

## Twelve Men: Simon the Zealot

As we continue our journey investigating the Twelve Disciples, we come to Simon. We have two Simons listed among the twelve disciples. Today, though, we are focusing on Simon the Zealot. Simon the Zealot is mentioned in all three synoptic gospels and the book of Acts:

*Matthew 10:4, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.*

*Mark 3:18, and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot;*

*Luke 6:15, and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot;*

*Acts 1:13, When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.*

Who is Simon the Zealot? As you can pick up from the New American Standard Version, all four scripture references name him as zealot. This not only allowed the writers to distinguish between Simon and Simon Peter, but it gives us a glimpse into the history of this disciple.

Modern scholars describe his name found in scripture to be one that associates him as one who is zealous. The Lexham Bible Dictionary states, *the standard interpretation among modern scholarship is that the title “Cananaean” is an Aramaic word (ܩܢܐܢܐ, qan’an) meaning “zealous one” and is not associated with the land of Canaan or the city of Cana (Hengel, The Zealots, 69–70).*<sup>1</sup>

That being said, there has been a previous interpretation that the root word in these passages of scripture actually describes Simon as not a zealot, but as several incorrect misinterpretations according the Lexham Bible Dictionary, *In Matthew and Mark, Simon is given the title of “Cananaean” (Καναναῖος, Kananaios), which Jerome and other church fathers misinterpreted as “Simon of Cana” (Jerome, Commentary on Matthew 10:2). As a result, Simon was identified as the bridegroom present at Jesus’ miracle at the wedding feast in John 2, as well as Jesus’ brother in Matt 13:55 and in Mark 6:3. The majority text of Matt 10:4 and Mark 3:18 reads Κανανίτης (Kananitēs), which occurs in some translations as “Simon the Canaanite” (Matt 10:4 KJV).*<sup>2</sup>

Luke’s account found in Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13 also gives him the title zealot (ζηλωτής, zēlōtēs).

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<sup>1</sup> John T. Lowe, [“Simon the Zealot,”](#) in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

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In the book *Twelve Ordinary Men*, John MacArthur writes, “*Simon was apparently at one time a member of the political party known as the Zealots. The fact that he bore the title all his life may also suggest that he had a fiery, zealous temperament. But that term in Jesus’ day signified a well-known and widely feared outlaw political sect, and Simon had apparently been a member of that sect.*”

According to historian Josephus, there were four basic political parties among the Jews of Simon’s time: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes (not mentioned in scripture), and Zealots. Most of us are familiar with the Pharisees and Sadducees because they are mentioned repeatedly in the gospel accounts. So, who were the Zealots?

MacArthur writes, “*The Zealots were extremists in every sense. Like the Pharisees, they interpreted the law literally. Unlike the Pharisees (who were willing to compromise for political reasons), the Zealots were militant, violent outlaws. They believed only God Himself had the right to rule over the Jews. And therefore they believed they were doing God’s work by assassinating Roman soldiers, political leaders, and anyone else who opposed them.*”

The Chosen TV series did a great job portraying this group and Simon the Zealot in one of their episodes.

There are a lot of interpretations, ideas and thoughts surrounding the group known as the Zealots. Apparently, the intensity of this group eventually led to a revolt after the life of Christ. The Lexham Bible Dictionary states, “*The revolt began in ad 66 and ended when the Roman general Titus conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in ad 70<sup>3</sup>.*”

This blog post is not about zealots, it is about the disciple named Simon the Zealot. We must understand context to understand who we are studying, so I always want to take time to dig a little bit not only for myself but for anyone who may read this post. With this understanding let’s move on so we do not go down rabbit trails.

No matter who Simon was, the point is Jesus called him to follow Him. Did Jesus call him because of his zeal? Maybe. As we’ve already mentioned, each of the twelve disciples had their own personalities. They were all different. As we discovered with Judas Iscariot, he was a betrayer...probably not fully committed...influenced by Satan. With Judas, the son of James, it seems he was humble and tender-hearted. Now with Simon the zealot, it appears he was someone who was zealous.

The Oxford Dictionary describes “zealous” as showing great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or objective.

It is safe to assume that Simon’s zeal for the previous things carried over to his zeal for Jesus, His ministry, and His teachings. I think of another character from the New Testament who shares a “somewhat” similar story: Paul.

Eerdman’s Dictionary of the Bible says, *Both his letters and the book of Acts attest to Paul’s intense zeal for God and ancestral Jewish law, which spurred him to carry out violent reprisals—not against Rome or any other foreign foes, but against the followers of Jesus Messiah whom he regarded in some sense as blasphemous covenant-breakers*

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<sup>3</sup> John T. Lowe, “[Simon the Zealot](#),” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

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(Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:6; Acts 22:3).<sup>4</sup> In the wake of his shattering conversion, Paul's zeal was redirected toward promoting the Way which he had persecuted. He continued to affirm his fellow Jews' basic "zeal for God" but insisted they become more "enlightened" concerning the righteousness which God established through faith in Christ, apart from the law (Rom. 10:1-4).<sup>5</sup>

I can't help but think just as Paul's mindset changed, Simon's did as well...and he too used his sense of zeal for the glory of God as he followed as Jesus' disciple.

For us today, what are we zealous for? Do we have a zeal to fervently follow Christ in a life of obedience, righteousness and holiness? Do people see our zeal for Christ in our daily lives? Does it point them to Jesus?

Being zealous isn't necessarily a bad thing. I mean we're not trying to overtake some group of people. As believers we should have a zeal to follow Jesus in a way that it changes everything about us.

*"O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be! Let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee."*

Join us next time as we look at the life of James, son of Alphaeus.



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<sup>4</sup> F. Scott Spencer, ["Zeal, Zealot,"](#) in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1409.

<sup>5</sup> F. Scott Spencer, ["Zeal, Zealot,"](#) in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1409.