

# Rufus and his world of change

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## Meet Rufus

Rufus was a fifteen-year-old boy living in the Roman Empire in the year 64 AD.

Everything about his world was changing.



Rufus had grown up in the Roman Province of Lazicum. Lazicum was located on the shores of the Black Sea in an area which today is the western section of the nation of Georgia.

In order to understand Rufus' world, we have to tell you a little bit about his family history.



## Rufus' family history

Rufus' ancestors had lived along the coast of the Black Sea for hundreds of years.

But in 65 *BC*, Rome invaded and overthrew the leaders of the time, and turned Lazicum into a Roman province. As always, Romans took prisoners of war.



The prisoners of war became slaves. In ancient times, slavery was not based on race. Slaves taken in ancient times were almost always captives of war.

Rufus' great grandfather was one of the captives. He was taken back to Rome and sold at a slave auction to a man named Albus Cato.

Albus Cato gave his new slave the Roman name of Flavius.



Flavius worked in the household of Albus Cato for his entire life. Flavius married another slave from his homeland and together they had a son they also named Flavius.

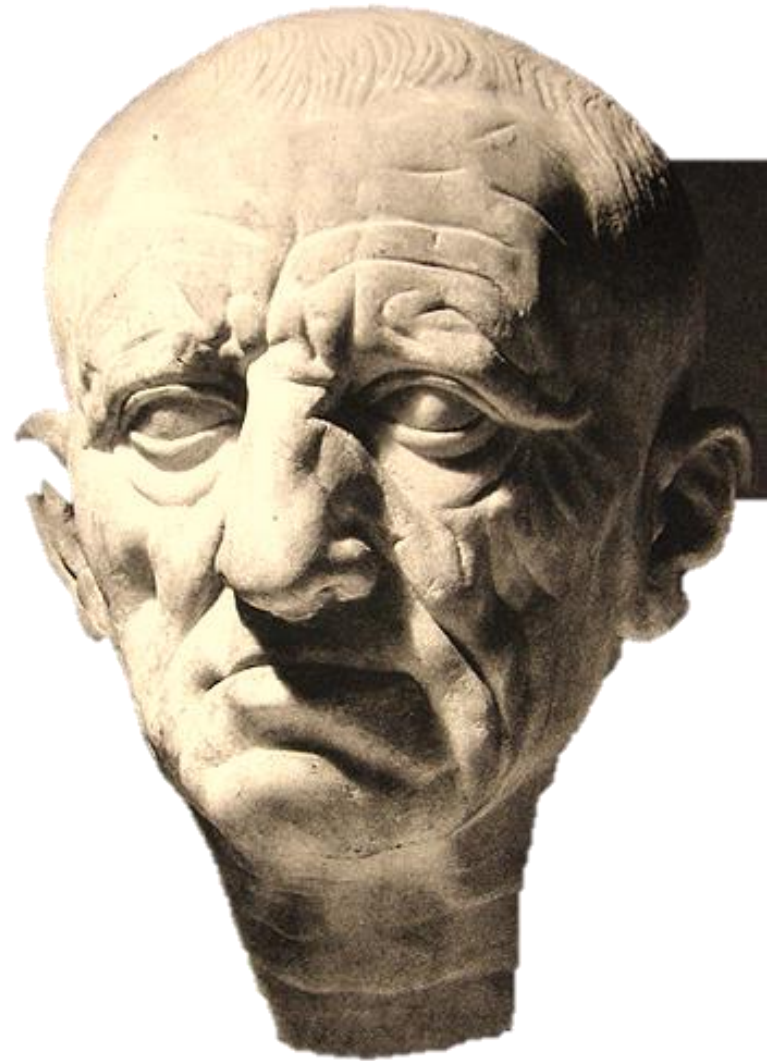
The pattern was the same in the next generation. Flavius "the second" also worked in the house of Albus Cato and married another slave from his homeland. The family managed to keep up the ancient language of their people.

A son was born to the couple that they named Flavius "the third."



But when the slave master, Albus Cato, was very old and about to die, he made a decent gesture. He freed Flavius "the second," his wife, and the son, "Flavius the third."

While the family was not eligible for Roman citizenship (which was highly prized), they now had freedman status. This would lead to more opportunities.



One great opportunity that young Flavius "the third" had was the chance to join the Roman army when he turned eighteen. And if he completed 25 years of service, he was eligible to become a Roman citizen with all its privileges and protections.

Not being a citizen, young Flavius was only eligible to join the auxiliary army that served in the provinces (not in Rome). Because he spoke the ancient language of his people, he was sent to Lazicum.

