

archaeologists came to the conclusion that this was the box and burial chamber of Alexander the son of Simon of Cyrene, who is mentioned in the gospels records. He is buried in Jerusalem. This is probably why he is not mentioned in Romans 16.

Let us consider the significance of this. We have a son in Jerusalem because he died there, and he was a member of the Jerusalem ecclesia. So when Mark writes his gospel and refers to Alexander, they would all know that he was a member of the Jerusalem ecclesia who eventually died there. We have the father (Simon) who we know was in Antioch, the third great city of the Roman world, and the first truly Gentile ecclesia, and that man was a prophet of the gospel, champion of the cross, preaching Christ. Perhaps Simon died in Antioch? There is no mention of him in Romans 16, but we do have the name of the other son and a mother, who were not only both in Rome but were members of the ecclesia there, but Rome is the very capital of the empire. Now do you remember what Jesus said, in Matthew 24, "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall seduce many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall grow cold. And this gospel of the kingdom, shall be preached in the whole world, for a testimony to all nations..." (Mat 24: 11-14).

This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all of the Roman world and here in this one family of Simon of Cyrene is the story of that triumph. A son in Jerusalem, a father in Antioch, a son and a mother in Rome, and through one man and his immediate family members, the message of the cross was spread from Jerusalem to Rome, in marvelous fulfillment of the Lord's words in Matthew 24, the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, and this one family did all this just by themselves. They became champions of the cross; who could have known how that story would unfold on the day that Simon was chosen in Jerusalem?

Think of the providence of God in all these matters. In Gen. 9: 25-27, there is a prophecy given by Noah at the time of his death. And he said, cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan will be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

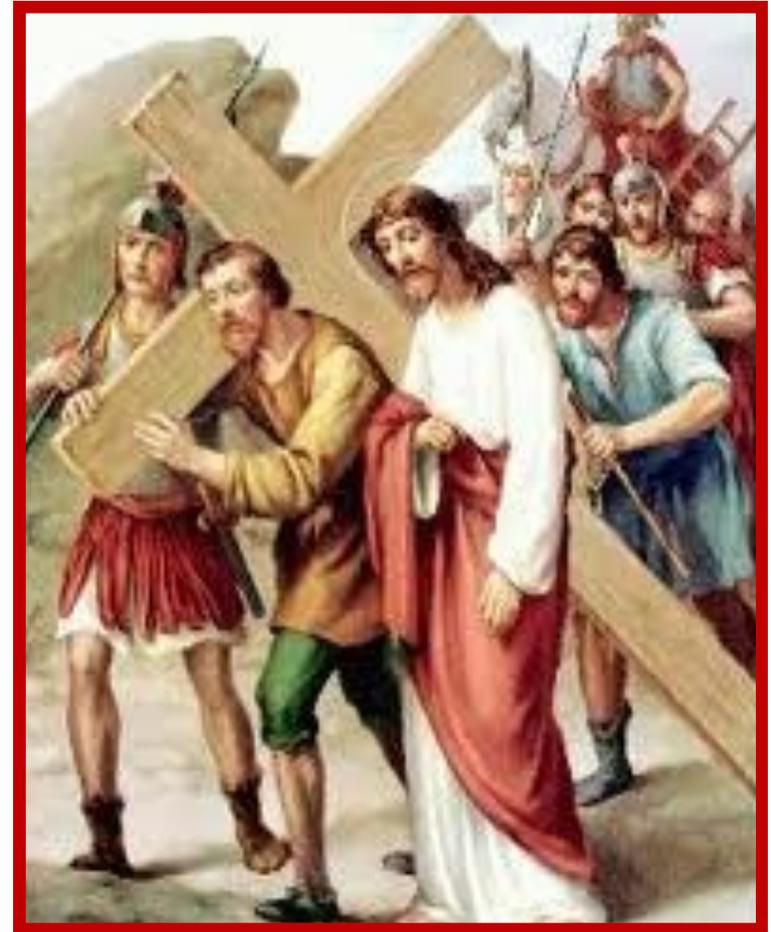
It was in the providence of God that day that a centurion chose Simon out of all the people in Jerusalem. How could he have known that his selection would bring the prophecy of Noah into sharp focus on Golgotha? How could the centurion know that it was to be in history, on that one day, in that one place, a man of Shem-Jesus of Nazareth, a man of Ham-Simon of Cyrene and a man of Japheth-the Roman centurion. The redemption for the man of Japheth lay in his readiness to accept that access to God lay in his willingness to become the servant and burden bearer to that man of Shem. The destiny of Golgotha was written in those prophecies so many years before. In the providence of God, the centurion chose the one man in the crowd that would bring it all together.

