

# CHAPTER 16

This chapter relates wholly to the kingdom of Israel, and the revolutions of that kingdom — many in a little time. The utter ruin of Jeroboam's family, after it had been twenty-four years a royal family, we read of in the foregoing chapter. In this chapter we have,

- I.** The ruin of Baasha's family, after it had been but twenty-six years a royal family, foretold by a prophet (v. 1-7), and executed by Zimri, one of his captains (v. 8-14).
- II.** The seven days' reign of Zimri, and his sudden fall (v. 15-20).
- III.** The struggle between Omri and Tibni, and Omri's prevalency, and his reign (v. 21-28).
- IV.** The beginning of the reign of Ahab, of whom we shall afterwards read much (v. 29-33).
- V.** The rebuilding of Jericho (v. 34). All this while, in Judah, things went well.

## <img alt="decorative icon" data-bbox="334 555 375 578"/> 1 KINGS 16:1-14

### RUIN OF BAASHA'S FAMILY FORETOLD

Here is,

**I.** The ruin of the family of Baasha foretold. He was a man likely enough to have raised and established his family — active, politic, and daring; but he was an idolater, and this brought destruction upon his family.

**1.** God sent him warning of it before.

**(1.)** That, if he were thereby wrought upon to repent and reform, the ruin might be prevented; for God threatens, that he may not strike, as one that desires not the death of sinners.

**(2.)** That, if not, it might appear that the destruction when it did come, whoever might be instruments of it, was the act of God's justice and the punishment of sin.

2. The warning was sent by *Jehu the son of Hanani*. The father was a seer, or prophet, at the same time (<sup><4407></sup>2 Chronicles 16:7), and was sent to Asa king of Judah; but the son, who was young and more active, was sent on this longer and more dangerous expedition to Baasha king of Israel.

*Juniores ad labores — Toil and adventure are for the young.* This Jehu was a prophet and the son of a prophet. Prophecy, thus happily entailed, was worthy of so much the more honour. This Jehu continued long in his usefulness, for we find him reproving Jehoshaphat (<sup><4492></sup>2 Chronicles 19:2) above forty years after, and writing the annals of that prince, <sup><4424></sup>2 Chronicles 20:34. The message which this prophet brought to Baasha is much the same with that which Ahijah sent to Jeroboam by his wife.

(1.) He reminds Baasha of the great things God had done for him (v. 2): *I exalted thee out of the dust to the throne of glory*, a great instance of the divine sovereignty and power, <sup><0928></sup>1 Samuel 2:8. Baasha seemed to have raised himself by his own treachery and cruelty, yet there was a hand of Providence in it, to bring about God's counsel, concerning Jeroboam's house; and God's owning his advancement as his act and deed does by no means amount to the patronising of his ambition and treachery. It is God that puts power into bad men's hands, which he makes to serve his good purposes, notwithstanding the bad use they make of it. *I made thee prince over my people*. God calls Israel his people still, though wretchedly corrupted, because they retained the covenant of circumcision, and there were many good people among them; it was not till long after that they were called *Loammi, not a people*, <sup><2009></sup>Hosea 1:9.

(2.) He charges him with high crimes and misdemeanours,

[1.] That he had caused *Israel to sin*, had seduced God's subjects from their allegiance and brought them to pay to dunghill-deities the homage due to him only, and herein he had *walked in the way of Jeroboam* (v. 2), and been *like his house*, v. 7.

[2.] That he had himself *provoked God to anger with the work of his hands*, that is, by worshipping images, the *work of men's hands*; though perhaps others made them, yet he served them and thereby avowed the making of them, and they are therefore called the *work of his hands*.

[3.] That he had *destroyed the house of Jeroboam* (v. 7), *because he killed him*, namely, Jeroboam's son and all his: if he had done that with an eye to God, to his will and glory, and from a holy indignation against the sins of

Jeroboam and his house, he would have been accepted and applauded as a minister of God's justice; but, as he did it, he was only the tool of God's justice, but a servant to his own lusts, and is justly punished for the malice and ambition which actuated and governed him in all he did. Note, Those who are in any way employed in denouncing or executing the justice of God (magistrates or ministers) are concerned to do it from a good principle and in a holy manner, lest it turn into sin to them and they make themselves obnoxious by it.

**(3.)** He foretels the same destruction to come upon his family which he himself had been employed to bring upon the family of Jeroboam, v. 3, 4. Note, Those who resemble others in their sins may expect to resemble them in their plagues, especially those who seem zealous against such sins in others as they allow themselves in; the house of Jehu was reckoned with for the blood of the house of Ahab, ~~2000~~ Hosea 1:4.

