

# The Man Who Helped Jesus Carry His Cross

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Under the demands of the Law of Moses, all Jewish males were required to go to Jerusalem three times a year, for three specific feasts: Passover, The Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths (Duet. 16:16). It was in obedience to this instruction that a man named Simon (a Jewish name), from Cyrene in North Africa, made his way to Jerusalem for Passover. Little did Simon know that this was not going to be any ordinary Passover. His life was about to experience a dramatic change. Life is often like that. Events happen unexpectedly, and our life is changed, for better or worse.

With Jews gathering from all over the world to celebrate the Passover, Jerusalem would swell in number. This particular Passover was quite unique. Earlier in the week, there was a big commotion as Jesus rode into town on a donkey (Matt. 21:1-11). Later, Jesus was in the temple casting out the money changers. No doubt there was much conversation that week about this Jesus, and debate about whether or not He was truly the long-awaited Messiah.

Toward the end of the week, there was more commotion. The religious leaders among the Jewish people had arrested Jesus and were seeking to have Him put to death. A crowd had assembled before the Roman Governor, Pilate.

So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"

Matthew 27:17

It is unlikely that Simon was among the crowd assembled, since he is later said to be coming in from the country. However, if he was present, he too might have shouted for Jesus to be crucified.

When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves." And all the people said, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!" Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

Matthew 27:24-26

On the way to the place where Jesus would be crucified, crowds lined the streets. Among the crowd lining the streets that day, was Simon from Cyrene. Out of all the Jewish people, from all over the world, Simon suddenly found himself pressed into service by a Roman soldier.

They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross.

Mark 15:21

That Simon was pressed into service tells us this was nothing he volunteered to do. Luke tells us he was *seized* into service (Luke 23:26). Mark's Gospel adds to Simon's chance selection, noting he was just passing by. Simon now found himself a part of the crucifixion procession. This was a task that would place him at Golgotha to witness the cross for himself.

Unlike the renderings of artists depicting Jesus carrying the whole cross, history would suggest that for a Roman crucifixion, the victim would only be carrying the wooden horizontal portion of the cross. This would later be joined to the vertical or upright member of the cross. However, though much lighter than a full cross, the beating Jesus received from the soldiers was apparently so severe, He could not bear the weight of the cross beam. Luke tells us Simon carried the cross behind Jesus (Luke 23:26).

All three Synoptic Gospels record the compelling of Simon to help bear the cross for Jesus, but whatever happened to him? Did he later become a believer in Jesus? While we cannot be absolutely certain, there are some interesting clues in Scripture that suggest the *possibility* that Simon did in fact come to faith in Jesus.

Mark identifies Simon as the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21). Apparently, these were individuals known to his audience. It has long been believed that Mark's Gospel was written for the church in Rome. Interestingly, in Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes, "Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine" (Romans 16:13). Is this the same Rufus who was one of the sons of Simon? The mother of Rufus (possibly Simon's wife), was seemingly quite a help to Paul. For some reason, no mention of Simon is given here. Had he at this point departed from this life? These are interesting questions that lack a firm answer.

Another place where we find Simon as a possible member of the Lord's church is in the book of Acts. Luke records a number of men who were prophets and teachers in Antioch, along with Paul and Barnabas. Among these men were, "Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene" (Acts 13:1). Simeon is another form of Simon (cf. Acts 15:14). The question is whether Luke was meaning to say that both Simeon and Lucius were from Cyrene.

The fact that Matthew, Mark, and Luke knew his name, and in the case of Mark, his family, might itself be a clue as to Simon later becoming a Christian. At any rate, it was certainly a day unlike any other day for Simon: The day he helped Jesus by carrying His cross.

As Christians, we are to take up our cross daily (Luke 9:23). Praise the Lord for those brethren who are *self-compelled* to help us during life's difficult times, when the weight becomes too much to bear alone.