\*(excerpted from: thebiblestudy.co.uk)



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## Simon of Cyrene



**... Simon would never forget the moment of contact  
with the Lord on Golgotha.  
He was transformed by his contact  
with the Suffering Servant...**

## Simon of Cyrene Carries Jesus' Cross

"And they forced one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross." (Mark 15: 21)

\*It is interesting to note that in the gospel account of John 19, the journey of Jesus to Golgotha, doesn't mention Simon of Cyrene. The reason for this is noted in verse 16: Then therefore he delivered him to be crucified. And they took Jesus and led him away. And he bearing his own cross, went forth to the place called Calvary, but in Hebrew Golgotha. The reason why John omits reference to Simon is because his purpose is to draw attention to a different aspect of the Lord. The answer maybe in John 19: 17, "and he bearing his cross", would refer to the man mentioned in Genesis 22: 6, and Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went forth together. Is Jesus a parallel to Isaac who bore the wood of his own sacrifice upon his back? United with his father in that work of sacrifice, twice in Genesis it says, "and so they went both of them". Is this the man in John's gospel, a man who is united with his father and he who bears the wood of his own sacrifice, as another Isaac about to be offered.

Once we come to Matthew's gospel account, do we hear of Simon of Cyrene and that they forced him to bear Jesus' cross. And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha... (Mat 27: 31-33). Note the words "as they came out", because the law of Moses forbade judicial execution within the city walls. Num. 15: 35, said that it had to take place without the camp and so that's what they were doing here, leading Jesus to Golgotha without the camp.

Now we can reconcile John 19 and Mat. 27, because what we are being told is that when Jesus, came to the gate of the city, as they were going out of the city wall where the crucifixion would take place, staggered under the weight as His strength failed Him. In Mat. 27: 32, "as they came out they found a man and forced him..." Similar word are used in Mat. 5: 41, "If a man was forced to go one mile, they should go two". This is referring to the power of the Romans who were authorized to order any Jew to perform some activity in the service of Caesar. The Latin word for forced or "compel" comes from the Persian and the literal meaning of the Persian word is to be "pressed into the service of a king"-and so Simon was! What Simon had not yet realized, is that the king into whose service he had been pressed this day was not the king of Rome, but the king of Israel. Simon bearing the cross that day would find the king he would serve for the rest of his life and this day would change Simon, singled out by the providence of God for an action, that he would not have wanted to have to perform at all. Imagine the shame he felt having to walk behind a condemned man, bearing the burden of the condemned man (the cross), while all the taunts of the jeering multitude rained down, not just on Jesus, but upon Simon himself, obliged to carry the cross, while the Romans

made the journey as long as possible winding through as many streets and places as they could so all might see and fear the power of the Roman authority.

Something providential happened in Simon's life that day. In Mark 15: 20-24, tells us that Simon was coming out of the countryside into the city of Jerusalem, but the Lord was traveling out of the city to a place without the camp and these two men were travelling in opposite directions on that day. This experience of meeting the Lord would utterly change his life and to walk in the opposite direction, i.e., to follow in the footsteps of Christ himself.

Simon would never forget the moment of contact with the Lord on Golgotha. He was transformed by his contact with the suffering servant. Mark's mentioning that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus suggests that the family had come into the faith and that this family was a family of believers.

In Romans 16: 13, Paul mentions to salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord and his mother...This is the only other place that the word Rufus is mentioned; was the family chosen by the Lord? By dramatic circumstances it appears that the entire family had come into contact with the gospel. The time at which the apostle wrote Romans, he had never been to Rome. How did Paul know about Rufus and his mother who were in Rome? One explanation could be that Paul met the family and spent time with them in Antioch where he met Simon who was called Niger, a prophet, and Saul was a teacher at the same time in the Antioch ecclesia. Alexander is not mentioned, but in 1941, in the city of Jerusalem, a professor called Nahman Avigad who was famous for his association with the Dead Sea Scrolls, and who was the father of Yigael Yadin, probably Israel's most famous archaeologist, while excavating an ancient tomb in the Kindron Valley outside of Jerusalem, that dated to the first century A.D. They found a number of ossuaries and a stone box, inside were the bones of a person. It was a private family burial tomb and 12 names were found on the particular ossuaries in the tomb. All inscriptions were in Greek, except for one which was in Hebrew, but the most interesting thing is that most of the Greek names that were found in the tomb were not common in Palestine, but with the Jewish community in Cyrenaica on the coast of Africa where Cyrene was. On one of the sides of the box were the words, "Alexandros Simenos" which means "Alexander son of Simon" and on the lid of the box was a further inscription that said "Alexander Querinay" and the inscription Querinay is regarded as short for "Cyrenaica". So rare is the name Alexander in Jewish literature that the