

The Apostle Simon the Zealot

May 10, 2021
Revision A

Gospel: Matthew 13:54-58
Epistle: 1 Corinthians 4:9-16

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Simon as a Member of the Zealot Party

Simon the Zealot (Luke 6:15, Acts 1:13) is also called Simon the “Canaanite” (Matthew 10:4, Mark 3:18). The word translated “Canaanite” is of Hebrew origin and means “zealot”. Thus, both names for Simon mean the same thing; the first simply refers to his political background, the second was transliterated from Hebrew to Greek.

At that time, there was a political party called “The Zealots”, with which Simon seems to have been associated, and which was founded by Judas of Galilee in c. 6 BC (Acts 5:37). The Zealots held¹ that paying taxes to the Roman Empire was treason against God. They took their name from the zeal shown by the Maccabees over a hundred years earlier in repelling the foreign invaders. The Zealots were involved in the revolt that brought about the destruction of Jerusalem² in c. 70 AD, and they were still active at the time of the final rebellion of Bar Kochba in 135 AD.

The Zealots were the most fanatical political party in 1st century Judea, and their motto could be summarized, “Better dead than Roman”. Circumcision to the Zealots was national Jewish identity, since it was a covenant with God given to Abraham (Genesis 17:1-14). For Paul (and James, the Bishop of Jerusalem) to say that the Gentiles didn't need to be circumcised, was heresy to the Zealots. We note that everywhere Paul went, even though he carried with him a letter from James, the Bishop of Jerusalem, saying that the Gentiles didn't need to be circumcised, he was opposed very strongly by the Jewish Zealots. This zeal of the Jewish Zealots came to a head during the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, beginning about 66 AD. By then, the Zealots ruled Jerusalem, and anyone who opposed them was quietly assassinated, thus creating a reign of terror in the City. Jerome compared the “jealous anger” of Simon the Zealot to the “severity” of Peter in putting to death Ananias and Sapphira³. This is the background that Simon came from, and it undoubtedly influenced Simon's zeal for Christ.

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¹ Ralph Gower, The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, Moody Press, Chicago, 1987.

² Josephus, Wars of the Jews, IV, v-vi.

³ Jerome, Letter to Riparius, CIX, 3.

Simon's Relationship to Jesus

According to tradition, Simon the Zealot was born in Cana of Galilee, just like Nathanael (John 21:2), and was the bridegroom at the wedding feast at Cana⁴. Mary's prominence at his wedding suggests that they may have been distantly related. Also invited to the wedding feast were Jesus and His disciples (John 2:2). Jesus had not called all of His disciples prior to this event, but He had called James and John, Andrew and Peter (John 1:40-42), Philip and Nathanael (John 1:43-51). Jude and James the son of Alphaeus may have been there also, since they were related. Matthew the son of Alphaeus was probably not present, since he was an outcast, being a tax collector (Matthew 9:9). Those that had been called as disciples were called just before Passover of 27 AD (John 2:13), but they had not left their fishing business to become full time Apostles yet. They would not do that until later that same year (Luke 5:1-11) after Jesus began baptizing many disciples (John 4:1-2).

Hippolytus identifies⁵ Simon the Zealot as the same person as Simeon, Jesus' cousin and the son of Joseph's brother Clopas (or Alphaeus). See Figure 1. This is probably not the case since Simeon and Simon were martyred in different places. But Hippolytus' account does agree with early accounts that link Jesus and Simon as blood relatives.

Numbered among the Twelve were five of the Jesus' direct relatives: James and John the sons of Zebedee (second cousins), James and Matthew the sons of Alphaeus (first cousins), and Jude (stepbrother). See Figure 1 for details of the relationship. Of these, James and John the sons of Zebedee had been called as disciples prior to the wedding feast at Cana, but the others hadn't.

Simon's Illumination at the Wedding Feast at Cana

Wedding Feasts in the 1st Century lasted for a week or two as a celebration of the marriage of the couple. In many cases, the bride and groom did not even know each other prior to the marriage, and their parents arranged the marriage. Thus it was important that the relatives of the two families take time during the feast to get together to discuss possible intra family business. The entire extended family of both bride and groom were there, representing many guests, and wine was consumed in large quantities.

However, midway through the feast, the wine ran out. Mary, Jesus' mother, mentioned this to Jesus expecting Him to do something about it. Jesus responded, "What is that to you or me? My hour is not yet come!" (John 2:4). Mary then spoke to the servants as if she had some authority in managing the affairs of the feast, "Whatever He says to you, do it!" In other words, He may ask you to do something strange, but I'm telling you to do it anyway because He knows what He's doing.

Jesus asked the servants to fill with water six stone water pots each holding 20 to 30 gallons. Then He asked them to draw some out and take it to the master of the feast, where the master of the feast was in charge of all the goings-on for the week-long wedding feast. When the master of the feast tasted the water that was made wine, he remarked to Simon, the bridegroom, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the *guests* have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!"

⁴ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, May 10.

⁵ Hippolytus, On the Twelve Apostles, 11.

Simon was aware of what supplies of wine he had on hand, and he knew that there was very little wine left, and what was left was the best he could afford. The sudden discovery of 120 to 180 gallons of really, really good wine for the guests came like a stroke of lightning into Simon's life. This event dwarfed even the most visionary of the political concepts that Simon and his compatriots discussed. Jesus had essentially created really good (expensive) wine out of nothing!

According to tradition, Simon was so impressed⁶ with Christ's miracle that he and his bride later agreed to live as brother and sister for the cause of the Gospel. Others of the Twelve did this also, to which Jesus alluded later. "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother *or wife* or children or lands (italics mine), for My Name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold, and inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:29). Simon and the rest of the Twelve voluntarily gave up the wealth and pleasures of this world for treasure in heaven (Matthew 19:21).

John Chrysostom stated⁷ that Jesus was not known at this time, and He had done no miracles. He was invited to the wedding feast as a relative of the groom only. If He had done miracles previously, He would not have needed John the Baptist to announce Him. He had done no miracles as a child and this was the first of His miracles.

"Jesus was invited to the marriage, and He came; for He looked not to His own honor, but to our benefit. He who disdained not to 'take upon Him the form of a servant' (Philippians 2:7), would much less disdain to be present at the marriage of servants; He who sat down 'with publicans and sinners' (Matthew 9:13), would much less refuse to sit down with those present at the marriage. Assuredly they who invited Him had not formed a proper judgment of Him, nor did they invite Him as some great one, but merely as an ordinary acquaintance; and this the Evangelist has hinted at, when he says, 'The mother of Jesus was there, and His brethren'. Just as they invited her and His brethren, they invited Jesus".

"And when they ran out of wine, His mother said to Him, 'They have no wine'" (John 2:3). Here it is worthwhile to inquire how it came into His mother's mind to imagine anything great of her Son; for He had as yet done no miracles, since the Evangelist said, 'This beginning of miracles Jesus did in Cana of Galilee'" (John 2:11).

"Now if any say that this is not a sufficient proof that it was the 'beginning of His miracles', for He may have done others elsewhere, we will make answer to him. The words of John (the Baptist); 'I myself did not know him; but for this I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel' (John 1:31). Now if He had wrought miracles in early age, the Israelites would not have needed another to declare Him. For He who by His miracles was so made known, not to those only in Judea, but also to those in Syria and beyond, did not need even these three years to manifest Himself (Matthew 4:24). For immediately His fame went abroad everywhere. In a short time He so shone forth by the multitude of His miracles, that His name was well known to all; He was much less likely to escape

⁶ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, May 10.

Isaac Lambertsen, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, pp. 229-230. This is a translation from the following:

The Lives of the Saints in the Russian Language, According to the Menology of St. Dimitri of Rostov, Moscow, Synodal Press, 1908, v. 9, (May) pp. 298-300.

