



Simon Of Cyrene Carries Jesus' Cross by Harold Copping

The gospels seem to contradict about who carried Jesus' cross, which critics seize upon.

Seeming contradiction:

Did Jesus bear his own cross?

(a) Yes (*John 19:17*)

(b) No (*Matthew 27:31-32*)

THE PROBLEM

Who carried the crossbeam or pole?

- [Matthew 27:32](#) – Simon
- [Mark 15:21](#) – Simon
- [Luke 23:26](#) – Simon
- [John 19:17](#) – Jesus

THE EXPLANATION

These divergent details, rather than being contradictions, actually are complimentary, and give powerful evidence the gospel writers are telling the truth, rather than copying from a single fictional account, or writing new fiction, in which the details are harmonized, or smoothed out.

“Then Pilate turned Jesus over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus away. Carrying the cross by himself, he went to the Place of the Skull (in Hebrew *Golgotha*)” ([John 19:16-17](#) NLT)

This phrase highlights the Roman practice of requiring condemned criminals to carry the crossbeam of their own cross to the site of execution, symbolizing the weight of their punishment. “The vertical beam (Latin *staticulum*) of the cross was generally kept at the execution site, and the victim was forced to carry only the heavy crossbeam (Latin *patibulum*)” (NLT study Bible note on [John 19:17](#)), which weighed 30 to 40 pounds or more. John omits the help which Simon the Cyrenian was soon forced to render, as also what seems to be implied by [Mark 15:22](#), that at the of the last of the journey, they might have

even had to carry Jesus himself.

“As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross”—Matthew 27:32 NIV

How can these seemingly contradictory accounts be reconciled?

Jesus started out carrying the beam. He subsequently fell under its weight, at least about 30 to 40 pounds or more. Jesus had been severely beaten by flogging. Simon was pressed into service to carry it the rest of the way. Notice that Matthew reports, it was, “as they were going out”, that is, of **“the Praetorium” (Matthew 27:27 NIV)**, that “they met . . . Simon”. They didn’t bring Simon into the Praetorium to carry the cross. They found him along the way, so Simon couldn’t have carried the cross the entire route. So someone else had to have carried it out of the Praetorium. Matthew, Mark and Luke do not tell us who that was, but John does. Thus, the gospels do not contradict about who carried Jesus’ cross.

Why, then, does John omit reporting anything about Simon carrying it? He wrote years after Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and didn’t see the need to repeat all the details they had already recorded. In fact, 92% of John’s gospel is unique, so he filled in many of the historical gaps.

“They pressed into service a passerby-by Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross”—Mark 15:21 NAB

“Cyrene was an important city in what is today Libya. There was a large Jewish settlement in Cyrene going back several hundred years” (The Reformation Study Bible). “Simon had made a Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem all the way from Crete in North Africa” (The Reformation Study Bible not on [Mark 15:21](#)).

A SEEMINGLY INSIGNIFICANT DETAIL

Why does Mark mention that Simon was “the father of Alexander and Rufus? They “are mentioned here probably because they became well known to the early church” (NLT Study Bible note on [Mark 15:21](#)).

Clement of Alexandria (late 2nd century) and Jerome (4th century) both report that Mark's gospel is Peter's memoirs about Jesus. Peter says he wrote his first letter from “Babylon”, likely a cryptic name for Rome, accompanied by his close associate Mark (**1 Peter 5:13**).

“Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too” (Romans 16:13 NIV). Among those being greeted in Paul's letter to the Romans, Rufus is cited for special mention, and so is his mother. Mark is thought to written his gospel from Rome, and to a primarily Roman audience.

If this Rufus in Romans is the same Rufus as in [Mark 15:21](#), then Rufus, the son of Simon of Cyrene, would have been very familiar with his father's memories of carrying Jesus' cross, and known to Mark's Roman readers. The coincidence is quite striking, and seems to account for a piece of gratuitous and needless information exclusively supplied by Mark.

Additionally, *“a first-century AD ossuary (‘bone box’) . . . bearing the inscription ‘Alexander (son) of Simon was recently found in Jerusalem”* (NIV Study Bible note on [Mark 15:21](#)). Alexander, son of Simon, would have been known to Mark's readers in the Jerusalem area.

Seemingly insignificant details such as these are what investigators look for in searching out whether a witness is truthful and credible. The gospels accurately, factually, and truthfully report events, and reveal that they do not contradict about who carried Jesus' cross.