under their garments. They plunged their daggers into Jonathan. Then they mingled with the multitude and cried with them to catch the assassins. I used these clever fellows many times to murder my enemies, many of which were Jews whom I hated.

"Some of these assassins got too bold, particularly a chap by the name of Dineas. He was getting too rich in his plundering and I received nothing from him. I sent word to him if he would give himself up I would not punish him but allow him his freedom. The wretch believed me. As soon as he gave himself up I bound him in chains and sent him to Rome to be tried. This would make a good impression on the Emperor who would know how diligent I was in wiping out bands of robbers and assassins. Little did Claudius know I was using them for my own ends, although some of those sneaking Jews began to inform him.

"Though I despised the Jews yet I must confess I fell in love with a Jewess. She was the wife of Azizus, king of Emesa, a small kingdom in Syria. She was the most beautiful woman that I had ever seen. I forgot all my other loves. I was consumed with desire for her. I felt that she, too, loved me. What mattered if she were the wife of another? Why should we remain unhappy by the laws of any nation? Love is supreme. I had at this time a clever Jewish friend by the name of Simon a magician. I sent him to the court of Azizus. He persuaded Drusilla to leave her husband with the promise that she would receive great happiness. Surely it was better to be the wife of Felix, with all his influence in Rome, than to be the wife of an insignificant king.

"There were some Jews who said this was a transgression of the laws of their GOD. But why should two people remain unhappy all their lives just to keep some ancient laws which have no relationship to real life? It is happiness that counts.

"The Jews were having their own trouble about their religion. Some twenty or more years ago a man by the name of JESUS was crucified under Pilate. He really was not guilty of any crime but occasionally we have to please the Jews. I know that I do that every once in a while to keep them quiet. Well, it seems that the followers of this JESUS believe him to be the Messiah. They claim that he was resurrected from the dead and appeared to some of them. The Jews were trying to stamp out this sect by sending them to prison and stoning others. It amused me to see the Jews fighting one another.

"I was curious about this sect after hearing so much about them. My wife, Drusilla, was also curious to know more about them. We had our opportunity of learning more when Captain Lysias in Jerusalem sent up a fellow by the name of Paul. He was the cause of a riot. It seems that he, too, was a follower of this JESUS and was one of the chief men of this sect.

"On the day of the trial the Jews had as their informer a certain orator by the name of Tertullus. He was a silver-tongued speaker and with great eloquence declaimed against Paul. But if he had used silver instead of oratory he might have made an impression on me. It is silver in which I am interested. Paul answered his arguments easily. I knew it was just a religious quarrel and that Paul had not done anything worthy of imprisonment. But there were two things in Paul's defense which interested me. The first was his declaration that he had come up to Jerusalem in order to bring alms and offerings to his nation. I figured out that the man must be rich and have rich friends. Immediately I made up my mind to keep him in prison until he offered me a large sum of money. I would make him pay well for his freedom.

"The second thing which interested me was the statement of Paul about a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. He said that it was also a teaching of the law and prophets of the Jews. I have often wondered whether there was a life after death. We Romans had little regard for the gods and the teachings about them. It was all right for the ignorant masses. It kept

them satisfied and quiet. But most of the nobles and ruling classes were skeptics. However, I could not help wondering whether there was a life after death.

"I asked Drusilla about this statement of Paul's regarding the resurrection of the just and unjust. She quoted a statement of one of the prophets of the Jews by the name of Daniel. He had written: **'And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.'** Drusilla was also interested because she had heard about these followers of JESUS. We thought it might be interesting and amusing to hear this man Paul and at the same time I might discover the source of his wealth. So I summoned him to appear before Drusilla and myself.

"I commanded him to speak to us concerning this CHRIST and faith in him. Paul told us that JESUS was the very Son of GOD and that He had lived with GOD throughout eternity. This JESUS was born of a virgin. Paul told us of some of the miracles which the CHRIST had performed. He told us of his crucifixion at the hands of the Jews and the Romans. But I already knew how Pilate had become mixed up in the death of this Jew. Then Paul told us of the resurrection of this JESUS the CHRIST. How he appeared to the apostles and how he appeared to him on his way to persecute the Christians.

"Then he told us a rather strange doctrine of how it was necessary to believe in this JESUS in order to receive the forgiveness of sin. This crucifixion was for the atonement of sin even though it was brought about by the hands of men. 'His blood,' said Paul, 'was shed for sin.' It was the same thing, he informed Drusilla, as the sacrifice in the Temple. This CHRIST was the sin-offering. But why should I, Felix, the procurator of Judea, be classified as a sinner? Why should I as Governor kneel as a sinner before this JESUS the CHRIST?

"Paul must have read my thoughts because he began to reason of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come. He explained that righteousness was doing what was right towards man and towards GOD. He told me that lying was a sin against man and GOD. I always thought that lying was an accomplishment and I prided myself on my ability to deceive. Dishonesty was another sin, according to Paul. One should take no more than that to which he is entitled. I thought of the thousands of talents that I had appropriated from the public treasury and of all the plunder taken from the homes of the wealthy. Most of my wealth consisted of that which I took from others. If dishonesty is a sin my sin would be enormous.

