

# Who was Simeon in the Bible?

The name Simeon is used of four men in the Bible: Simeon, son of Jacob (Genesis 29:33); Simeon, a man in Jerusalem who met the baby Jesus (Luke 2:25); Simeon, named in the lineage of Jesus (Luke 3:30); and Simeon of the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1). This article will focus on two Simeons: the son of Jacob and the man mentioned in Luke 2.

Simeon in the Old Testament is the second-born son of Jacob, born to Jacob's wife Leah. Jacob was the patriarch, or father, of the twelve tribes of Israel and had received the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 28:14-15).

Simeon was a man of anger and violence. His sister Dinah was taken and defiled by a Hivite named Shechem, a son of the ruler of that area (Genesis 34:2). When Jacob and his sons learned of this, "they were shocked and furious, because Shechem had done an outrageous thing in Israel by sleeping with Jacob's daughter—a thing that should not be done" (Genesis 34:7). All the brothers conspired to initiate a plan to establish a false treaty with Hamor's family (Genesis 34:13). The treaty involved all the men of the city being circumcised (verse 15). But, instead of the family of Jacob and the family of Hamor living peacefully together as Hamor was led to believe (Genesis 34:21), the sons of Jacob, including Simeon, sought to avenge their sister. After the men of the city had been circumcised, while they were still in pain, Simeon and Levi "took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem's house and left" (Genesis 34:25-26). Jacob rebuked Simeon and Levi for their bloody act: "You have brought trouble on me by making me obnoxious to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land" (Genesis 34:30).

Later, as Jacob was nearing death, he gave his sons a patriarchal blessing. At that time, he remembered the sins of Simeon and Levi, saying, “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’s words came to pass as, centuries later, after the conquest of the Promised Land, the tribe of Simeon was small and was forced to share territory with Judah, a larger and more powerful tribe (Joshua 19:1-9). The curse on Simeon reminds us that vengeance belongs only to God (Genesis 4:15; Psalm 38:20; 1 Peter 3:9).

The Bible also shows that Simeon was a man of envy and hatred. He and his brothers were jealous of their father’s love for Joseph and angered by Joseph’s dreams that the brothers construed as arrogance, so they sold Joseph into slavery (Genesis 37). Simeon was then complicit in leading their father to believe that Joseph had been killed by a fierce animal. Later, Joseph, as vizier of Egypt, tested his brothers and imprisoned Simeon until his brothers returned from Canaan (Genesis 42:18-19, 24).

Despite Simeon’s wrongdoing, we see God’s love and grace. Simeon was justly rebuked and cursed by his father, but he was also honored by Jacob as recorded in two special moments. The first occurs when Jacob, still grieving the supposed death of Joseph, is presented with the possibility that he might lose Simeon as well and equates Simeon with his two favorite children, Joseph and Benjamin: “You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me” (Genesis 42:36). We also see Jacob’s grace when he recognizes Joseph’s sons as being equal to Reuben and Simeon, his first and second born. In this blessing of

his grandchildren, Jacob, despite Simeon's prior violence, murder, and lies, recognizes Simeon's rightful place in the family.

In Revelation 7:7 the tribe of Simeon is listed in a place of honor, among the twelve tribes of Israel who are sealed by God's protection in the tribulation. Simeon, son of Jacob, is referenced throughout the Pentateuch and seven times in the book of Joshua. Simeon and/or the tribe that bears his name is also mentioned in the historical records of 1 and 2 Chronicles and in the book of Ezekiel.

The other prominent Simeon in the Bible was a man in Jerusalem (Luke 2:25) who lived at the time Jesus was born. Simeon's reputation was that of being "righteous and devout" (Luke 2:25). For generations the people of God waited for and expected a Messiah, a Savior. Simeon was like his fellow Israelites in that he waited "for the consolation of Israel" (verse 25). The concept of consolation implies comfort. The nation of Israel was waiting for God's comfort, expecting that He would come and rescue them (Luke 23:50-51; Mark 15:43; Acts 10:22), just as He had done in delivering them from slavery and bringing them out of Egypt (Exodus 14). Simeon was unique in what he knew—namely, that he would see the Messiah with his own eyes, for "it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah" (Luke 2:26).

Joseph and Mary, in faithfulness to the Law, traveled to Jerusalem while Jesus was still an infant to present Him to God in the temple (Luke 2:22; cf. Exodus 13:1-2). It is during their visit to the temple that Simeon saw Jesus, the long-awaited "consolation of Israel." We don't know how long Simeon had waited, but we do know that he was led by the Spirit to go to the temple that day, and he recognized Jesus the moment he saw Him.

When Simeon saw the baby Jesus, he picked Him up in his arms and said,  
“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.  
For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32).

Simeon’s words assert that 1) Jesus would be the salvation of the world, 2) He would deliver truth not only to those in Israel but also to the Gentiles, and 3) Jesus would bring glory upon the people of Israel. Luke records that Jesus’ parents “marveled at what was said about him” (Luke 2:33).

Simeon spoke to Mary, Jesus’ mother. Simeon said, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too” (Luke 2:34). In this prophecy, Simeon said that 1) some of the Jewish people would believe that Jesus is the “consolation of Israel,” and some would not, 2) there would be much opposition to Jesus in the future, 3) Jesus would reveal the truth, and 4) Jesus’ suffering would cause Mary much pain, personally.

Simeon stands as a testimony of how we, too, should anticipate the arrival of the Messiah. Simeon looked forward to Christ’s first coming, and we anticipate His second coming (see Acts 1:11 and Titus 2:13).

Jesus, the “consolation of Israel,” is the comfort of all those who believe in Him, and

Simeon is a beacon of faith in an unbelieving world and a positive assurance that “hope does not disappoint” (Romans 5:5, NASB).