

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS  
LESSON 11A  
THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS  
CHAPTER 16**

**INTRODUCTION**

Israel's relationship with God was sliding further downhill. When Jeroboam was king over Israel, he made graven images in the form of golden calves and called the people to worship them as their God who had delivered them out of bondage from Egypt. In about 60 years of Israel's history from Jeroboam to Ahab (930-874 B.C.), the people of Israel bowed down and worshipped Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility. They had forsaken the LORD their God and turned to pagan gods. Bear in mind that they did not stop using the name Jehovah. Their sin was to worship Jehovah in front of the golden calves and mouthing the Name Jehovah and Baal at the same time. They hyphenated the name Jehovah with Baal!

The political scene was no better. Men who aspired to the throne resorted to assassination to gain power. A country could not be stable when the rule of the land changed hands so frequently.

Judah too suffered from spiritual backsliding. Rehoboam did not walk in the ways of David but did evil in the eyes of the LORD. His son Abijam followed in his footsteps. But God was merciful - for David's sake, a good king would ascend to the throne. Asa (Abijam's son) reigned for 41 years and carried out religious reforms in the land. He led the people away from their idolatrous worship back to the LORD their God. For a time, there was spiritual revival.

Chapter 16 gives an account of five kings. Baasha reigned for 24 years – this showed that he was a strong king who could control the land. He died a natural death (16:1-7), and was succeeded by his son, Elah who reigned only for 2 years (16:8-10). Elah was assassinated by Zimri, an officer in his army, who made himself king. But Zimri reigned for only 7 days. He committed suicide when another contender to the throne attacked him (16:11-20). After the death of Zimri, the people made Omri king over Israel but not before he defeated Tibni, a rival contender for the throne (16:21-28). Omri was succeeded by his son Ahab (16:29-34). The divine writer devoted only 14 verses to chronicle the reign of Omri, but used no less than five chapters relating the reign of Ahab (1 Kings 16-22).

**OUTLINE**

1. Baasha, Elah & Zimri (vv.1-22);
2. Omri the Achiever (vv.23-28);
3. Ahab -Like Father Like Son (vv.29-34)

## COMMENTARY

### Baasha, Elah & Zimri – 16:1-22

**Baasha** (vv.1-6) assassinated Nadab, Jeroboam's son, in order to make himself king over Israel. He ruled for 24 years (908-886 B.C.). He was not a good king. When he became king, he wasted no time in killing all the descendants of Jeroboam. This fulfilled the word of the LORD through the prophet Ahijah (14:10). Baasha was not punished by God for this deed of killing Jeroboam and his descendants. He was punished for his own sins. The Bible described his 24 years of ministry in one verse. 1 Kings 16:2 say, "*Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel; and **thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins;***" [Emphasis added]

Jehu, the LORD'S prophet was sent to pronounce God's judgment against Baasha for he had made the people of Israel sin, and provoked the LORD to anger with their sins of idolatry. God would destroy his posterity like he destroyed the house of Jeroboam (16:2, 3). Baasha died a natural death, and was succeeded by his son, Elah (16:6, 8). The same consequence of sin that happened to Jeroboam was told to Baasha. In fact Baasah was the instrument raised by God to punish Jeroboam. Instead of learning from Jeroboam's mistakes, Baasha like a fool repeated them.

Baasha is known as the king who never learned.

**Elah** (vv.7-14) ruled only for two years (886-885 B.C.). He was a weak king who followed in the footsteps of his father, Baasha. One flaw in his character was his addiction to alcohol. He got himself drunk in the house of his steward Arza instead of enduring the hardship of battle in the field against the Philistines (16:15-16). Zimri was King Elah's military commander to one half of his army of chariots. When the king was drunk, Zimri assassinated him in the house of Arza. It was possible that Azra was one of the conspirators who helped to get the king drunk, and subsequently killed. This ended Elah's brief rule as king over Israel.

Elah is known as the king who drank his kingdom away.

**Zimri** (vv.15-22) declared himself king over Israel but he ruled for only seven days (885 B.C). He wasted no time in securing his position by killing all the members of Baasha's family. He did not spare "one that pisseth against the wall", that is he did not leave a single male alive. Zimri's dastardly act fulfilled the word of the LORD, which was spoken against Baasha by the prophet Jehu.

At the time of the assassination, the other half of the army was encamped against Gibbethon, a city of the Philistines. When the soldiers heard that Zimri had assassinated Elah, they, together with the rest of Israel, made Omri, who was the other military commander, the king of Israel (16:16). Omri led his army to the capital city Tirzah which was defended by the armies of Zimri. But Omri soon

defeated Zimri's men and took control of the city. Zimri fled to the royal palace, set it on fire and committed suicide (the first for a king of Israel).

Zimri is known as the king gave up a kingdom by suicide.

### **Omri the Achiever – 16:23-28**

Omri's succession to the throne was not without obstacles. Tibni, the son of Ginath (nothing more was mentioned about him) led some people to oppose Omri (16:22). In the civil war that ensued, Omri and his followers defeated Tibni who died in battle. Omri ascended to the throne and ruled over Israel for 12 years (885-874 B.C.).

Omri became one of the most significant rulers of Israel. Although the divine author devoted a short passage to his reign, he made considerable development to the nation. The intent of the divine writer was not to chronicle the reign of a king just for secular purposes but to record events, people and places from the perspective of God's plan. The writer was interested in whether King Omri walked in the ways of the LORD. Two facts were recorded in regard to Omri.