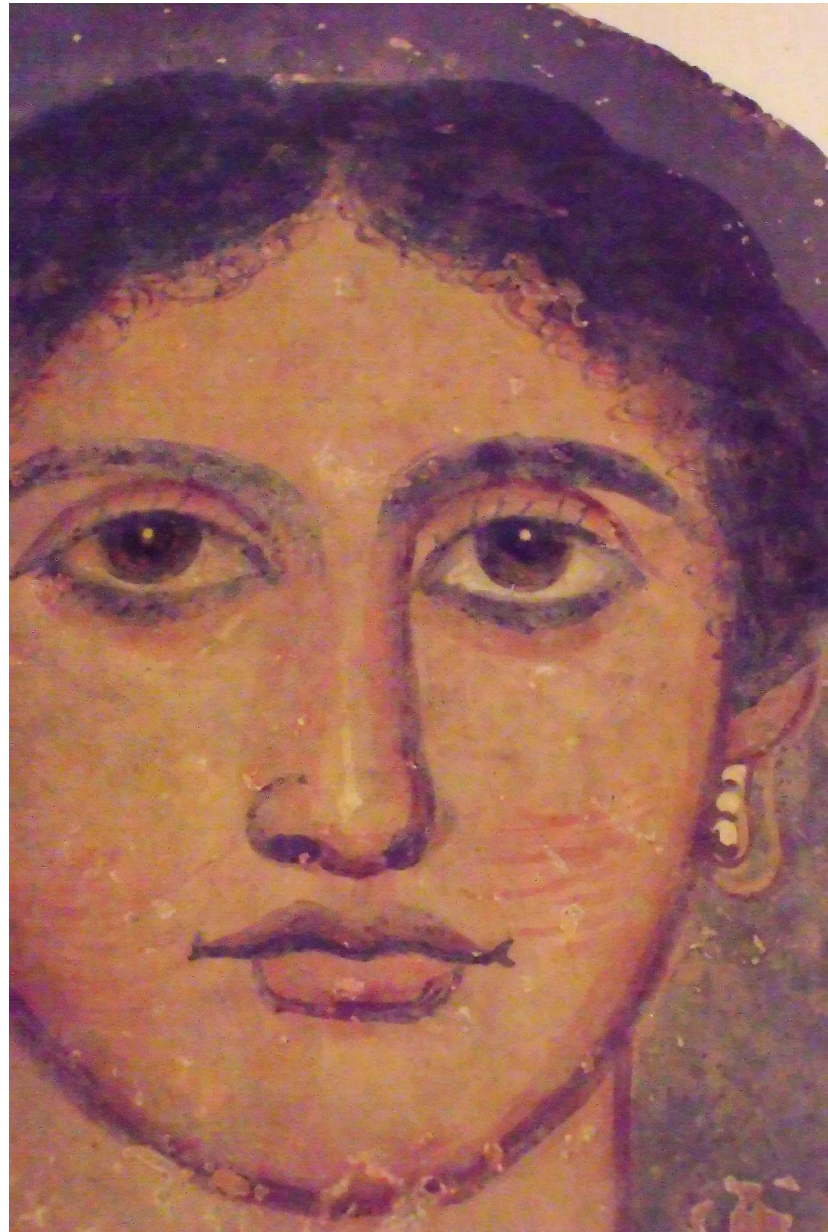




Technically young Flavius was not allowed to marry during his 25 year stint in the auxiliary army, but like most of his fellow soldiers, he took a wife anyway. Her name was Natela and she was from Lazicum.

Together they had two sons, Flavius "the fourth" and Rufus.

This brings us up to date on our story of Rufus and his changing world.



## The changing world of Rufus

Rufus' world should have been pretty stable. His future had been charted since he was born. Like his older brother, Flavius "the fourth," Rufus would enter the auxiliary army when he was eighteen. Even though his father would become a Roman citizen when his 25-year term was up, the status of Roman citizen did not apply to his wife and boys. Under normal circumstances, no children of foreign mothers could become Roman citizens. However, if Rufus and Flavius "the fourth" spent 25 years in the auxiliary army, they would earn citizenship too.

Rufus had planned for this as long as he could remember. And there were many reasons he liked this plan.



Rufus and his family had spent as much time in Rome as they'd spent in their ancestral home of Lazicum.

His father's auxiliary unit kept having to return to Rome on official business. Rufus, like his brother and father, felt very Roman, as their family had spent three generations there. Even though they could not yet own property in Rome, they followed nearly all the Roman traditions.



The family always went to Rome to honor their ancestors at *parentalia*. The Romans, like most people in ancient times, believed that ancestors had active spirits after death. At *parentalia*, families visited the tombs of their ancestors and gave them food and drink.

It was said that if they failed to do this, the ancestors would leave their tombs and wail as ghosts in the city streets and fields .



Rufus and his family also kept the Roman mystery religions. One of these, called the cult of Mithras, was popular with the soldiers. The cult involved seven initiations, ritual meals, and underground temples.

The central character of the religion was Mithras. In one ceremony he is said to hunt and ride a sacred bull, overwhelm it with his super strength, and then kill it in a cavern. He and the god of the sun would then have a banquet and feast on the bull's hide.



The Cult of Mithras was also respected by Rufus' mother's family and other people of Lazicum because it was similar to Black Sea mystery religions.

