

# FIRST KINGS

## Chapter 16

And the word of the LORD came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, 2 “Since I exalted you out of the dust and made you leader over my people Israel, and you have walked in the way of Jeroboam and have made my people Israel to sin, provoking me to anger with their sins, 3 behold, I will utterly sweep away Baasha and his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. 4 Anyone belonging to Baasha who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the field the birds of the heavens shall eat.” 5 Now the rest of the acts of Baasha and what he did, and his might, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? 6 And Baasha slept with his fathers and was buried at Tirzah, and Elah his son reigned in his place. 7 Moreover, the word of the LORD came by the prophet Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha and his house, both because of all the evil that he did in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam, and also because he destroyed it.

**16:1** *Jehu*. Like his father before him (see 2Ch 16:7–10), Jehu brought God’s word of condemnation to a king. Much as the man of God from Judah (see note on 13:1) and later the prophet Amos, he was sent from the south to a northern king. His ministry continued for about 50 years until the reign of Jehoshaphat of Judah (2Ch 19:2; 20:34). (CSB)

A prophet, not to be confused with the later Israelite king by the same name (2Ki 10:28–36). The prophet’s denunciation of Baasha was not motivated by political prejudice; he also rebuked a king of Judah (2Ch 19:2). Cf 2Ch 20:34 for his literary activity. (TLSB)

**16:3** *consume Baasha and his house*. Cf. 14:10 (the house of Jeroboam); 21:21 (the house of Omri and Ahab). (CSB)

**16:5** *what he did*. For the purposes of the writer of Kings, it was not necessary to list any of Baasha’s achievements. He may have been a very successful ruler from a military-political point of view. (CSB)

**16:7** *he destroyed it*. Although Baasha fulfilled God’s purpose (14:10, 14) in destroying the house of Jeroboam, he remained responsible for this violent and unlawful act (cf. Ge 50:20; Isa 10:5–7, 12). (CSB)

Jeroboam’s dynasty. Baasha serves God’s judgment but also is condemned. (TLSB)

**15:33–16:7** Because of the evil of Israel’s King Baasha, the Lord predicts that his house, like that of Jeroboam, will be cut off (16:3). But God’s grace to families and households persists, even for us. The great King of heaven confirms us as members of His household. • Lord, bless this house, whatever befall; may Jesus Christ be all in all. Amen. (TLSB)

*Elah Reigns in Israel*

**8** In the twenty-sixth year of Asa king of Judah, Elah the son of Baasha began to reign over Israel in Tirzah, and he reigned two years. **9** But his servant Zimri, commander of half his chariots, conspired against him. When he was at Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza, who was over the household in Tirzah, **10** Zimri came in and struck him down and killed him, in the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, and reigned in his place. **11** When he began to reign, as soon as he had seated himself on his throne, he struck down all the house of Baasha. He did not

**leave him a single male of his relatives or his friends. 12 Thus Zimri destroyed all the house of Baasha, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke against Baasha by Jehu the prophet, 13 for all the sins of Baasha and the sins of Elah his son, which they sinned and which they made Israel to sin, provoking the LORD God of Israel to anger with their idols. 14 Now the rest of the acts of Elah and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?**

**16:8** *twenty-sixth year of Asa.* 886 B.C. (CSB)

*Elah.* Baasha, like Jeroboam, had only one successor. After Elah reigned for only two years, Zimri struck him down. (TLSB)

*two years.* 886–885 B.C. (CSB)

**16:9** *commander.* In the power struggle for Israel’s throne, military leaders played a prominent role. (TLSB)

*drunk.* The fact that Elah was carousing at Tirzah while the army was laying siege to Gibbethon (v. 15) indicates he had little perception of his responsibilities as king. (CSB)

*Arza.* An official who may have helped plan Elah’s assassination. (TLSB)

**16:10–22** *Zimri.* The cavalry commander Zimri had barely proclaimed himself king when the troops “encamped against Gibbethon” (v 15) made Omri “the commander of the army, king over Israel” (v 16). He, in turn, had to eliminate Tibni, another contender. Zimri became a proverbial example of an assassin (cf 2Ki 9:31). (TLSB)