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXI, 1.

notice so long if while a child He had wrought miracles. For what was done would have seemed stranger as done by a boy, and there would have been time for two or three times as many. But in fact He did nothing while He was a child, save only that one thing to which Luke has testified (Luke 2:46), that at the age of twelve years He sat hearing the doctors, and was thought admirable for His questioning”.

There is a story in one of the New Testament Apocryphal writings⁸ that states that Jesus performed miracles as a child. This is refuted by later Church Fathers like John Chrysostom for the above reasons. The story also states that Jesus played with Simon as a child. While we can put little confidence in some of the details of this document, it does indicate the possibility that there may have been some family ties between Jesus and Simon

Chrysostom went on to say⁹ that Mary had remembered all that she had pondered in her heart (Luke 2:19, 33). Prior to this, Jesus had lived as one of the many and she did not have confidence to say any such thing to Him. But now she had noted the witness of John the Baptist in the past few days (John 1:36), and now He had disciples of His own! Perhaps too she had some human feelings, like His brethren, when they said, “Show yourself to the world” (John 7:4). Not knowing how Jesus would work the miracle, Mary said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do it!” (John 2:5) This represented considerable insight on the part of the Virgin Mary.

Chrysostom noted¹⁰ that by using stone water pots that had been used for the Jewish rites of purification, all suspicion was removed from the possibility that wine had once been stored in these containers. Adding water to the dregs of a wine cask could create something that tastes like very weak wine. But this was definitely not the case here.

Chrysostom also noted¹¹ that this was not an assembly of drunken men that could not tell the difference between good wine and poor wine. It was not a guest, who noted that this was the good wine, but the master of the feast. “Those who are entrusted with the management of such banquets are the most sober, as having this one business, to dispose all things in order and regularity; and therefore the Lord called such a man’s sober senses to testify to what was done”. And the master of the feast then naturally called this to the attention of the bridegroom.

Glimpses of Simon During the First Year of the Church

In the first year of the Church, the Book of Acts describes several encounters between the Apostles and the religious leaders. And in all cases, either Peter or John are quoted as being the spokesmen for the Apostles. On Pentecost, Peter was described “standing with the Eleven” (Acts 2:14) in his message to the people who were confused by the events taking place. When Peter and John healed the lame man, the man held onto both Peter and John, but Peter was the one who spoke to the people about what had happened (Acts 3:1-12). When Peter and John were arrested for this, it was Peter who spoke in their defense (Acts 4:1-8). When the Twelve were arrested and put in prison, an angel let them out during the night. Summoned before the High Priest and the

⁸ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Savior”, 30, Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8

⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXI, 1-2; XXII, 1.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXI, 2.

¹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, XXII, 1.

Sanhedrin, the account reads that Peter *and the other Apostles answered* and said, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:17-29).

Few details are given in Acts regarding the exact accusations that were brought against the Apostles, or who of the Twelve answered these accusations. Pseudo Clement¹² records one example where Simon responded:

“And, behold, one of the disciples of John asserted that John was the Christ, and not Jesus, inasmuch as Jesus Himself declared that John was greater than all men and all prophets. ‘If, then,’ said he, ‘he was greater than all, he must be held to be greater than Moses, and greater than Jesus himself. And if he was the greatest of all, then must he be the Christ.’ To this Simon the Canaanite, answering, asserted that John was indeed greater than all the prophets, and all who are born of women, yet that he is not greater than the Son of Man. Accordingly Jesus is also the Christ, whereas John is only a prophet. And there is as much difference between him and Jesus, as between the forerunner and Him whose forerunner he is; or as between Him who gives the Law, and him who keeps the Law. Having made these and similar statements, the Canaanite also was silent. After him Matthias, who was substituted as an apostle in the place of Judas, began to exhort the people that they should not regard Jesus with hatred, nor speak evil of Him. For it were far more proper, even for one who might be in ignorance or in doubt concerning Jesus, to love than to hate Him. For God has affixed a reward to love, a penalty to hatred. ‘For the very fact,’ said he, ‘that He assumed a Jewish body, and was born among the Jews, how has not this incited us all to love Him?’ When he had spoken this, and more to the same effect, he stopped.