But many things were about to change.



The first thing that was changing was Rufus himself. Because he'd just turned fifteen, he was supposed to dress differently. He had to get rid of the bulla and tunic of his childhood and take on the man's dress of the toga.



And there was also a new emperor. His name was Nero.

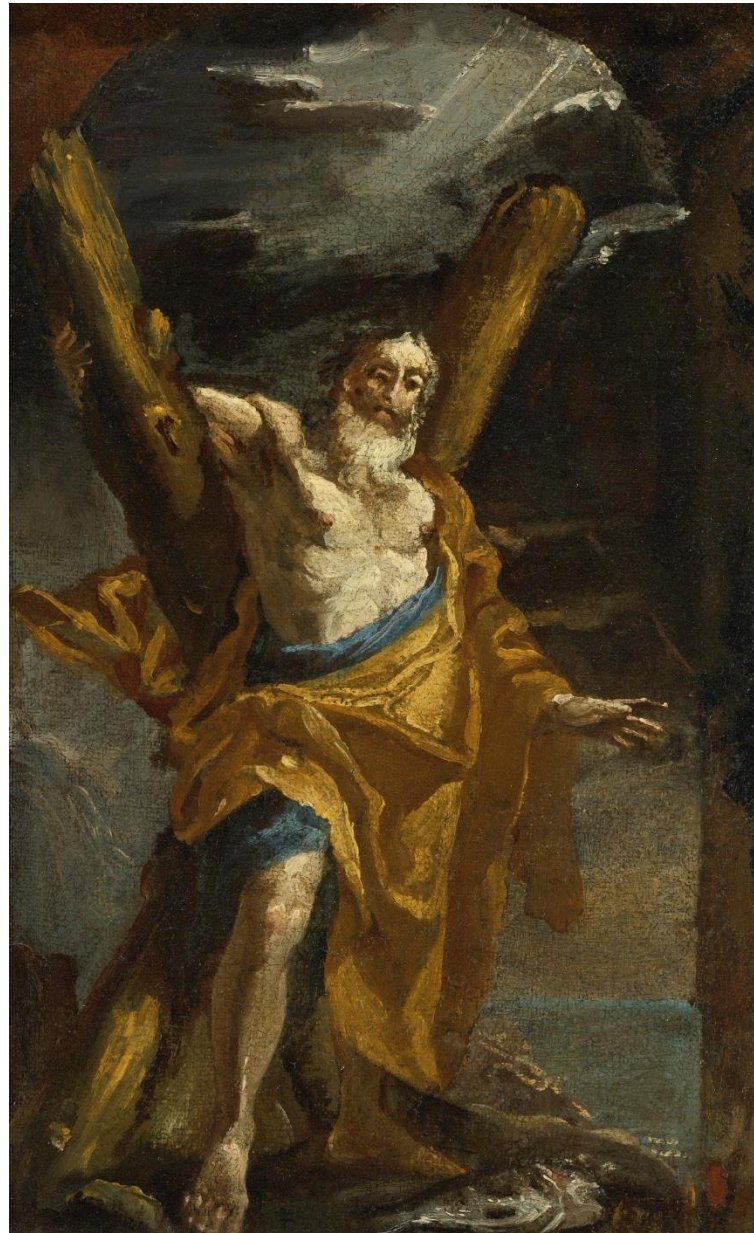
As one of his first orders of business, Nero changed the status of Lazicum. It was added to the Province of Pontus to the south the month that Rufus turned fifteen. This led to a lot of changes in the duties of Rufus' father and brother.





But this was nothing compared to other changes.

Rufus' mother Natela and her family had recently become interested in a new religion. A few years earlier in Lazicum, a Jew named Andrew (see right) had preached about a new faith and had converted quite a few people. Now little groups were traveling all over the Black Sea area preaching to others. They called the new religion Christianity.