**16:10** *twenty-seventh year of Asa.* 885 B.C. (CSB)

**16:11** *friends.* Probably the chief adviser to the king. (CSB)

**16:12** *word of the LORD... by the prophet Jehu.* See vv. 1–4. Zimri did not consciously decide to fulfill Jehu’s prophecy, but unwittingly he became the instrument by which Jehu’s prediction was fulfilled when he conspired against Elah and destroyed the dynasty of Baasha. (CSB)

**16:13** *their idols.* A reference to all the paganism in Israel’s religious observances, including the use of the golden calves in worship (see 12:28; 14:9). (CSB)

Lit, “vanities.” (TLSB)

**16:8–14** After only two years as king, Baasha’s son Elah is assassinated (while “drinking himself drunk”). One of his military leaders, Zimri, seizes the throne. How easily sinful human beings slip into gross wickedness and debauchery! Instead of indulging our sinful nature, the Lord cultivates in us “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22–23). Such fruit grows within a heart made right through faith in Jesus. • Holy Spirit, keep me from falling into the sins that destroy, and guide me in what is good and right. Amen. (TLSB)

*Zimri Reigns in Israel*

**15 In the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, Zimri reigned seven days in Tirzah. Now the troops were encamped against Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines, 16 and the troops who were encamped heard it said, “Zimri has conspired, and he has killed the king.” Therefore all Israel**

**made Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel that day in the camp. 17 So Omri went up from Gibbethon, and all Israel with him, and they besieged Tirzah. 18 And when Zimri saw that the city was taken, he went into the citadel of the king's house and burned the king's house over him with fire and died, 19 because of his sins that he committed, doing evil in the sight of the LORD, walking in the way of Jeroboam, and for his sin which he committed, making Israel to sin. 20 Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and the conspiracy that he made, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?**

**16:15** *twenty-seventh year of Asa. 885 B.C. (CSB)*

*Zimri reigned seven days.* He did not control the entire military (v 9) and could not maintain his coup. (TLSB)

**16:16** *all Israel.* The unanimity did not last (v 21). (TLSB)

*Omri, the commander of the army.* He held a higher rank than Zimri did under Elah (v. 9). (CSB)

**16:17** *Tirzah.* The royal residence. (CSB)

**16:18** *burned ... over him.* Suicide. Archaeologists found the tenth/early ninth-century phase of Tirzah's development destroyed. (CSB)

**16:15–20** Zimri lasts only seven days as king before the troops conspire against him and make Omri the king. Zimri dies when he burns down the king's house. When we despise the preaching of God's Word, disaster can come quickly. That is why repentance and the drowning of our sinful nature—the old Adam—is a daily activity, as we receive renewal in the Holy Spirit through the life-giving Word of Scripture. • Heavenly Father, forgive us the sins of this day, and renew us by the Holy Spirit to live for Him who died and rose again for our salvation. Amen. (TLSB)

*Omri Reigns in Israel*

**21 Then the people of Israel were divided into two parts. Half of the people followed Tibni the son of Ginath, to make him king, and half followed Omri. 22 But the people who followed Omri overcame the people who followed Tibni the son of Ginath. So Tibni died, and Omri became king. 23 In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri began to reign over Israel, and he reigned for twelve years; six years he reigned in Tirzah. 24 He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver, and he fortified the hill and called the name of the city that he built Samaria, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill. 25 Omri did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did more evil than all who were before him. 26 For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in the sins that he made Israel to sin, provoking the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger by their idols. 27 Now the rest of the acts of Omri that he did, and the might that he showed, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? 28 And Omri slept with his fathers and was buried in Samaria, and Ahab his son reigned in his place.**

**16:21** *Tibni.* Supported by “half of the people,” Omri's rival maintained his claim to the throne for about five years. Then he died, presumably a casualty of the civil war. (TLSB)

**16:22** *Tibni died.* It is not clear whether Tibni's death was due to natural causes or the result of the military struggle for control of the land. (CSB)

*Omri.* Founder of one of the more stable dynasties, Omri restored order in the Northern Kingdom. During the reign of his successors (Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram), the relationship between Israel and Judah

changed from one of hostility to one of peace and cooperation. The former army commander acted wisely when he moved the capital to “the hill of Samaria” (v 24). Virtually inaccessible on three sides it was able to hold off the Assyrian army for three years (2Ki 17:5). Ahab completed construction of the city. It thrived for c 150 years. (TLSB)