Simon’s Missionary Journeys

We do not have many details of Simon’s missionary journeys, but there are accounts that he traveled very widely. Most of the information available on Simon’s missionary journeys comes from the hymns of the Church used for his Feast Day. From the hymns of the Church, the characteristics of his missionary journeys seem to be like his namesake: a great deal of zeal for the Lord.

“Receiving Grace¹³ from the divine Spirit, becoming a member of the choir of the Apostles, and breathing forth with fiery tongue the fiery breath which once was borne down upon them from heaven, O Simon, you utterly consumed the thorns of pagan ungodliness. O preacher of Christ God, entreat Him that our souls may be saved”.

“You became fiery of spirit¹⁴, O Apostle, receiving the whole radiance of the Spirit Who descended upon you from heaven. And you burned up all the falsehood of idolatry”.

“Possessed of a strange zeal¹⁵, O blessed Simon, you were called the namesake of zeal, and acquired a title in accordance with your character, crying out: Blessed are You, O Lord God, forever!”

¹² Pseudo-Clement, Recognitions of Clement, I, 60.

¹³ “Sticheron for Matins of the Commemoration of the Holy Apostle Simon the Zealot”, May 10th, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

¹⁴ “Ode I for Matins of the Commemoration of the Holy Apostle Simon the Zealot”, May 10th, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

¹⁵ “Ode VII for Matins of the Commemoration of the Holy Apostle Simon the Zealot”, May 10th, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

Jerome referred to Simon's zeal as taking the form of a jealous anger toward ungodliness, similar to Phineas, Elijah, Peter and Paul.

"I will frankly admit that my indignation overpowers me; I cannot listen with patience to sacrilegious opinions. I have read of the javelin of Phineas (Numbers 25:1-8), of the harshness of Elijah (2 Kings 1:9-15), of the jealous anger of Simon the Zealot. Also of the severity of Peter in putting to death Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), and of the firmness of Paul who, when Elymas the sorcerer withstood the ways of the Lord, doomed him to lifelong blindness (Acts 13:6-12). There is no cruelty in regard for God's honor. Wherefore in the Law it is said, 'If your brother or your friend or the wife of your bosom entice thee from the truth, your hand shall be upon them and you shall shed their blood, and so shall you put the evil away from the midst of Israel'" (Deuteronomy 13:6-11).

The accounts that we have of Simon's missionary journeys indicate that he traveled to a number of places. He began his missionary journeys at the same time that others of the Twelve were leaving on their missionary journeys. Since the Twelve are last recorded as being together at the ordination of the first seven deacons (Acts 6:2), Simon and the others left Jerusalem just after the stoning of Stephen when the Church was scattered (Acts 7:59-8:4). This occurred exactly one year to the day¹⁶ after the Pentecost.

The hymns of the Church speak of Simon's missionary journeys to a wide range of foreign countries as follows:

"The wondrous Simon¹⁷, the boast of the Apostles, passed over the ends of the earth like a brilliant ray, driving away the darkness of polytheism with his saving, brilliant and divine teachings. He enlightened all to worship the one Godhead in three Hypostases, indivisible and undivided. The Apostle Simon, going about the ends of the earth, whirling about like a wheel, burned away the madness of idolatry from all the land. Shedding the light of piety, he kindled luminous rays of grace for the faithful, that they may worship the one Godhead in three Hypostases, indivisible and undivided. The Apostle Simon, most radiant and wondrous, the teacher of the Nations, the net of God, drawing us up from the depths of perdition with exalted theology, the true preacher, has now wisely led all to the knowledge of Christ and set forth his corrections as a beautiful banquet".

"Like a high-flying eagle you soared over creation, O most sacred Simon, disciple and Apostle of Christ. Burning up the falsehood of idolatry with the fiery sound of your dogmas, you led the nations out of the depths of ignorance unto the knowledge of God".