**II.** A reprieve granted for some time, so long that Baasha himself dies in peace, and is buried with honour in his own royal city (v. 6), so far is he from being a prey either to the dogs or to the fowls, which yet was threatened to his house, v. 4. He lives not either to see or feel the punishment threatened, yet he was himself the greatest delinquent. Certainly there must be a future state, in which impenitent sinners will suffer in their own persons, and not escape, as often they do in this world. Baasha died under no visible stroke of divine vengeance for aught that appears, but *God laid up his iniquity for his children*, as Job speaks, ~~1219~~ 1 Kings 21:19. Thus he often visits sin. Observe, Baasha is punished by the destruction of his children after his death, and his children are punished by the abuse of their bodies after their death; that is the only thing which the threatening specifies (v. 4), that the dogs and the fowls of the air should eat them, as if herein were designed a tacit intimation that there are punishments after death, when death has done its worst, which will be the sorest punishments and are most to be dreaded; these judgments on the body and posterity signified judgments on the soul when separated from the body, by him who, *after he has killed, has power to cast into hell*.

**III.** Execution done at last. Baasha's son Elah, like Jeroboam's son Nadab, reigned two years, and then was slain by Zimri, one of his own soldiers, as Nadab was by Baasha; so like was his house made to that of Jeroboam, as was threatened, v. 3. Because his idolatry was like his, and one of the sins for which God contended with him being the destruction of Jeroboam's

family, the more the destruction of his own resembled that, the nearer did the punishment resemble the sin, as face answers to face in a glass.

**1.** As then, so now, the king himself was first slain, but Elah fell more ingloriously than Nadab. Nadab was slain in the field of action and honour, he and his army then besieging Gibbethon (<sup><1157></sup>1 Kings 15:27); but the siege being then raised upon that disaster, and the city remaining still in the Philistines' hands, the army of Israel was now renewing the attempt (v. 15) and Elah should have been with them to command in chief, but he loved his own ease and safety better than his honour or duty, or the public good, and therefore staid behind to take his pleasure; and, when he was *drinking himself drunk in his servant's house*, Zimri killed him, v. 9, 10. Let it be a warning to drunkards, especially to those who designedly drink themselves drunk, that they know not but death may surprise them in that condition.

**(1.)** Death comes easily upon men when they are drunk. Besides the chronic diseases which men frequently bring themselves into by hard drinking, and which cut them off in the midst of their days, men in that condition are more easily overcome by an enemy, as Amnon by Absalom, and are liable to more bad accidents, being unable to help themselves,

**(2.)** Death comes terribly upon men in that condition. Finding them in the act of sin, and incapacitated for any act of devotion, that day *comes upon them unawares* (<sup><12134></sup>Luke 21:34), like a thief.

**2.** As then, so now, the whole family was cut off, and rooted out. The traitor was the successor, to whom the unthinking people tamely submitted, as if it were all one to them what kind they had, so that they had one. The first thing Zimri did was to *slay all the house of Baasha*; thus he held by cruelty what he got by treason. His cruelty seems to have extended further than Baasha's did against the house of Jeroboam, for he left to Elah *none of his kinsfolks or friends* (v. 11), *none of his avengers* (so the word is), none that were likely to avenge his death; yet divine justice soon avenged it so remarkably that it was used as a proverb long after, *Had Zimri peace who slew his master?* (<sup><1198></sup>2 Kings 9:31. In this,

**(1.)** The word of God was fulfilled, v. 12.

**(2.)** The sins of Baasha and Elah were reckoned for, with which they *provoked God by their vanities*, v. 13. Their idols are called their *vanities*,

for they cannot profit nor help. Miserable are those whose deities are vanities.

## <1165> 1 KINGS 16:15-28

### THE REIGNS OF ZIMRI AND OMRI

Solomon observes (~~382~~ Proverbs 28:2) that *for the transgression of a land many were the princes thereof* (so it was here in Israel), *but by a man of understanding the state thereof shall be prolonged* — so it was with Judah at the same time under Asa. When men forsake God they are out of the way of rest and establishment. Zimri, and Tibni, and Omri, are here striving for the crown. Proud aspiring men ruin one another, and involve others in the ruin. These confusions end in the settlement of Omri; we must therefore take him along with us through this part of the story.