*overcame*. Militarily, which likely caused Tibni’s death. (TLSB)

**16:23** *thirty-first year of Asa*. 880 B.C. (CSB)

*twelve years*. 885–874. The 12 years of Omri’s reign include the four years of struggle between Omri and Tibni (cf. vv. 15, 29). (CSB)

*Tirzah*. Omri had been able to capture Tirzah in a matter of days (vv. 15–19). (CSB)

**16:24** *Samaria*. Seven miles northwest of Shechem, Samaria rose about 300 feet above the surrounding fertile valleys (referred to as a “wreath” in Isa 28:1). The original owner may have been persuaded to sell his property (see 21:3) on the condition that the city be named after him (cf. Ru 4:5). The site provided an ideal location for a nearly impregnable capital city for the northern kingdom (see 20:1–21; 2Ki 6:25; 18:9–10). With the establishment of this royal city, the kings of the north came to possess a royal citadel-city like that of the Davidic dynasty (see 2Sa 5:6–12). Archaeologists have discovered that Omri and Ahab also adorned it with magnificent structures to rival those Solomon had erected in Jerusalem. From this time on, the northern kingdom could be designated by the name of the royal city, just as the southern kingdom could be designated by its capital, Jerusalem (see, e.g., 21:1; Isa 10:10; Am 6:1). (CSB)

Hbr *shomron*. From verb meaning “watch” or “guard.” 7 mi NW of Shechem. The city was enclosed by a casemate wall in Phoenician style masonry. (TLSB)

**16:25** *more...than all*. Omri’s alliance with Ethbaal of Tyre and Sidon (Omri’s son Ahab married Ethbaal’s daughter Jezebel to seal the alliance) led to widespread Baal worship in the northern kingdom (vv. 31–33) and eventually to the near extinction of the Davidic line in the southern kingdom. This marriage alliance must have been established in the early years of Omri’s reign (see note on v. 23), perhaps to strengthen his hand against Tibni (see vv. 21–22). (CSB)

Omri had a much longer reign than most other kings, thus greater opportunity for evil. We do not know for certain why the Lord tolerated Omri whereas other kings were overthrown. Although he was evil, Omri established peaceful relations with more faithful Judah. (TLSB)

**16:27** *acts...he did*. Omri’s military and political accomplishments were not of importance for the purposes of the writer of Kings (see Introduction: Theme). Apart from establishing Samaria as the capital of the northern kingdom, about all that is known of him is that he organized a governmental structure in the northern kingdom that was in place during the rule of his son, Ahab (see 20:14–15). Omri’s dynasty, however, endured for over 40 years. A century and a half later (732 B.C.) Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria referred to Israel as the “house of Omri” in his annals. (CSB)

According to extrabiblical sources, Omri achieved international fame. Assyrian records referred to Israel as “the land of Omri” even after his dynasty had vanished. However, considerations other than military and political interest guided the writer of 1Ki in the selection of what he recorded in his prophetic history (see pp 526–27). Hence, he devoted only eight verses (vv 21–28) to this king, who appears to have been one of Israel’s more illustrious rulers. By contrast, the story of Omri’s son Ahab takes up six chapters (16:29–22:40), more space than is accorded any other king since Solomon. This is likely because of Ahab’s repentance and his interaction with Elijah (21:25–29). (TLSB)

**16:21–28** During Omri’s reign in Israel, civil war breaks out, with half the people following him and half following Tibni. Omri’s forces are victorious, and Tibni dies. Amid all the conflict of our age, true peace resides in Jesus Christ, through whom our sins are forgiven so that we are reconciled to our heavenly Father and may be reconciled to one another. • “Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word; Curb those who by deceit or sword Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son And bring to naught all He has done.” Amen. (LSB 655:1) (TLSB)

*Ahab Reigns in Israel*

**29** In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri began to reign over Israel, and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. **30** And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. **31** And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. **32** He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. **33** And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. **34** In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.