"Fishing for the nations¹⁸, the glorious Apostle taught the ends of the earth to worship You with the Father and the Spirit, O Christ God. Wherefore, establish Your Church, and send down Your blessing upon the faithful, O only Merciful One, who love mankind. Fishing for reason-endowed fish with the net of your divine

¹⁶ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 27.

¹⁷ "Stichera for Vespers of the Commemoration of the Holy Apostle Simon the Zealot", May 10th, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

¹⁸ "Sedalia for Matins of the Commemoration of the Holy Apostle Simon the Zealot", May 10th, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

words, you brought the first-fruits thereof to our God. Desiring to clothe yourself in the wounds of Christ, you showed yourself to be an emulator of His suffering”.

“You were revealed¹⁹ to the ends of the world, shining with light. Having received the fire of the Spirit, you were shown to be radiant. Wherefore, we magnify you. Having offered yourself wholly to God, you were united to Him. Entreat Him now, O divinely manifest one, in behalf of us who praise you with faith and love”.

There are some seeming conflicts in accounts of the missionary journeys of Simon, but these may be partially resolved by the account of his presence at the funeral of the Virgin Mary. There are strong traditions of his martyrdom in both the British Isles and in Persia. However, there is also the tradition that he was raised from the dead in order to be present at the funeral of the Virgin Mary in c. 55 AD. Thus his martyrdom in both Britain and Persia are quite possible.

Simon Travels to Britain

One account of Simon’s missionary journeys states²⁰ that he passed through Egypt, Mauritania, Libya, Numidia, Cyrenia and Abkhazia. In Abkhazia, he enlightened many pagans with the Faith. The first five of these countries are along the Northern Coast of Africa bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Abkhazia, however, is Northwest of the Black Sea in modern Russia. Another account of Simon’s missionary journeys concurs²¹ that Simon went to preach the Gospel in Mauritania in North Africa near modern Algeria. This account states that because he succeeded in converting many to the Faith of Christ, he was tortured and finally crucified there.

The same traditional account states²² that Simon also went to Britain where he enlightened many unbelievers with the light of the Gospel. Nicephorus (9th Century) concurs that Simon traveled to Britain. Dorotheus of Gaza stated that Simon not only went to Britain, but that he was crucified by idolaters and buried there.

Another account of Simon’s travels confirms²³ that he visited North Africa including Egypt, Mauritania, Libya, Numidia, Cyrene and Abkhazia, but suggests that he was not crucified there. Instead he proceeded from there to the Eastern parts of Britain in the first year of the Boadicean War²⁴ and was crucified in the vicinity of Caistor under Caius Decius on May 10th, 61

¹⁹ “Ode IX for Matins of the Commemoration of the Holy Apostle Simon the Zealot”, May 10th, Russian Menaion, St. John of Kronstadt Press, Liberty, TN.

²⁰ Isaac Lambertsen, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, pp. 229-230. This is a translation from the following:

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²¹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, May 10.

²² Isaac Lambertsen, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, pp. 229-230. This is a translation from the following:

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²³ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2006, May 10. The Great Synaxaristes also quotes Dorotheus and Nicephorus.

²⁴ The Boadicean (also spelled Boudicean) War was fought in 59-62 AD between the Romans led by Gaius Suetonius Paulinus and the Celtic Ileni tribe led by Queen Boudicea. Boudicea’s father, the leader of the Ileni, was a Roman ally; when he died, he left his kingdom to his daughters. The Romans ignored this, flogged Boudicea and raped her daughters. Boudicea then led 100,000 Ilemi to defeat the Romans at modern Colchester and

AD, where it was Decius' atrocities that had brought on the Boadicean War. During this time, Simon worked with Joseph of Arimathea, who had performed the burial rite of Christ along with Nicodemus (John 19:38-42)

Another account of Simon's travels says²⁵ that he had been to Britain earlier, c. 44 AD, but that he had left Britain and returned to the continent. At this earlier time, Simon worked with the Apostle of the Seventy Aristobulus, who was brother-in-law to the Apostle Peter.

Simon's Presence at the Virgin Mary's Funeral

In the mid 50's AD, the Virgin Mary had reached her mid 70's, and she was feeling the effects of old age. Simon was in his mid-50's at this time and he had already been martyred, either in North Africa or in Britain. And it was then that the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her that her departure was imminent²⁶, and would occur in three days.

Shortly after Gabriel left, the Apostle John was translated in a bright cloud from wherever he was at the time. This was similar to the way the Deacon Philip was translated from the desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza to Azotus (Acts 8:26, 39-40), and as Habakkuk the prophet carried food to Daniel, who was in the lions' den, and quickly returned to Judaea²⁷. There is some disagreement among the Church Fathers as to whether John was in Ephesus or in some region of Judea. They contend that John did not leave the Virgin Mary alone during her lifetime, unless it was just briefly in the care of her stepson, James, the Lord's brother.

After John arrived²⁸, "the rest of the Twelve arrived also from whatever part of the world where they were then preaching the Gospel. Peter came from Rome²⁹, Paul from Tiberia, Thomas from India, James from Jerusalem. Andrew, Peter's brother, Philip and Luke also came, and Simon the Zealot and Jude, who had fallen asleep, were raised by the Holy Spirit out of their tombs. To them the Holy Spirit said, 'Do not think that it is now the resurrection. But on this account you have risen out of your tombs, that you may go to give greeting to the honor and wonder-working of the mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, because the day of her departure is at hand, of her going up into the heavens'. And Mark likewise coming around, was present from Alexandria; he also with the rest, from each country".

All of the Twelve arrived except Thomas. They stood and went in, and greeted the queen mother with the following words: 'Hail, Mary, full of grace! The Lord be with you' (Luke 1:28). And she eagerly rose quickly, and bowed herself, and kissed them, and gave thanks to God. And Peter answered and said to the Apostles, 'Let us each, according to what the Holy Spirit announced

London. Emperor Nero considered withdrawing all Roman forces from Britain. However, General Suetonius withdrew, regrouped, and led his army to victory over the Ileni, even though he was heavily outnumbered.

²⁵ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2006, May 10.

²⁶ Roberts and Donaldson, "The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary", Ante-Nicene Fathers, v.8. Roberts and Donaldson, "The Passing of Mary", Ante-Nicene Fathers, v.8.

²⁷ Lancelot C. L. Brenton, "Bel and the Dragon 1:33-39", The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson, Peabody MA, 1990.

Orthodox Study Bible, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2008, Daniel 12:28-42.

²⁸ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., "The Passing of Mary, First Latin Form", Apocrypha of the New Testament, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

²⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, "The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary", Ante-Nicene Fathers, v.8.

and commanded us, give full information to the mother of our Lord'. And those who had come likewise agreed to give an account of how they had come. So each of the Twelve gave Mary an account of where they were when they were summoned”.

“Then the blessed Mary said to her brethren: ‘What is this, that you have all come to Jerusalem?’ Peter, answering, said to her: ‘We had need to ask this of you. Certainly, as I think, none of us knows why we have come here today with such rapidity. And they all wondered that they were there when they heard these things. The blessed Mary said to them: ‘I asked my Son, before He endured the passion, that He and you should be at my death; and He granted me this gift. Whence you may know that my departure will be tomorrow’”.

