

Joshua 19:1-9, Simeon

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Patriarchal Background

Second of Jacob's sons; born to Leah, the first wife, Gen 29:31-35.

Participates with Levi in the slaughter of Shechem, Gen 34 (cf. vv. 25, 30). Named first; as elder of the brothers, may have taken the lead.

- In keeping with the responsibility of the family in the OT to seek out its own justice:
 - Avenger of blood, Num 35:15-24; "revenger of blood" = "kinsman redeemer," cf. example in 2 Sam 14:5-9.
 - Deut 22:20,21, "men of the city," who as we have seen are co-tribal, responsible for stoning a fornicator.
- Needs to be controlled; cf. cities of refuge; appeal to David in 2 Sam 14.
- The problem here is that they are uncontrolled. They escalate an individual offence into a battle with the whole city.

Application: The danger of uncontrolled wrath. Consider the list of the works of the flesh in Gal 5:19-21. Hamor's fornication was wrong, but so was the wrath of Simeon and Levi. Cf. the sin of Assyria, in Isa 10:5ff;

- the Lord punished Israel through him, 6,
- but his attitude was proud and haughty, 7-11, 13-14
- so the Lord will punish him, 12, 15-16.

There may be an allusion to this aspect of his character in the Lord's naming of Peter, in the NT.

- His original name was "Simon," the Greek form of "Simeon," and James calls him this in Acts 15:14.
- His character throughout the gospels is "impulsive, volatile, unreliable" (Morris on Jn 1:42), much like his namesake.
- In John 1:42, the Lord renames him "Cephas," that is, "Peter," a boulder.

This conduct on their part leads to Jacob's curse on Levi and Simeon, Gen 49:5-7. Levi is scattered by being denied a territory, but turned into the priestly tribe. How about Simeon?

Scattering of Simeon

Three aspects:

Tribal reduction during the wandering

Num 1:23, at the start of the wilderness wandering, Simeon is the third largest tribe (after Judah and Dan), with 59,300 fighting men.

Num 26:14, after the wandering, Simeon is the very last tribe, with only 22,200 fighting men.

Not even listed in the blessing of Moses on the tribes in Deut 33 (except in LXX, where there is a comment on his small size).

No territory in the original allocation

Like Levi. But Levi had cities among several tribes; Simeon is shut up to the south of Judah. We see this in Josh 19:1-9; they have no boundary list, just a city list (compare 18:12; 19:11, 18, 25, 33, where “coast” is the same word as “border” earlier).

If we consider the cities, we see that even this location was far from the centers of activity. Of most we have no detailed knowledge. Only two have a prominent later history:

Ziklag

1 Sam 27:1-6 shows that this city was under the control of the Philistines at Gath, and their king Achish granted it as a fief to David. Simeon (like many of the other tribes) was unable to maintain control of their holdings.

So far out of the way that not even Achish knew what he was doing there, vv. 8-12.

After the Amalekites raided the area, David overtook and defeated them, and distributed the spoil of his covert sorties against the Philistines to various southern cities, including south Ramoth and Hormah of Simeon, 1 Sam 30:26-31 (though these are lumped under “Judah”)

Beersheba

Named 33x in OT, 10x grouped with “Dan” as synecdoche (part for whole) for the entire country, because of its southern location and Dan’s northern location. Some other references also use it to indicate the boon docks:

- 2 Sam 24:7, the limits of Joab’s census under David
- 1 Kings 19:3, Elijah’s stop fleeing from Jezebel
- 2 Kings 23:8, southern limit of Hezekiah’s reform (north is Geba, because the northern kingdom is excluded)

Shows us how far marginalized Simeon was by this allocation of territory.

No clear home after the division

In spite of its position in the south of Judah, appears to have sided with the northern kingdom in the civil war.

- 1 Kings 11:31 promises ten tribes to Jeroboam; Benjamin clearly stays with Judah (see Benjamin chapter), and if Simeon does too, that leaves only nine.
- Simeon is reckoned with Manasseh and Ephraim, associated with Israel, and contrasted with Judah and Benjamin in the account of Asa’s reform in 2 Chr 15:9.
- Grouped with Ephraim, Manasseh, and Naphthali as an object of Josiah’s purge in 2 Chr 34:6. (This is after the fall of the northern kingdom.)

- Beersheba (a Simeonite city, 19:2) is reckoned with Dan as a site of “the sin of Samaria” in Amos 8:14, and with Bethel in 5:5, suggesting that Simeon hosted the pagan cultus of the northern kingdom. (*But see Andersen and Freedman for argument that 8:14 is traditional “merism” [their term] “Dan to Beersheba”.*)

May have migrated into northern territory, though Amos 8:14 suggests that strong northern sympathies persisted even in the south.

Thus the third aspect of their scattering is that they become an alien people even in Judah, geographically separated from those with whom their main sympathies lie.

Glimmer of Hope

In the midst of this situation of judgment, there is one glimmer of hope. One of Simeon’s cities was selected as a levitical city. There is some confusion as to whether it was Ain (21:16) or Ashan (1 Chr 6:50); the difference is only one Hebrew letter. But the point is that even in this forsaken wilderness, God stationed the Levites so his people would have access to his word. Simeon was scattered in judgment, but Levi was scattered in blessing, and the judged tribe receives representatives of the blessing one, to give them hope and a glimmer of light in their darkness.

Hymn: 28, “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy”