

SIMON THE ZEALOT



Christ to the World Ministries

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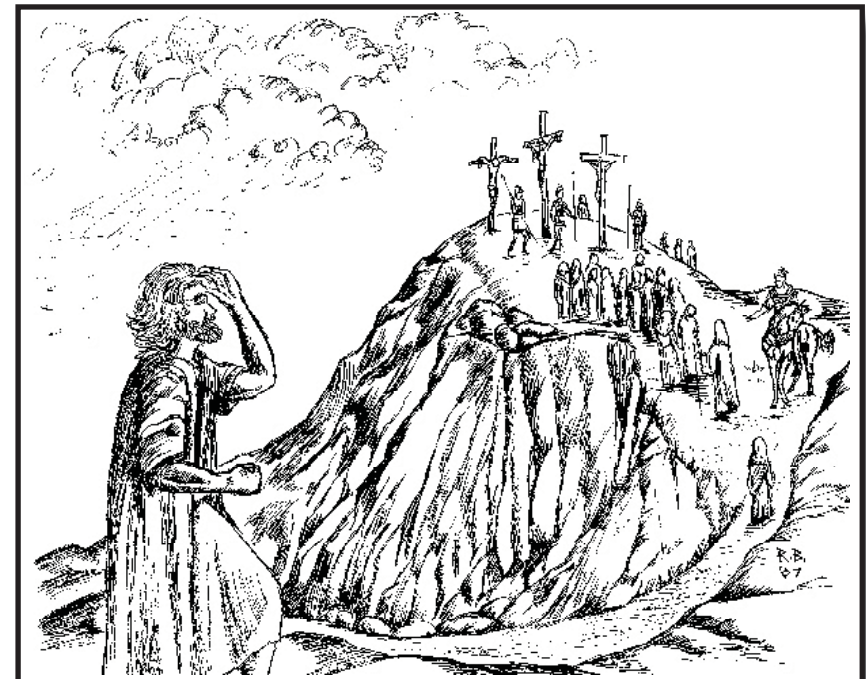
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CHRIST TO THE WORLD MINISTRIES

Simon the Zealot

Read Luke 6:12-16 and Acts 1:12-14 in your Bible.

We do not know much about Jesus' disciples, except for the main ones: Peter, James, and John. But we have some hints about the others. Matthew was a tax collector. Judas was a man from the Judean town of Kerioth. Another was Simon the Zealot.

The designation Zealot could have been a nickname, referring to Simon's fiery nature. But it more likely showed him to be a member of the Zealot party in Palestine. There were a number of religious/political parties at that time.

Influential Parties in Palestine

Palestine was an occupied country ruled outright by the Roman Empire. All the power and authority in Jesus' homeland came from Rome. Still there were groups who tried to have influence in the government and over the people.

The *Pharisees* were the longest-standing party. They traced their beginnings to the period just after Ezra and Nehemiah at the close of the Old Testament. They became known for their zealous commitment to preserve the religious tradition of the Jews in exact interpretation of the teachings of the law of Moses. The understanding of the law's meaning developed over time and the Pharisees sought to apply every part of it to daily life. This took deep religious devotion, and they looked with scorn on other Jews who did not share their passionate commitment to keeping the Law.

The *Sadducees* were the aristocrats of Jewish society. They were religious conservatives, also dedicated to keeping the law of Moses. However, they denied the existence of angels and demons, and did not believe in life after death. Because they controlled the upper levels of the priests in the temple, they were the link between the Jewish people and the Roman authorities. This enabled them to maintain their wealth and power over the Jewish people.

The *Herodians* were a sort of political party. They favored the rule of the Herods, who were kings of small parts of Palestine. These were puppet kings, put in place by the Roman emperors. They had very limited powers. Those who favored them also favored Roman rule.

The *Essenes* were an isolated religious group who mostly lived apart from Jewish society. They also kept the law of Moses. But they had nothing to do with politics or everyday life in Palestine, nor the temple in Jerusalem. They lived in the desert near the Dead Sea and looked for the coming of a triumphant Messiah.

The *Zealots* were started by a man named Judas. He led an uprising against the Roman government in A.D. 6, while Jesus was still a child. This group opposed the Romans due to Rome's intolerance of their way of life. Fiercely devoted to liberty, the Zealots held that God was their only Ruler. The revolution started by Judas was brutally put down. But his movement continued. Although these men operated mostly in the shadows, they kept cropping up as small revolutionary movements.

Why Did Jesus Select Simon?

Other than the designation of Zealot, the Bible is silent about this disciple. He must have felt strongly enough about the cause of the Zealots to be identified with them. Not many were willing to carry that name. The Roman armies were always on the alert watching for men who might try to start a revolution.

What did Jesus see in Simon? He must have seen his eagerness, his zeal, for the law of God. Here was a person whose love for God could be directed. He could grow to see the kingdom of God as far beyond an earthly empire. So Jesus chose him to be one of the Twelve.

It might not have been easy for Jesus to work with Simon. This man, like the others in Jesus' close band of twelve, very likely had strong opinions about the kingdom of God. We don't have any quotes from him. So we have to imagine. We have quotes from some of Jesus' disciples asking what kind of power they might have in Jesus' kingdom. Maybe Simon dreamed of being Jesus' head general in the kingdom battle against the Roman Empire!

Jesus was surely patient with Simon, as he was with the rest of his disciples. He did not rebuke Simon for any dreams of greatness. Instead he tried to direct this disciple toward the true understanding of the kingdom of God.

How did Simon grow? He stayed with Jesus clear to the terrible end. Jesus was crucified, like many of Simon's own party twenty-five years earlier. Simon must have known that his dream of God's earthly kingdom would not come true. But he was present after the resurrection. We read in Acts 1:13 that he was part of the band of disciples waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. He was still a zealot, but his passion was for his Lord, Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

What kinds of dreams do you have? Do you wish your life were different from the way it is now? Jesus offers you the opportunity to remake your life. He can change your life. Jesus can forgive your sin. As you follow him, he will show you the way to live in his kingdom. He will give you a larger life than you ever dreamed of.

Pray this prayer: *“Dear God, I know that I'm a sinner. I believe that Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead and is alive today. I now turn from my sins. I am placing my faith and trust in Jesus alone to be my Savior and to forgive me. I receive Jesus into my life as my Savior and Lord. From this day forward, I will follow Jesus. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for loving me and for coming into my life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.”*

Welcome into God's family! Share with others that you have received Christ as your Savior and Lord. Ask for baptism in a local church as a public expression of your faith. If there is no church near you, start a church by gathering a group of persons in your home and worship together on a regular basis. Read your Bible and pray each day. Tell others what Christ has done for you and what he can do for them.