

What can we learn from the tribe of Simeon?

Each of the twelve sons of Israel / Jacob received a blessing from his father just before Jacob's death. The twelve sons were the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the blessing contained prophetic information about the future of each tribe. In the case of the tribe of Simeon, which was paired in the prophecy with the tribe of Levi, Jacob prophesied, "Simeon and Levi are brothers—their swords are weapons of violence. Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased. Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel" (Genesis 49:5-7).

Jacob pronounces a curse upon the anger of Simeon and Levi, no doubt remembering when they treacherously and barbarously destroyed the Shechemites, an act Jacob deeply resented for the barbarous way in which it was done and the reproach it brought upon his entire family (Genesis 34:24-30). Simeon's anger was evil, not because indignation against sin is unwarranted, but because his wrath was marked by deeds of fierceness and cruelty. Righteous anger and indignation, the kind Jesus exhibited in cleansing the temple, for example, is never characterized by cruelty. The swords of Simeon, which should have been only weapons of defense, were weapons of violence to do wrong to others, not to save themselves from wrong.

Jacob's pronouncement "I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel" came true. The tribe of Simeon was the smallest and weakest of all the tribes at the close of their sojourn in the wilderness, as noted in the second census of Moses (Numbers 26:14), and the tribe of Simeon was omitted from the blessing of Moses (Deuteronomy 33:8). Further, because of its size, the tribe of Simeon was forced to share territory with

Judah, a larger and more powerful tribe (Joshua 19:1-9). Jacob did not cut the descendants of Simeon off from any part in the promised inheritance, but he did divide and scatter them.

As Christians, we learn from the tribe of Simeon that anger is the cause of a great deal of sin when it is allowed to boil over without restraint, resulting in a scenario in which hurts are multiplied (Proverbs 29:11). Anger leaves devastation in its wake, often with irreparable consequences. Furthermore, while anger against sin is not unwarranted, we ought always to be very careful to distinguish between the sinner and the sin, so as not to love or bless the sin for the sake of the person, nor to hate or curse the person for the sake of the sin.

Jacob's statement "Let me not enter their council; let me not join their assembly" is a lesson for us as well. We are not to take the counsel of the angry man because he is unstable and exhibits an inability to control his passions. When anger is a defining trait in another's life, it is an indication of the lack of self-control, which is a hallmark of believers (Galatians 5:22-23). An angry person makes a poor counselor, and, in fact, his company should be avoided, especially when the sin of anger is unconfessed and there is no attempt to deal with it in a godly manner.

Finally, Simeon and Levi appeared to be inseparable brothers who are often mentioned together in Scripture, an indication that, like many brothers and sisters, they may have "brought out the worst in each other." Christian parents who see this type of relationship developing in siblings whose influence upon one another is unhealthy, would do well to consider separating them from one another in circumstances where their unfortunate tendency to spur one another to wrong may exert itself.