**I.** How he was chosen, as the Roman emperors often were, by the army in the field, now encamped before Gibbethon. Notice was soon brought thither that Zimri had slain their king (v. 16) and set up himself in Tirzah, the royal city, whereupon they chose Omri king in the camp, that they might without delay avenge the death of Elah upon Zimri. Though he was idle and intemperate, yet he was their king, and they would not tamely submit to his murderer, nor let the treason go unpunished. They did not attempt to avenge the death of Nadab upon Baasha, perhaps because the house of Baasha had ruled with more gentleness than the house of Jeroboam; but Zimri shall feel the resentments of the provoked army. The siege of Gibbethon is quitted (Philistines are sure to gain when Israelites quarrel) and Zimri is prosecuted.

**II.** How he conquered Zimri, who is said to have reigned seven days (v. 15), so long before Omri was proclaimed king and himself proclaimed traitor; but we may suppose it was a longer time before he died, for he continued long enough to show his inclination to the way of Jeroboam, and to make himself obnoxious to the justice of God by supporting his idolatry, v. 19. Tirzah was a beautiful city, but not fortified, so that Omri soon made himself master of it (v. 17), forced Zimri into the palace, which being unable to defend, and yet unwilling to surrender, he burnt, and himself in it, v. 18. Unwilling that his rival should ever enjoy that sumptuous palace, he

burnt it; and fearing that if he fell into the hands of the army, either alive or dead, he should be ignominiously treated, he burnt himself in it. See what desperate practices men's wickedness sometimes brings them to, and how it hurries them into their own ruin; see the disposition of incendiaries, who set palaces and kingdoms on fire, though they are themselves in danger of perishing in the flame.

**III.** How he struggled with Tibni, and at length got clear of him: *Half of the people followed this Tibni* (v. 21), probably those who were in Zimri's interest, with whom others joined, who would not have a king chosen in the camp (lest he should rule by the sword and a standing army), but in a convention of the states. The contest between these two lasted some years, and, it is likely, cost a great deal of blood on both sides, for it was in the twenty-seventh year of Asa that Omri was first elected (v. 15) and thence the twelve years of his reign are to be dated; but it was not till the thirty-first year of Asa that he began to reign without a rival; then Tibni died, it is likely in battle, *and Omri reigned*, v. 22. Sir Walter Raleigh, in his *History of the World* (2.19.6), enquires here why it was that in all these confusions and revolutions of the kingdom of Israel they never thought of returning to the house of David, and uniting themselves again to Judah, *for then it was better with them than now*; and he thinks the reason was because the kings of Judah assumed a more absolute, arbitrary, and despotic power than the kings of Israel. It was the heaviness of the yoke that they complained of when they first revolted from the house of David, and the dread of that made them ever after averse to it, and attached to kings of their own, who ruled more by law and the rules of a limited monarchy.

**IV.** How he reigned when he was at length settled on the throne.

**1.** He made himself famous by building Samaria, which, ever after, was the royal city of the kings of Israel (the palace at Tirzah being burnt), and in process of time grew so considerable that it gave name to the middle part of Canaan (which lay between Galilee on the north and Judea on the south) and to the inhabitants of that country, who were called *Samaritans*. He bought the ground for *two talents of silver*, somewhat more than 700*l.* of our money, for a talent was 353*l.* 11*s.* 10 1/2*d.* Perhaps Shemer, who sold him the ground, let him have it considerably the cheaper upon condition that the city should be called after his name, for otherwise it would have borne the name of the purchaser; it was called *Samaria*, or *Shemeren* (as it is in the Hebrew), from Shemer, the former owner, v. 24. The kings of

Israel changed their royal seats, Shechem first, then Tirzah, now Samaria; but the kings of Judah were constant to Jerusalem, the city of God. Those that cleave to the Lord fix, but those that leave him ever wander.

**2.** He made himself infamous by his wickedness; for *he did worse than all that were before him*, v. 25. Though he was brought to the throne with much difficulty, and Providence had remarkably favoured him in his advancement, yet he was more profane, or more superstitious, and a greater persecutor, than either of the houses of Jeroboam or Baasha. He went further than they had done in *establishing iniquity by a law*, and forcing his subjects to comply with him in it; for we read of the statutes of Omri, the keeping of which made *Israel a desolation*, <sup><316></sup>Micah 6:16. Jeroboam caused Israel to sin by temptation, example, and allurements; but Omri did it by compulsion.