"Then he mentioned injustice and murder. I always considered it right to receive gifts which he termed bribes. But he told me that his GOD considered the taking of bribes as something particularly abhorrent. His GOD hated injustice. And as for murder Paul said that the murderer would never enter into Heaven, the abode of the righteous. I had tortured and murdered hundreds. Often for no great reason I ordered my soldiers to kill and plunder. No murderer would enter into Heaven, said Paul.

"My conscience was pricked because I knew that I lied, stole, was unjust and a murderer. But why should I be troubled in conscience? Why should I, Antonius Felix, worry about what this religious fanatic calls transgressions of the law of GOD? Why must I be righteous? But again that Paul seemed to read my thoughts. He declared that the living GOD was righteous and demands that all His creatures be righteous. This GOD had said: **'Be ye holy as I am holy.'** This

Holy GOD would not tolerate wickedness in the lives of His creatures. He commands all to do what is right. I had never thought of GOD as such a holy Being and one who demanded righteousness. This thought began to trouble me.

"Then this persistent disciple of CHRIST continued digging at my conscience. He spoke of temperance. I had been everything but a temperate man. I have never tried to bridle my passions. Eat, drink, and be merry has been my philosophy as that of many others. Paul mentioned adultery. Drusilla turned crimson and I felt uncomfortable.

I thought it had been clever to take her away from her husband. But now my conscience began to burn. The fellow made me squirm as he revealed the law of his GOD against adultery and sexual lusts. Then the thought struck me that his GOD had not showed His displeasure. I had experienced no drastic punishment. I held a place of honour. I was becoming wealthy. And in Drusilla I had my heart's desire. This GOD of Paul's could not be so hard against sin.

"But Paul struck terror into my heart by speaking of the judgment. He told me that GOD did not always punish upon earth but that there was to be a final judgment. At that final judgment all our deeds would be shown and even our thoughts. I thought of my lies. I thought of my curses. I thought of my stealing. I thought of my injustices. I thought of my murders. And I thought of my lusts. What a record to present in front of the holy and righteous GOD! What would He do? Paul told me. He told me that GOD would separate the good from the wicked. He repeated these words of CHRIST: **'Then shall he say also unto them on the left, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels.'** When he spoke of hell fire and eternal punishment I trembled like a leaf.

"Paul observed this and said: 'You are trembling and well you might. You are a guilty sinner and under the condemnation of the righteous GOD. You have but one chance and that is to repent and turn to CHRIST. Believe that He died upon the cross for your sins and you will be forgiven. Though your sins are as crimson they shall be as white as snow. CHRIST will give you strength to live a holy life. Repent and believe on the Lord JESUS CHRIST:

"I pondered that offer of forgiveness through faith in CHRIST for a few moments. It would be wonderful to know that all my sins were forgiven and that GOD would receive me into His Heaven. But to repent! That would mean leaving Drusilla. Would that be a fair thing for me to do after taking her from her husband? To repent! That would mean to restore what I had stolen! I was just becoming rich and I needed money. To repent and become a follower of the CHRIST! Why the Jews would hate me even more and they would try to influence Claudius to remove me. It might mean the loss of this influential position. This would be no time to repent and become a Christian. I would wait for a more convenient season. And so I cried out to Paul: **'Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.'**

"A more convenient season! GOD never gave me a convenient season. I became fonder of Drusilla as time went on. A son was born to us. How would it be possible for me to leave her? The times became more difficult to rule. There was a battle between the Jews and the Syrians. Just because my soldiers plundered some of the rich Jews they complained to Nero who had succeeded Claudius as Emperor. My brother Pallas did what he could but I was recalled to Rome. Certainly it was not convenient to turn to CHRIST when my position and life were at

stake. That was not a convenient season. Why did GOD allow my enemies to triumph if He wanted me to repent? Why did He take away the position through which I accumulated wealth?

"Nero would not re-appoint me to Judea. He said that he would not displease certain influential Jews. Naturally I had to spend all my time to get some other kind of appointment. And that was not easy because Nero thought I had failed and he was a cruel man. With all my worries it certainly was not time to repent and become a Christian. That would spoil all my chances. The season was not convenient.

"However, there was still the thought in my mind that I would repent, perhaps, when I was about to die. That would be a convenient time to prepare for the other world and the terrible judgment to come. Death approached and how I fought him. Do you know what it is to fight death? It takes your every breath and every ounce of strength. You have no time to think. You have no time to repent. All you think of is that you want to live. And, yes, if GOD will let you live then you will repent. I fought with death. It was a terrible struggle. I thought I would win. But death conquered and I awoke in hell. GOD did not give me a convenient season.

"A more convenient season! That is the thought that torments me day after day, week after week, year after year, century after century. A more convenient season! That is the flame that cannot be extinguished in this endless time. A more convenient season! That is the worm that dieth not in this eternal hell. If GOD had only given me a convenient season. If GOD had only given me a convenient season - a more convenient season. O that that thought might be extinguished and that that worm might die! A more convenient season. GOD never gave me a more convenient season. I am damned throughout eternity with that timeless flame and deathless worm. A more convenient season! GOD never gave me a more convenient season."

~ end of chapter 13 ~