**16:29** Conciliatory attitude toward the southern king, no doubt fostered by his father, later led to full cooperation of the two kingdoms against a foreign aggressor (cf 22:1–4). (TLSB)

*thirty-eighth year of Asa.* 874 B.C. (CSB)

*Ahab.* Mentioned in the annals of Shalmaneser III of Assyria (858–824 BC). (TLSB)

*twenty-two years.* 874–853 B.C. (CSB)

**16:30** *did evil ... more than all.* Omri sinned more than those before him (see v. 25), and Ahab sinned more than his father had. Evil became progressively worse in the royal house of the northern kingdom. Nearly a third of the narrative material in 1,2 Kings concerns the 34-year period of the reigns of Ahab and his two sons, Ahaziah and Joram. In this period the struggle between the kingdom of God (championed especially by Elijah and Elisha) and the kingdom of Satan was especially intense. (CSB)

Under Ahab’s reign, apostasy—the cause of Israel’s fall a century later—reached a new high Without necessarily observing a chronological sequence, the author presents a series of events as evidence of this “evil in the sight of the LORD.” Ahab’s marriage to a Phoenician princess and worship of her national idol, known as Melkart, deserves early mention to show how far he went to “provoke the LORD ... to anger” (v 33). Capable of violating this basic requirement of the covenant, he could be expected to defy other laws of the Lord. Yet, the Lord ended the reigns of other evil rulers but allowed Ahab to continue, in view of his repentance (cf 21:25–29). (TLSB)

**16:31** *married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal.* The Jewish historian Josephus refers to Ethbaal as a king-priest who ruled over Tyre and Sidon for 32 years. Ahab had already married Jezebel during the reign of his father. (CSB)

*Sidonians.* From the ancient city-state Sidon on the eastern coast of the Great Sea. (TLSB)

*Baal.* Perhaps Melqart, the local manifestation of Baal in Tyre, whose worship was brought to Israel by Jezebel. It is probable that Ahab participated in the worship of this deity at the time of his marriage. The names of Ahab’s sons (Ahaziah, “The LORD gasps”; Joram, “The LORD is exalted”)

suggest that Ahab did not intend to replace the worship of the Lord with the worship of Baal but to worship both deities in a syncretistic way. (CSB)

**16:32** *house of Baal which he built in Samaria.* Ahab imported the Phoenician Baal worship of his wife Jezebel into the northern kingdom by constructing a temple of Baal in Samaria, just as Solomon had erected the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. This pagan temple and its sacred stone (see note on 14:23) were later destroyed by Jehu (2Ki 10:21–27). (CSB)

Through his wife, Jezebel, Ahab introduced Phoenician Baal worship to Israel. (TLSB)

**16:33** *than did all the kings of Israel.* Ahab elevated the worship of Baal to an official status in the northern kingdom at the beginning of his reign. (CSB)

**16:34** As the king's marriage showed his evil heart, so the rebuilding of Jericho showed the people's disregard of the Lord's will. Hiel's loss of his sons from his firstborn to his youngest showed that God fulfilled His threat regarding Jericho. Subsequent history would show the fulfillment of His threat regarding Israel. (TLSB)

*built Jericho.* Does not mean that Jericho had remained uninhabited since its destruction by Joshua (see Jos 18:21; Jdg 1:16; 3:13; 2Sa 10:5), but that it had remained an unwalled town or village. During the rule of Ahab, Hiel fortified the city by reconstructing its walls and gates (see 9:17 for a similar use of "rebuild"). This violated God's intention that the ruins of Jericho (Jos 6:26) be a perpetual reminder that Israel had received the land of Canaan from God's hand as a gift of grace. Accordingly, Hiel suffered the curse Joshua had pronounced. (CSB)

**16:29–34** Ahab, who marries Jezebel the Sidonian, becomes the most notorious of the long line of wicked kings (v 30). Once people reject God's Word, anything goes, as the lives of Ahab and Jezebel attest. Yet by His grace, God can call people from the deepest shadow of darkness to repentance and salvation. In Christ, we have the light of life; in Him, we receive the grace and love of our heavenly Father. • "Renew me, O eternal Light, And let my heart and soul be bright, Illumined with the light of grace That issues from Your holy face." Amen. (LSB 704:1). (TLSB)