

Who was Rufus in the Bible?

The Bible mentions Rufus in two places, and we can assume they both speak of the same man (Mark 15:21; Romans 16:13). The first mention of Rufus is in the context of events on the day Jesus was crucified. Due to the horrific abuse Jesus had already undergone, He was unable to carry the heavy wooden cross the Roman soldiers laid upon His back. So the soldiers grabbed a passing man and made him carry the cross for Jesus. Mark 15:21 says, “A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.”

In order to understand why Simon of Cyrene was identified as being the father of Rufus, we need to remember that Mark most likely wrote his account of Jesus’ life while in Rome, for Roman Christians. He would have used names that were familiar to the church in Rome. They may not have known Simon of Cyrene, but they knew his son Rufus. We can connect Rufus with Rome because of Paul’s letter to the Romans many years later. In Romans 16:13, he wrote: “Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.”

Since these are the only two places in Scripture that mention the name Rufus, it is highly likely that they are speaking of the same person. From these two mentions, we gather that Rufus was a believer and a son of the man named Simon who was forced to carry the cross for Jesus. It would appear, based on what Mark and Paul write, that Rufus and his family became Christians after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

We can only imagine the great impact that carrying Jesus’ cross had on Simon of Cyrene. Did Jesus speak to Simon on that agonizing journey to Golgotha (Matthew 27:32-33)? Did Simon know whose cross he carried, and did he go home and tell his wife and sons what

had happened? As part of His divine plan, God chose a man named Simon to encounter Jesus only hours before He died in order to bring salvation to Simon's household (see Isaiah 46:11). We can only speculate about the details that followed, but we do know that, at some point, Rufus and his mother became Christians and were part of the church at Rome. Rufus and his brother, Alexander, were apparently well-known in the church, or Mark would not have mentioned them. And Rufus and his mother must have been quite active in ministry, based on Paul's specific greeting to them.