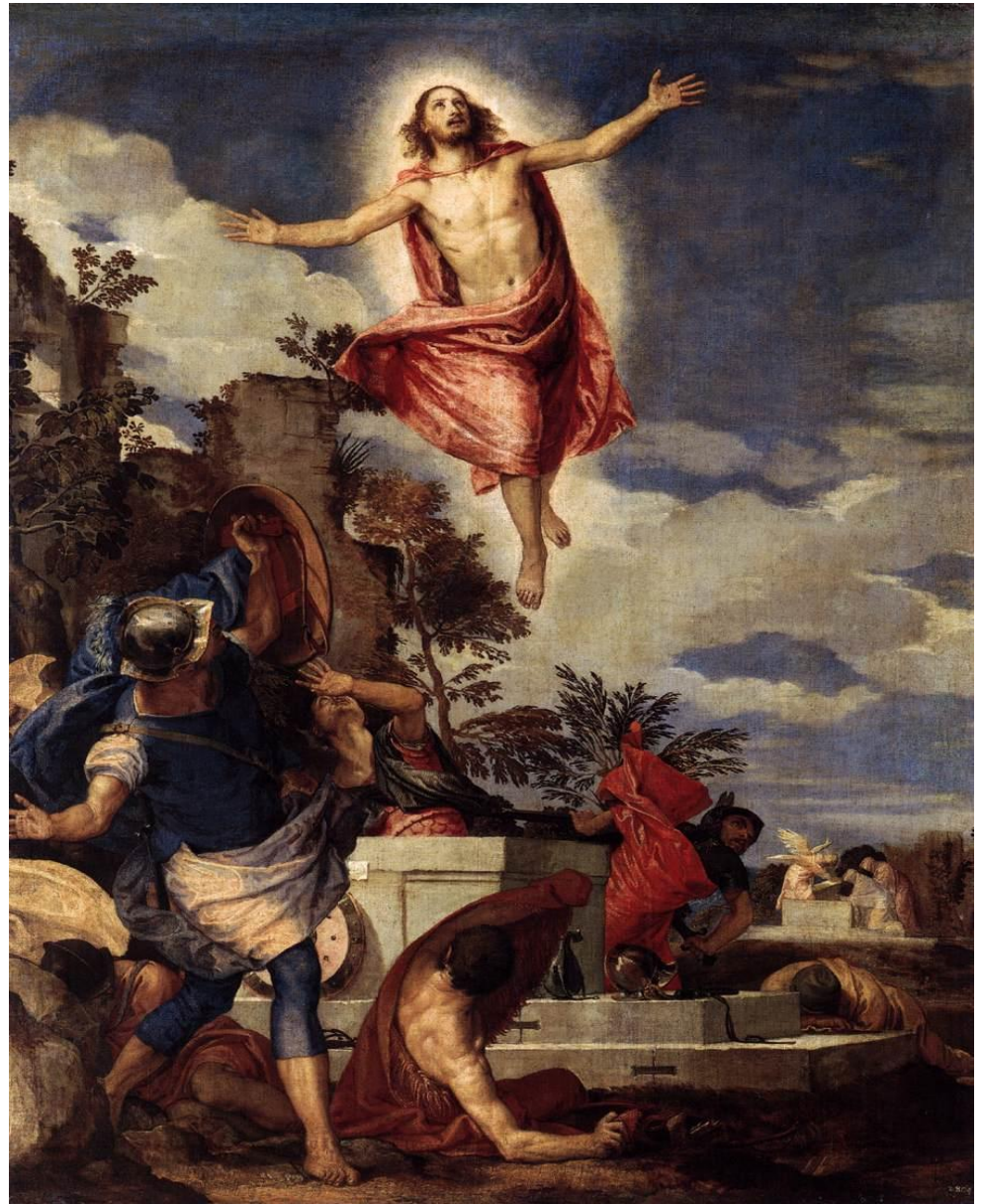


The preacher Andrew and his brother Simon Peter had been disciples back in Judaea of a Jew named Jesus.



Jesus had been a member of the Jewish religion, but his apostles started a new sect after Jesus died. The apostles told everyone about Jesus' miracles and teachings. They said that he'd been killed by the Romans and later rose from the dead.

His followers called Jesus the Son of God.



