

Who was Shimei in the Bible?

There are a total of 18 men in the Bible with the name Shimei, all Israelites and all found in the Old Testament. Some Shimeis are simply mentioned by name in genealogies, some are called out for their sin of intermarriage with other cultures, and some are mentioned due to their relationship to other famous Bible characters (such as Saul, David, and Esther). You can find a few of them in the following passages: 2 Samuel 21:21; 1 Kings 1:8; 1 Chronicles 3:19; 4:26-27; 5:4; 6:29.

Among all these men named Shimei, there are two who are of particular note. The first is Shimei son of Gershon (one of Levi's sons). This Shimei was the head of one of the Israelite clans that were brought up out of slavery in Egypt and was the father of the Shimeites (see Numbers 3:21; cf. Zechariah 12:13). The clan of Shimei was among those "responsible for the care of the tabernacle and tent, its coverings, the curtain at the entrance to the tent of meeting, the curtains of the courtyard, the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard surrounding the tabernacle and altar, and the ropes—and everything related to their use" (Numbers 3:25-26). Many years later, a descendant of Shimei the Gershonite, a man named Asaph, became King David's leader of music (1 Chronicles 6:39-43) and wrote many psalms (e.g., Psalm 73).

The other Shimei who stands out in the Bible is Shimei son of Gera, who was a part of King Saul's clan. When King David was forced to flee from his son Absalom, who coveted his father's throne, Shimei met the king along the way: "As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left" (2 Samuel 16:5-6). Shimei blamed David for King Saul's death during a battle

with the Philistines. Saul had, in fact, fallen on his own sword to escape capture by the enemy (see 1 Chronicles 10:1-4); however, Shimei accused David of murder and announced that this was the reason Absalom was taking over the kingdom.

David's men wanted to kill Shimei then and there, but David, in his despair, believed the Lord had sent Shimei to curse him (2 Samuel 16:11-12), and he refused to allow his men to kill Shimei. David and his party resumed their journey, and Shimei continued to follow, cursing and throwing stones and dirt at them (verse 13).

Eventually, Absalom's rebellion was put down, Absalom was killed, and King David was restored to his throne. Shimei knew that he was now on shaky ground, so he gathered with him over a thousand Benjamites and went to meet David (2 Samuel 19:16-17). Falling on his face, Shimei apologized for his past behavior and begged the king not to hold it against him (verses 18-20). Again King David's men asked to kill Shimei, but again David refused and gave Shimei his oath that he would not kill him.

It seems that Shimei was a thoroughly despicable man, however, and that he persisted in his opposition to David. On his deathbed, David charged Solomon with the task of executing Shimei: "Do not consider him innocent. You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood" (1 Kings 2:9). The only reason Shimei was still alive was that David was honoring his oath. Solomon showed Shimei mercy, giving him one final chance: as long as Shimei remained in Jerusalem, he would live (verses 36-37). Shimei agreed to the pact, but three years later he left the city. When King Solomon found out, he called for Shimei and told him, "You know in your heart all the wrong you did to my father David. Now the Lord will repay you for your wrongdoing" (verse 44). Shimei was then executed (verse 46).