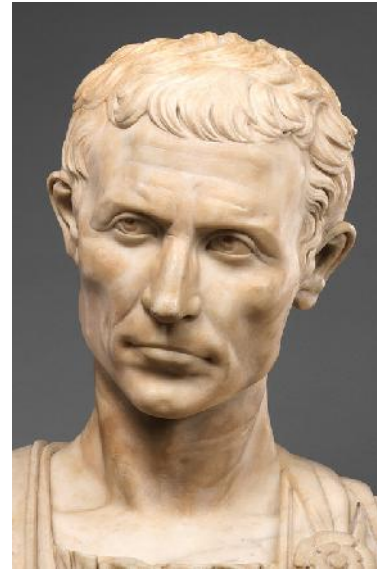


I am going to talk today about a really important man - JULIUS CAESAR (pronounced 'See - zah'). And then on Wednesday and Friday I will talk about what happened after Caesar died. It's a big story, but we'll get through it. Let's settle down and start with the life of Julius Caesar. You will probably have come across Caesar already if you have read any ASTERIX books, that I was talking about on Wednesday. If you have, you will know that Caesar was the ruler of ROME for a little while - just for a year, from 45 BC (remember, 'BC' means 45 years before the birth of Jesus) until his death in 44 BC. What made Caesar really important is that he completely changed the way ROME was ruled. Until Caesar came along, you couldn't say that any one person ruled Rome. Instead, the power to rule Rome was shared out among a number of different bodies and people. There was the SENATE, which was made up of powerful and well-known Romans, who made speeches about what Rome should do. There were the ASSEMBLIES, which were elected by the Roman people: they got to pass laws and appoint people to important positions. The most important of these positions were the CONSULS (pronounced 'con - sools'): there were two of those every year and they would make decisions as to what should happen in Rome if something needed to be done quickly. While the consuls were the closest thing to 'rulers' of Rome, they had to listen to the Senate and the Assemblies when deciding what to do, and they couldn't do much anyway because every year, the consuls were replaced by a new couple of consuls. And this was the way things had been in Rome for about 500 years, ever since the last Roman king TARQUIN (pronounced 'Tark - win') was thrown out of Rome for behaving really badly.



However, by the time Caesar was a young man, people were grumbling that the Roman system wasn't working very well - that important problems didn't get sorted out properly. There was a constant danger that one of Rome's generals - who were sent out into the rest of Europe to help expand and hold onto the ROMAN EMPIRE - would decide that enough was enough, that Rome needed the kind of firm leadership that he could provide, and take his army back to Rome and make himself into a new king of Rome. So there was a rule that no Roman army was allowed to cross into Italy, to prevent a Roman army being used to conquer Rome, and set up a new king: Roman armies were for fighting in France or Germany or Romania or Spain; they were not for fighting in Italy. There was a river in north Italy called THE RUBICON (pronounced 'Roob - ih - con') which marked the boundary across which a Roman army was not allowed to go.

Caesar was a hugely successful Roman general, who had brought France (or as it was then called 'GAUL' (pronounced 'Gall')) completely under Roman control and had started to expand the Roman Empire into Germany, and Britain as well. But then in 50 BC, he was told by the Senate to come back to Rome. At the time the Senate was under the control of another very successful Roman general, called POMPEY (pronounced 'Pomp - ee'). Caesar thought, 'If I go back to Rome, I will have to leave my army behind because of the rule against armies not crossing the Rubicon, and I will be all on my own. I'm really worried Pompey and my enemies will then try to get rid of me.' So Caesar returned to Rome - but he took his army with him. He took his army up to the Rubicon river and said that they would all camp there for the night. And overnight, Caesar wondered whether to invade Italy with his army. In the morning, he had made his decision. 'ALEA JACTA EST' (pronounced 'Al - ee - ah yak - ta

est') he told his friends: 'The die is cast' (did you know that if you are talking about the dice you use to play a game like Monopoly, if you talk about a single dice, that's called a 'die', not a dice? You learn something new every day with me). He ordered his army to cross the river - and ever since then, the phrase 'Crossing the Rubicon' has been used to describe someone taking a very important step that has very big consequences.

The news as to what Caesar had done swiftly got back to Rome, and everyone got very scared - the most successful general in Rome's history was marching on Rome with his army behind him. Even Pompey was scared, and he left Italy with some troops. Caesar followed him, and eventually their armies met in Greece and Caesar won the battle. Caesar returned to Rome, and was made, not king of Rome - even 500 years on, there were too many bad memories of what Rome was like when it had a king - but **DICTATOR** of Rome. As dictator, he made a number of changes to the way Rome was run - including introducing a whole new calendar (the **JULIAN CALENDAR**), which with 12 months is almost identical to the calendar we use nowadays. And, indeed, the month you were born in - **JULY** - is named after Julius Caesar. But Caesar was prevented from making many more changes to the way Rome was run because his enemies - who wanted to go back to the way things were and feared that Caesar would make himself a king of Rome - had decided that the only way of stopping Caesar was to kill him.

Caesar had been warned by a fortune teller, otherwise known as a **SOOTHSAYER** (there is an Asterix book about a bad soothsayer), on 15 February 44 BC that his life was in danger and that he should watch out for himself in the next 30 days. That 30 day period would run out on the **IDES OF MARCH** (where 'Ides' - pronounced 'Aye - dz' meant the middle of the month) on 15 March 44 BC. That day, Caesar was due to go to the Roman Senate to speak with the Senators there about his plans for how Rome should be ruled while he was away fighting another war. The night before, Caesar's wife **CALPURNIA** had bad dreams and told Caesar he shouldn't go to the Senate. But one of Caesar's closest friends, **DECIMUS** (pronounced 'Des - ee - moos') persuaded him that it was important to go to the Senate. Unknown to Caesar, Decimus was in on the plot and was one of 60 Roman senators who planned to stab Caesar to death. On the way to the Senate, Caesar is said to have seen the soothsayer who had told him to watch out in the next 30 days. Remembering the prophecy, Caesar said to him, 'Look - the Ides of March have come!' meaning 'Look - the 30 days are up and I'm still here!' The soothsayer responded, 'Yes, Caesar, they have come but not yet passed' meaning 'Yes - it's the 30th day, but it's not over yet.'



Caesar then entered the Senate, where he was surrounded by the Senators who planned to kill him, and he was stabbed to death with the knives that they had smuggled into the Senate with them. Caesar's deputy MARK ANTONY had been warned about the plot to kill Caesar but didn't manage to get to the Senate in time to warn Caesar. As he got close, he heard shouting coming from the Senate and knew that he was too late - and ran away. But he would come back to make sure that Caesar's killers would pay for what they did. On Wednesday, we will take up the story of what happened next, and on Friday we will see how the very thing that Caesar's killers wanted to avoid happening ended up happening because they killed Caesar - not someone becoming king of Rome, but someone becoming EMPEROR OF ROME.