“After Mary’s death the next day, the Apostles with great honor laid the body in a tomb on the Mount of Olives, then Thomas was suddenly brought to the Mount of Olives, like the others had been brought earlier. He saw Mary’s body going up to heaven, and began to cry out to her. Then the waistband with which the Apostles had encircled her body was thrown down from heaven to the blessed Thomas. And taking it, and giving thanks to God, he came again into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, finding all the Apostles and a great crowd there. Then Thomas said, ‘Where have you laid her body?’ And they pointed out the sepulcher with their finger. And he said, ‘The body is not there’. But they didn’t believe Thomas. Then they went to the sepulcher, which was a new one hollowed out in the rock, and took up the stone; but they did not find the body, and did not know what to say. Then Thomas told them how he was singing mass in India — he still had on his sacerdotal robes. He, not knowing the word of God, had been brought to the Mount of Olives, and saw the body of the blessed Mary going up into heaven, and prayed her to give him a blessing. She heard his prayer, and threw him her waistband, which she had about her. And the Apostles seeing the belt which they had put about her, glorified God, on account of the benediction which the blessed Mary had given him, and because he had seen her body going up into heaven. Then Thomas gave them his benediction, and said, ‘Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!’”

“And the same cloud³⁰ by which they had been brought carried them back each to his own place. And so also the Apostles quickly returned to where they had at first been, to preach to the people of God”.

The Continuation of Simon’s Missionary Journeys in Persia

Another traditional account of Simon’s missionary journeys states³¹ that Simon also traveled to Persia with the Apostle Jude, the Lord’s stepbrother, (See Figure 1 for Jesus’ family tree.) and that they were martyred together near the Persian Gulf. If Simon and Jude were related, their desire to work together may be understandable.

³⁰ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “The Passing of Mary, First Latin Form”, *Apocrypha of the New Testament*, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

³¹ Isaac Lambertsen, *The Lives of the Holy Apostles*, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, pp. 229-230. This is a translation from the following:

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While Simon was in Persia with Jude, Jude drafted his general Epistle³², which we now have as part of the New Testament Scriptures. The occasion for Jude composing this Epistle was the fact that ungodly people had concealed themselves within the community of believers, and turned the grace of God into an opportunity for iniquity. Under the guise of Christian freedom, they allowed their followers to commit all kinds of abominable deeds. These ungodly people were followers of Simon Magus, the Samaritan magician, who had tried to purchase the Holy Spirit from the Apostle Peter (Acts 8:9, 18-23). Simon Magus was called³³ the source of most of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Century heresies that plagued the Church.

Jude's Epistle may seem harsh to our ears today, but it was necessary then. Paul warned the elders of the Church at Ephesus of similar developments that would occur after his departure (Acts 20:29-31). Other documents³⁴ also describe the work of Jude and Simon the Zealot in Persia.

Irenaeus noted³⁵ that the priests of these heresies "both lead profligate lives and practice magical arts, each one to the extent of his ability. They use exorcisms and incantations, love-potions and charms, as well as those beings that are called "dream-senders". The Apostle Jude, writing to the Churches in Persia about these heretics, stated:

"Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!' But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah".

"These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving *only* themselves. *They are* clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 1:8-13).

There are varying accounts for the location of Simon's death in Persia. From Western tradition, the Menology of St. Basil II states³⁶ that Simon was martyred in Edessa. Fortunatus of

³² Isaac Lambertsen, *The Lives of the Holy Apostles*, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, pp. 229-230. This is a translation from the following:

The Lives of the Saints in the Russian Language, According to the Menology of St. Dimitri of Rostov, Moscow, Synodal Press, 1908, v. 9, (May) pp. 298-300.

³³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I, xxvii, 4; I, xxiii, 2.

Vincent of Lerins, *The Commonitory*, XXIV, 62-63.

Eusebius, *Church History*, II, 13, III, 26-29.

Ignatius, "To the Trallians", 10-11, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, v. 1.

Tertullian, *Against All Heresies*, II, ix, 1-4.

Theodoret, *Letter to the Monks of Constantinople*, 145.

³⁴ "The Passions of Simon and Jude", *Apocrypha of the New Testament*, publisher unknown

³⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I, xxiii, 4.

³⁶ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menologion_of_Basil_II.

The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2006, May 10

Poitiers and the Venerable Bede state³⁷ that both Simon and Jude were martyred at Suanir in Persia, where the location of this city is not known today. Simon was sawn in half while Jude was stabbed with some type of sharp weapon. Western tradition also states that Simon and Jude were buried in the same coffin.