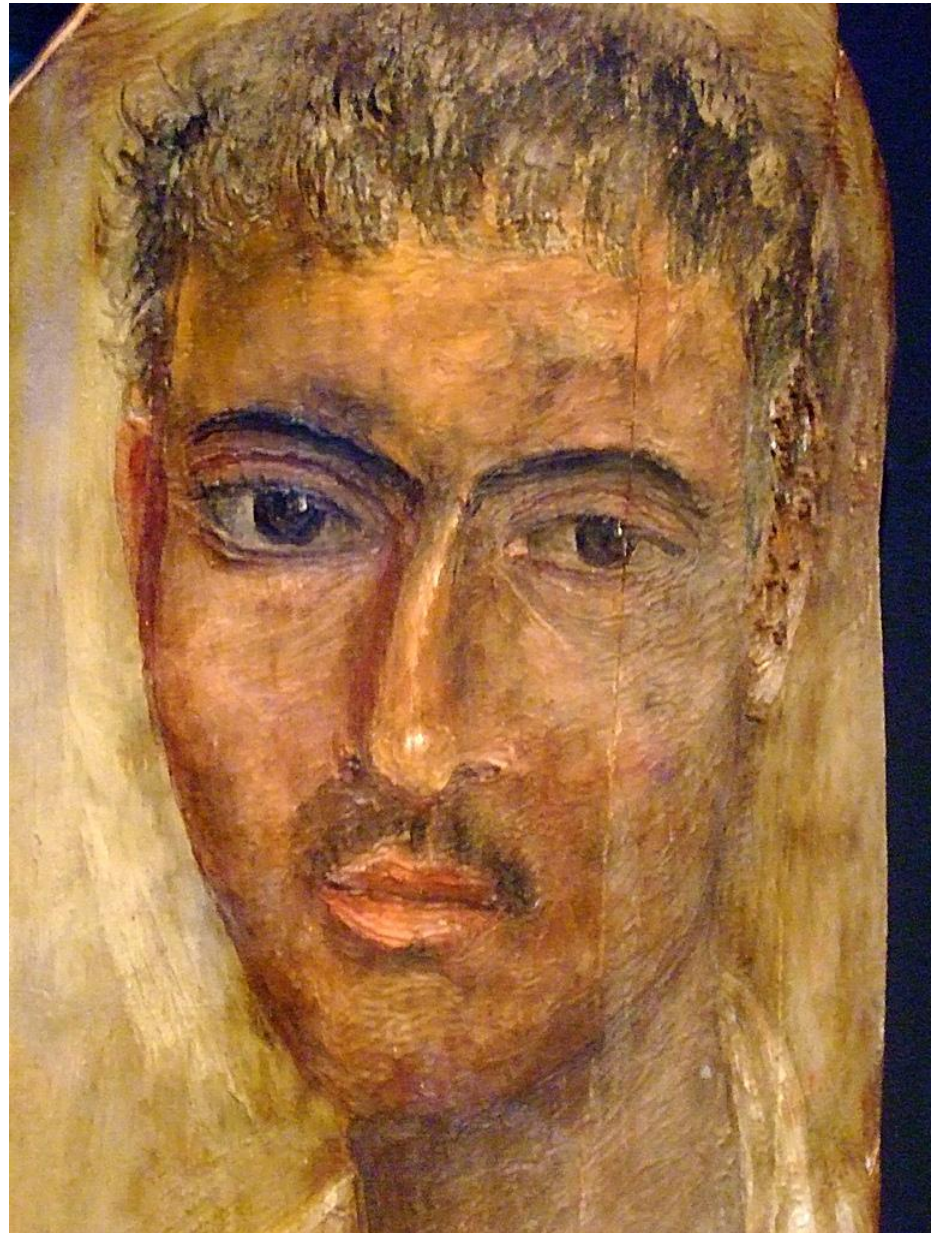
Jesus had promised that this present world would come to an end. He said there would be signs of a future Armageddon where the old order would be turned over for a new order of peace and joy. The signs of the end of the world were wars of kingdoms, earthquakes, and famines.

Natela was convinced. "Look around," she exclaimed. "Look at what's happening in Parthia and Armenia. Don't forget the Lydia and Dead Sea earthquakes. Or how about the rebellion and famine we are hearing about in Judaea now?"



Rufus was convinced, but his father Flavius was not.

"I don't know about this," he said doubtfully. "Let me ask around."



Flavius came back with this report. "My sources say that this man Jesus was just a trouble maker wanting to lead a rebellion. Our Roman government sentenced him to death."

He told Natela and Rufus to be leery of this new movement.



Still Rufus and his mother  
attended the *Christian meetings*.  
Rufus didn't know what to think.

