

## **SIMON OF CYRENE**

The synoptic gospels give the account of Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross of Jesus to Golgotha (Calvary) (**Matt.27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26**).

John's gospel doesn't give the account but does mention that Jesus began by carrying His cross: "They took Jesus therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of the Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha." (John 19:17)

The synoptic gospels tell us that Simon of Cyrene was "coming out from the country" when the Roman soldiers "pressed into service (angareuo) a passer-by." (Mark 15:21)

The Greek word, angareuo, has a Persian background. It refers to a courier with the authority to press people or things into service to expedite a mission such as the mail. The English word, angary (compulsory public service), is derived from it. This word was used by Jesus in Matt.5:41 "And whoever shall force (angareuo) you to go one mile, go with him two."

**This Easter special will study SIX aspects of Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross of Jesus to Golgotha.**

### **1. Simon was a dispersed Jew from Cyrene of Libyria in North Africa.**

The name, Simon, is derived from the Hebrew word (shama / hear / Deut.4:1 / Hear, O Israel).

Cyrene was a Greek colony settled by Dorian speaking people. It was located about 10 miles from the Mediterranean Sea. It was wealthy from commerce and trade.

During the reign of Ptolemy Soter (323-285BC), as many as 100,000 Jews were dispersed there. Cyrene was later willed to Rome (96BC) for about 500 years. A famous Cyrenian mathematician, Eratosthenes, discovered how to determine the size of the earth and how to identify prime numbers (History of Ancient World, pg.269).

### **2. Simon was in Israel to celebrate the Passover like so many other orthodox Jews.**

He was heading from his lodging in the country into Jerusalem because it was early morning of the day of preparation (14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan) for the 8-day festival of Passover-Unleavened Bread – "Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour." (John 19:14) [6 AM]

**Later that same day:** "The Jews therefore, because it was the day of preparation (14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan), so that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath / 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan or first day of Unleavened Bread / was a high Sabbath), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away." (John 19:31)

- Simon might have thought, "what does this cross have to do with the Passover other than a big distraction for me?" But God was at work to change his life in ways he could never imagine (Acts 26:9-18) [Saul of Tarsus].

### 3. The Cyrenians were members of the Synagogue of Freedmen in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-15).

- This was the synagogue for the Hellenistic Jews and those dispersed who returned on visits and national holidays.
- This synagogue rose against Stephen (Acts 6-7). This would have the synagogue of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 6:58).
- This was also the synagogue of a fellow African mentioned in Acts 8 as the Ethiopian official of Queen Candace.

### 4. Most scholars believe that Simon of Cyrene was saved as a result of his Passover experience with the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Simon of Cyrene carried the message of the cross of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem to Africa as an ambassador of Christ (2 Cor.5:18-21). Later his family was prominent in missionary evangelism – “Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.” (Rom.16:13) “And 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)

Paul may have known Simon of Cyrene and his wife from their days in the Synagogue of the Freedmen.

Church historians believe that Simon of Cyrene was martyred in North Africa.

### 5. Cyrenians were early converts to Christianity and became actively involved missionary evangelism.

They were present at Pentecost when Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-13) – “Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men, from every nation under heaven.” (Acts 2:5) “And the districts of Libya around Cyrene.” (Acts 2:10) [1 of 15 different languages]

They were part of planting the Church of Antioch (Acts 11:19-26) – “But there were some of them, men of Cyrus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.” (11:20)

This Antioch church became an evangelistic training center for worldwide ministry (Acts 13:1-3).

### 6. During His earthly ministry, Jesus had taught His followers that discipleship involved carrying a cross.

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny (arneomai / a.m.impv) himself and take up (airo / a.a.impv) his cross daily and follow (apoloutheo / p.a.impv) Me.” (Luke 9:23).

Yet none of them got the message and none were present for the opportunity to be **pressed into the service** of carrying the cross for Christ – “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:27)

“For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” (Phil.1:29; 2:17-18, 29-30; 3:8-10)

Jesus teaches us that the bearing the cross comes before wearing the crown – “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb.12:2)

“But may it never be that I should boast **except in the cross** of our Lord Jesus Christ through whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.” (Gal.6:14)