**V.** How he ended his reign, v. 27, 28. He was in some repute for the might which he showed. Many a bad man has been a stout man. He died in his bed, as did Jeroboam and Baasha themselves; but, like them, left it to his posterity to fill up the measure, and then pay off the scores, of his iniquity.

## <116> 1 KINGS 16:29-34

### AHAB'S REIGN

We have here the beginning of the reign of Ahab, of whom we have more particulars recorded than of any of the kings of Israel. We have here only a general idea given us of him, as the worst of all the kings, that we may expect what the particulars will be. He reigned twenty-two years, long enough to do a great deal of mischief.

**I.** He exceeded all his predecessors in wickedness, *did evil above all that were before him* (v. 30), and, as if it were done with a particular enmity both to God and Israel, to affront him and ruin them, it is said, *He did more purposely to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger*, and, consequently, to send judgments on his land, *than all the kings of Israel that were before him*, v. 33. It was bad with the people when every successive king was worse than his predecessor. What would they come to at last? He had seen the ruin of other wicked kings and their families; yet, instead of taking warning, his heart was hardened and enraged against God

by it. He thought it a *light thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam*, v. 31. It was nothing to break the second commandment by image-worship, he would set aside the first also by introducing other gods; his little finger should fall heavier upon God's ordinances than Jeroboam's loins. Making light of less sins makes way for greater, and those that endeavour to extenuate other people's sins will but aggravate their own.

**II.** He married a wicked woman, who he knew would bring in the worship of Baal, and seemed to marry her with that design. *As if it had been a light thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, he took to wife Jezebel* (v. 31), a zealous idolater, extremely imperious and malicious in her natural temper, addicted to witchcrafts and whoredoms (<sup><1312></sup>2 Kings 9:22), and every way vicious. The false prophetess spoken of <sup><1620></sup>Revelation 2:20 is there called *Jezebel*, for a wicked woman could not be called by a worse name than hers; what mischiefs she did, and what mischief at last befel her (<sup><1333></sup>2 Kings 9:33), we shall find in the following story; this one strange wife debauched Israel more than all the strange wives of Solomon.

**III.** He set up the worship of Baal, forsook the God of Israel and served the god of the Sidonians, Jupiter instead of Jehovah, the sun (so some think), a deified hero of the Phoenicians (so others): he was weary of the golden calves, and thought they had been worshipped long enough; such vanities were they that those who had been fondest of them at length grew sick of them, and, like adulterers, much have variety. In honour of this mock deity, whom they called *Baal* — *lord*, and for the convenience of his worship,

**1.** Ahab built a temple in Samaria, the royal city, because the temple of God was in Jerusalem, the royal city of the other kingdom. He would have Baal's temple near him, that he might the better frequent it, protect it, and put honour upon it.

**2.** He reared an altar in that temple, on which to offer sacrifice to Baal, by which they acknowledged their dependence upon him and sought his favour. O the stupidity of idolaters, who are at a great expense to make one their friend whom they might have chosen whether they would make a god of or no! **3.** He made a grove about his temple, either a natural one, by planting shady trees there, or, if those would be too long in growing, an artificial one in imitation of it; for it is not said he *planted*, but he *made* a grove, something that answered the intention, which was to conceal and so



countenance the abominable impurities that were committed in the filthy worship of Baal. *Lucus, ... lucendo, quia non lucet* — *He that doeth evil hateth the light.*

**IV.** One of his subjects, in imitation of his presumption, ventured to build Jericho, in defiance of the curse Joshua had long since pronounced on him that should attempt it, v. 34. It comes in as an instance of the height of impiety to which men had arrived, especially at Bethel, where one of the calves was, for of that city this daring sinner was. Observe,

**1.** How ill he did. Like Achan he meddled with the accursed thing, turned that to his own use which was devoted to God's honour. He began to build, in defiance of the curse well known in Israel, jesting with it perhaps as a bugbear, or fancying its force worn out by length of time, for it was above 500 years since it was pronounced, ~~<img>~~ Joshua 6:26. He went on to build, in defiance of the execution of the curse in part; for, though his eldest son died when he began, yet he would proceed in contempt of God and his wrath revealed from heaven against his ungodliness.

**2.** How ill he sped. He built for his children, but God wrote him childless; his eldest son died when he began, the youngest when he finished, and all the rest (it is supposed) between. Note, Those whom God curses are cursed indeed; none ever hardened his heart against God and prospered. God keep us back from presumptuous sins, those great transgressions!