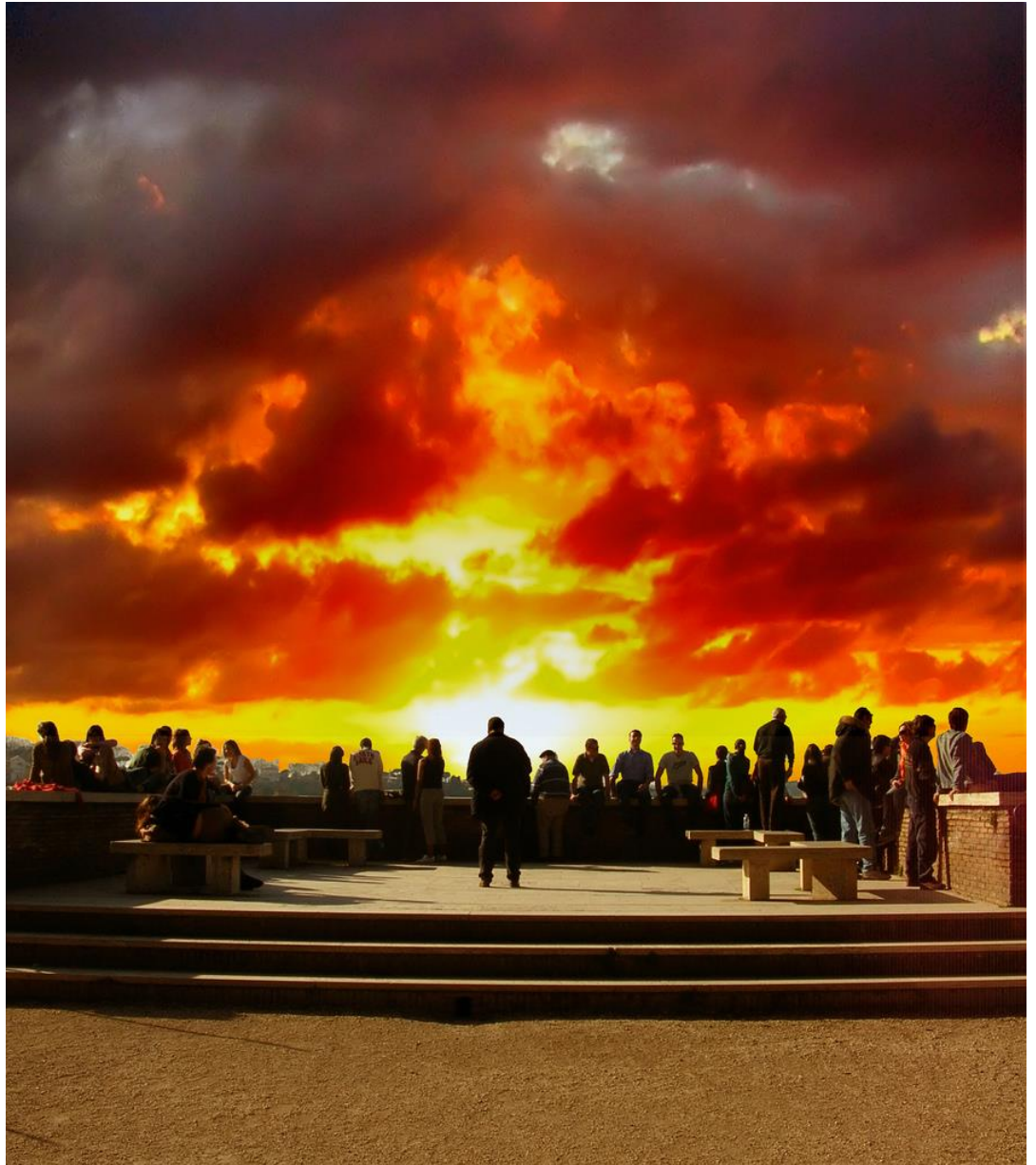


Then replacement soldiers arrived from Rome. One soldier came to Rufus' home. He had shocking news. He'd just witnessed the burning of the city of Rome.

Rufus' family was shocked.

"Who started this?" demanded Flavius.

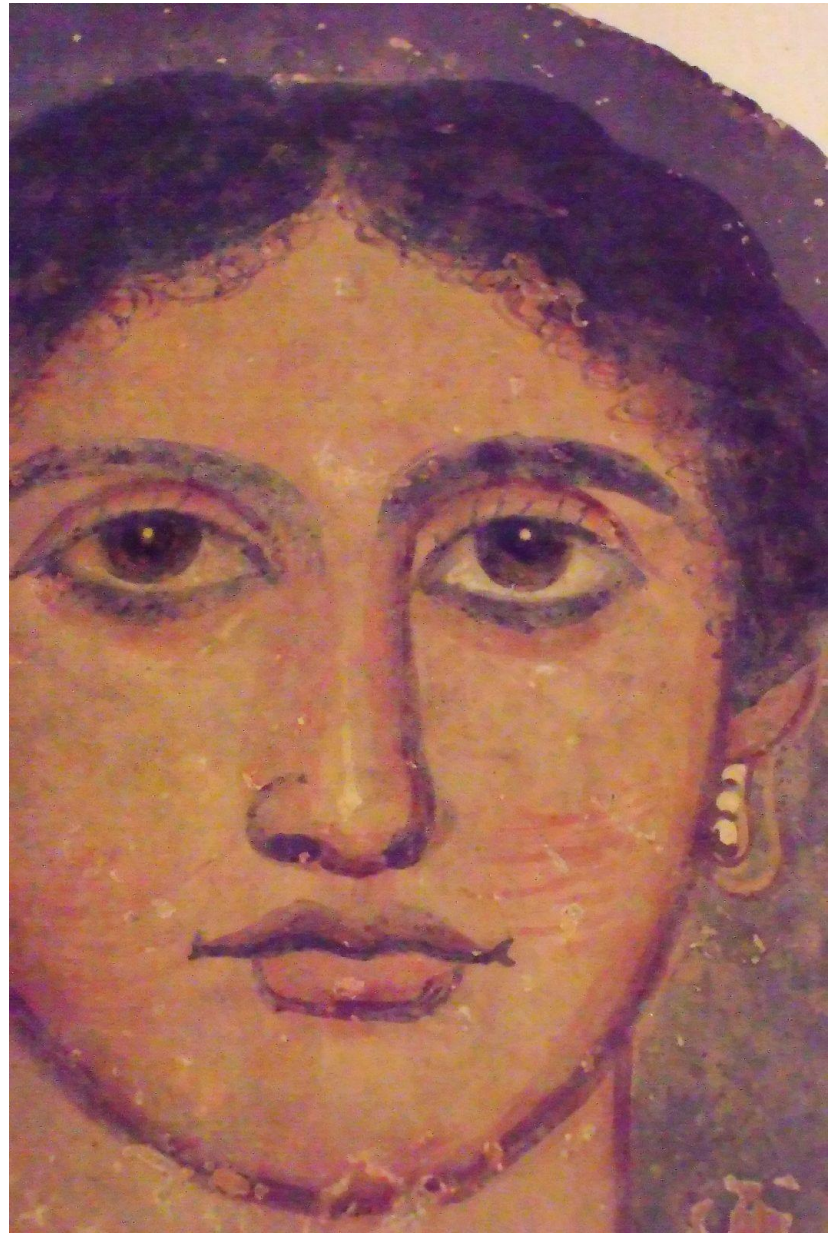
"Well, at first the people accused Nero himself of burning down the city," said the soldier. "But the emperor claimed it was the Christians. He even said that some had already confessed."