Another traditional account states³⁸ that Simon was buried in the city of Nikopsia, near Dzhigentia, North of the Black Sea. A Church was later erected on this latter gravesite, and the Church had a major renovation in 1875 through the zeal of one of the grand dukes of Russia. The history of the evangelization of Armenia (East of the Black Sea) following the death of Abgar, king of Edessa, refers³⁹ to Simon being martyred in that area along with the Apostle Nathanael (i.e. Bartholomew). But this account does not seem to come from an eyewitness of the event.

“There came then into Armenia the Apostle Bartholomew, who suffered martyrdom among us in the town of Arepan. As to Simon (the Zealot), who was sent unto Persia, I cannot relate with certainty what he did, nor where he suffered martyrdom. It is said that one Simon, an apostle, was martyred at Veriospore”.

From the letters contained in the archives of the city of Edessa, Jude and Simon the Zealot worked together to some extent in Armenia, Mesopotamia and Persia. Good communication existed between Abgar, king of Armenia (at Edessa) and other kings of Persia and Assyria. In his letters, Abgar proclaimed⁴⁰ the Apostles to his fellow kings. In these letters, Abgar states that Simon was sent primarily into Persia while Jude and Thaddaeus (of the Seventy) were sent primarily into Armenia.

“Abgar placed copies³⁷ of his letters in his archives. He wrote to the young Nerseh, king of Assyria, at Babylon”.

“Abgar, king of the Armenians, to my son Nerseh, greeting. I have received your letter and acknowledgments. I have released Beroze from his chains, and have pardoned his offenses: if this pleases you, give him the government of Nineveh. But as to what you write to me about sending you the physician who works miracles and preaches another God superior to fire and water, that you may see and hear him, I say to you: he was not a physician according to the art of men. He was a disciple of the Son of God, Creator of fire and water; he has been appointed and sent to the countries of Armenia. But one of his principal companions, named Simon, is sent into the countries of Persia. Seek for him, and you will hear him, you as well as your father Ardaches. He will heal all your diseases and will show you the way of life”.

“Abgar wrote also to Ardaches, king of the Persians, the following letter. ‘Abgar, king of the Armenians, to Ardaches my brother, king of the Persians, greeting. I know that you have heard of Jesus Christ the Son of God, whom the

³⁷ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2006, May 10.

³⁸ Isaac Lambertsen, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, pp. 229-230. This is a translation from the following:

The Lives of the Saints in the Russian Language, According to the Menology of St. Dimitri of Rostov, Moscow, Synodal Press, 1908, v. 9, (May) pp. 298-300.

³⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, ed., “Copy of Five Letters from Abgar”, Memoirs of Edessa and Other Ancient Syriac Documents, Ante Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁴⁰ Roberts and Donaldson, Preaching of the Apostle Thaddaeus at Edessa, Copy of Five Letters”, VIII, 4-5, Moses of Chorene: History of Armenia, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

Jews have crucified; Jesus who was raised from the dead, and has sent His disciples through all the world to instruct men. One of His chief disciples, named Simon, is in your Majesty's territories. Seek for him, and you will find him, and he will cure you of all your maladies, and will show you the way of life. And you will believe in his words, you, and your brothers, and all those who willingly obey you. It is very pleasant to me to think that my relations in the flesh will be also my relations, my friends, in the spirit”.

“Abgar had not yet received answers to these letters when he died, having reigned thirty eight years”.

Other accounts describe⁴¹ Jude's missionary journeys in Armenia. Jude would have been an old man, in his 80's, by this time, while Simon was about 20 years younger. Since Jude and Simon were related, their desire to work together in Persia and Armenia is understandable, since Simon would be able to help his older relative get around.

⁴¹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, June 19.

Isaac Lambertsen, The Lives of the Holy Apostles, Holy Apostles Convent Press, Buena Vista, CO, 1990, p. 226.

This is a translation from the following:

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Figure 1

FAMILY TREE OF JESUS