"Well that's it for us," insisted Natela.  
"We'll have nothing to do with those  
Christians anymore."

Rufus agreed.



So for years Rufus and his family avoided the Christians. Periodically they heard rumors that they were being persecuted back in Rome. They felt bad about that, but would not forgive them for burning their city to the ground.



As Rome was being rebuilt, Rufus stayed in his homeland waiting to turn eighteen.

He and the other sons of soldiers practiced their soldiery skills. One of their games was to make small chariots out of wood and harness them to goats. They'd then practice archery while speeding through the fields.



They'd pretend they were officers in the Praetorian Guard—the highest military unit that existed in the Roman Empire. These were the soldiers that guarded the emperor.

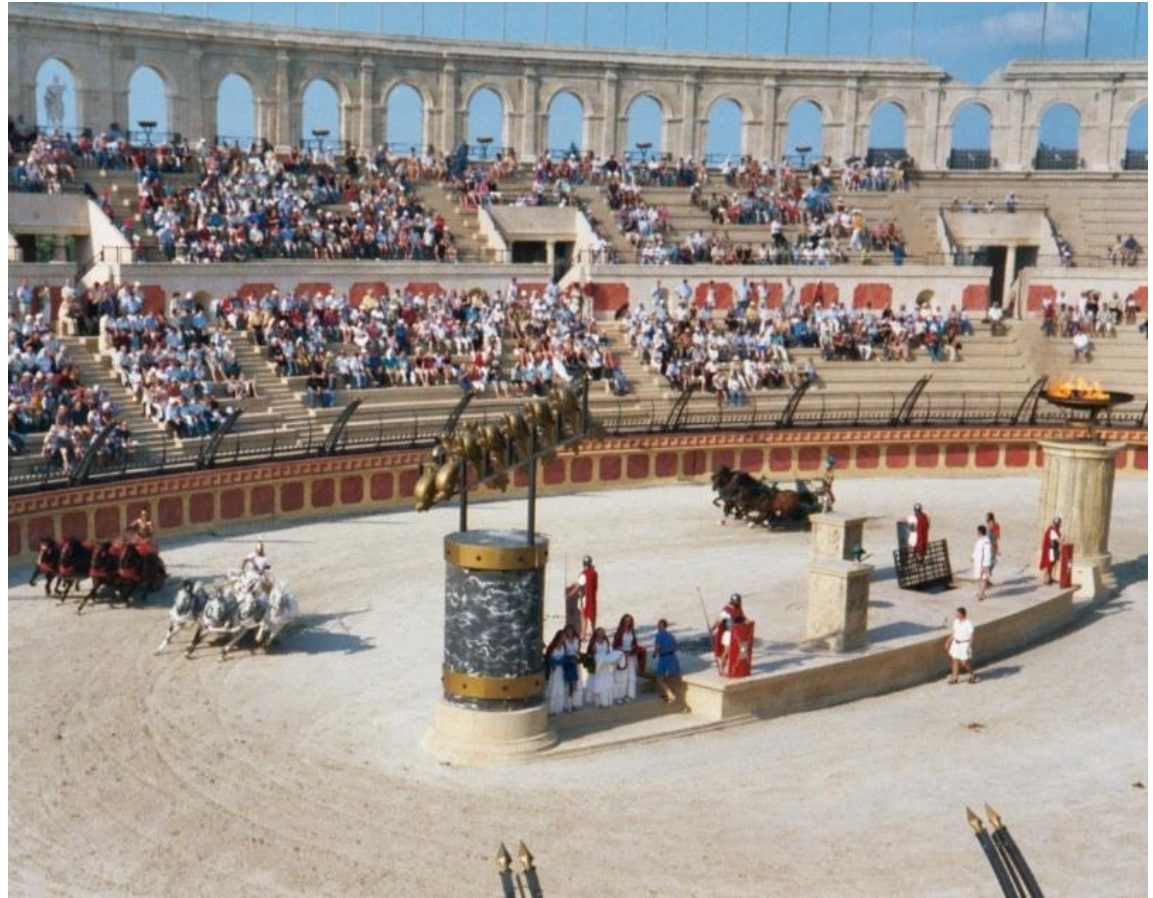


In three years Rufus entered the auxiliary army as a soldier and began his training. He was also assigned to his homeland and was even in the same unit as his older brother and father, which was very comforting.



Then a year later Rufus and his family began to hear alarming news from Rome. While the city was being rebuilt, the affairs of state were not going well.

The citizens of Rome were losing faith in their emperor. Nero, leaving Rome in charge of a freedman, went to Greece to flaunt his artistic abilities in the theatres. He then stayed in Greece for the Olympic Games and won the chariot race.



Back in Rome, persecutions and executions continued. There were food shortages and hardships everywhere. Nero was summoned back. Rather than fix the problems, he started to torture members of his government, blaming them for the problems.

By June of 68 AD no one backed Nero. The head of the Praetorian Guard convinced his troops to stop protecting him.



Alas, the Roman senate condemned the emperor to be flogged to death. Rather than face this fate, Nero committed suicide.





And what about all those Christians? Well, it turned out that Nero had simply made up the story about them burning down Rome.

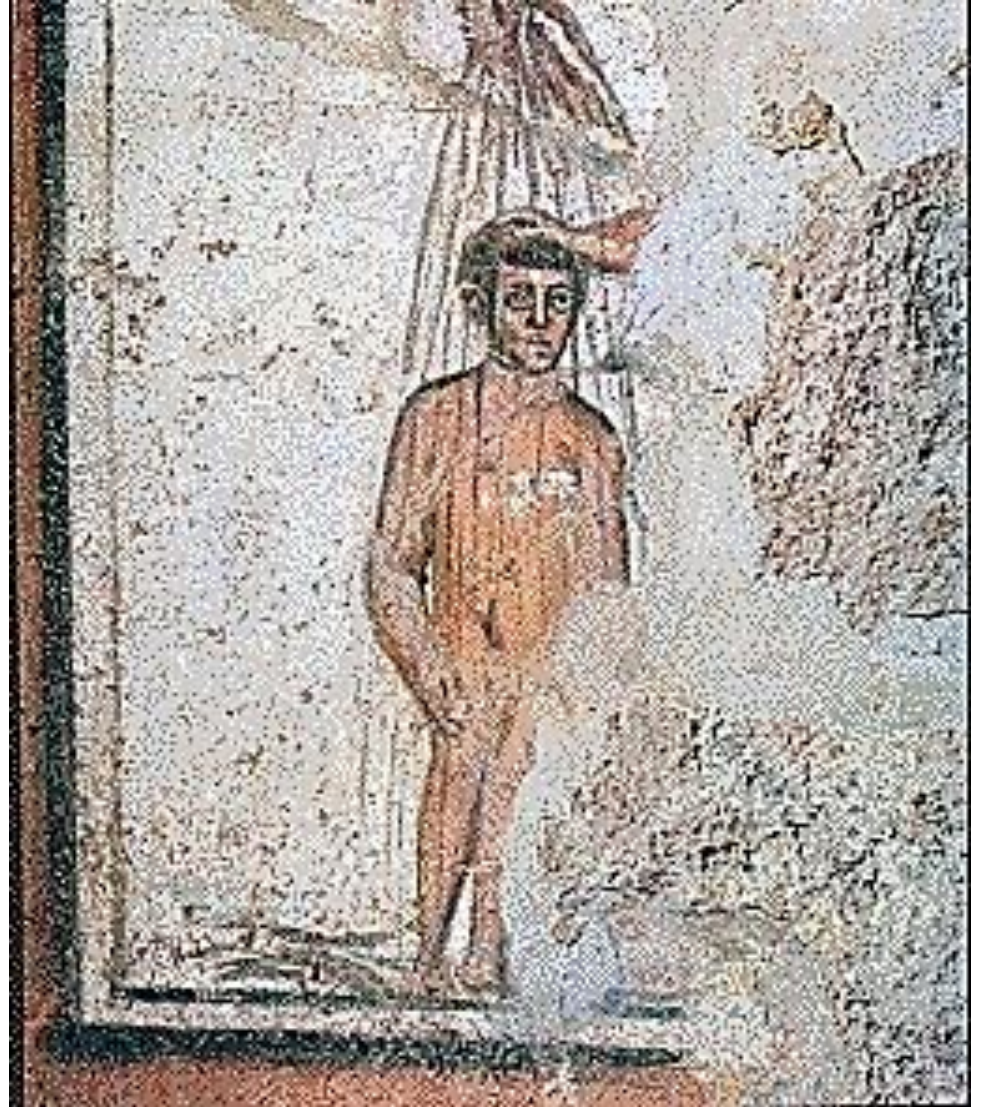
Rufus' family was shocked. It looked like their own emperor may have ordered the burning of their beloved city.



While Rufus, his brother, and father could not officially become Christians at that time because they were in the army, Natela and her family returned to the meetings and eventually were baptized as Christians.

Over the years the Christian Church grew in the Roman Empire and by the time of the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century, Christianity became the official religion of the empire.

However, Armageddon never came.



The end

Let's talk!!!