The first fact was that Omri bought a hill called Samaria from the owner, Shemer for two talents of silver, which was equivalent to US\$8,448 at modern day silver prices. He built a city and named it Samaria, retaining the name of the hill. He then shifted the capital city from Tirzah to Samaria where he ruled for six years until his death. The purchase of Samaria was politically, economically, and militarily wise. Samaria was more strategic

than Tirzah. It had great economic potential being nearer to the trade routes. And militarily, it was on a hill, which made the city more secure and much easier to defend. It remained the capital of Israel until the Assyrians destroyed it in 722 B.C.

The second fact was that Omri did evil in the eyes of the LORD and he "earned" the dubious reputation of having done "worse than all that were before him" (16:25). The divine writer was not interested in Omri's political, economic and military achievements for these were temporal.

Omri was noted for other achievements during his rule over Israel. Apart from securing the hill of Samaria and building the capital city on it, he rescued the land from anarchy. Before he ascended to the throne, the land was politically unstable and there was much unrest among the people. He managed to bring stability to the nation. In the short period of his reign, the nation became a power to be reckoned with among the neighbouring countries of Syria and Moab, which would otherwise have crushed it. A strong alliance was established with the Phoenicians when his son, Ahab, married Jezebel. Thus they enjoyed the advantage of the Phoenician seaport for their overseas trade.

Omri is known as a political king who trusted in the arm of flesh.

### **Ahab -Like Father Like Son 16:29-34**

Omri died and was buried in Samaria. Ahab, his son, reigned over

Israel in Samaria for 22 years (874-853 B.C.). The historical record of Ahab's reign began in chapter 16 and ended in chapter 22. In Judah, it was Asa's 38<sup>th</sup> year when Ahab ascended the throne of the Northern Kingdom.

The writer described Ahab as a wicked king who robbed his father of the reputation for being the worst king (16:30). It was mentioned twice that Ahab was the son of Omri (16:29 and 16:30) – like father like son! The name Ahab even suggested that he took after his father for it can be translated “resembling the father.”

Ahab's marriage to Jezebel was highlighted suggesting that it had a great impact on him. Jezebel was a princess. She was the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of the Zidonians (or Sidonians). Ahab was strongly influenced by his wife in the worship of Baal. The word “Baal” which meant “lord” or “master” was the supreme name of the Phoenician and Canaanite god of fertility -- the god of rain and grain. Ahab added to the worship of the graven images of the calves which Jeroboam said represent the LORD (YAHWEH), with a third place of worship in Samaria, his capital city. He jumped from the frying pan into the fire when he turned to the worship of Baal.

It was pure unadulterated idolatry, a very grave sin against the LORD. Ahab went on to build an altar in honour of Baal. As if that was not enough, he built a temple in Samaria for Baal too. Then he added the image of the goddess of fortune Asherah (a grove). The divine writer charged Ahab for provoking the LORD God of Israel

(16:33). We could safely conclude that Jezebel (the name means “unhusbanded or unexalted”) was a very active worshipper. She wanted Ahab and the people to worship Baal. Later we will learn that she recruited her own priests. She therefore made sure that Ahab worshipped her gods.

During his reign, Ahab must have engaged Hiel the Bethelite to rebuild Jericho (16:33). The rebuilding of Jericho was a dangerous task because years earlier Joshua had pronounced a curse on it (Joshua 6:26): *Cursed be the man before the LORD, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it.*

Hiel lost his two sons, the firstborn whose name was Abiram when the foundation was laid, and his youngest son, Segub when the gates were erected.

### **PRACTICAL VALUE**

One salient lesson from the sacred account is that, in the final analysis, the one thing that really counts is our relationship with God. If we have a right relationship with God, serving Him and walking in His ways, we will receive His approval and favour. On the other hand, those who worshipped other gods and sinned against God can be assured of God's wrath. We ought to be constantly mindful of this truth. Omri was a sad example. He achieved great things for himself and the land, but all that did

not impress God at all. God requires our fear, love, and obedience. We need to be careful that we do not measure a person’s worth based on his achievements, financial standing, and social status.

Little sins will grow into bigger sins. From Solomon to Abijam and from Jeroboam to Ahab, we see the evil in Judah and Israel gaining momentum. Each king was more wicked than the last – to borrow the words of Hosea, the prophet, “*for they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind*” (8:7). Only repentance and God’s forgiveness can reverse the moral decline in the nation, church or individual. AMEN

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**MONDAY:** 1 Kings 16:1-14; 2 Chronicles 16:7-10.

**TUESDAY:** 1 Kings 16:15-28; Mark 8:34-37.

**WEDNESDAY:** 1 Kings 16:29-34; Joshua 6:26-27.

**THURSDAY:** 1 Kings 16:1-34

**FRIDAY:** 1 Kings 16:1-34

**Discussion Questions**

1. What do you observe about the sinful ways of Omri (v.25) and Ahab (v.30)? What do these teach us regarding the self-propagating power of sin?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

2. What sin of Ahab provoked the LORD to anger? How did he go beyond what previous kings of Israel had done, and what led him to do it?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

3. Describe who is a modern day Baasha?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

4. Describe who is a modern day Elah?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

5. Describe who is a modern day Zimri?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

6. Describe a modern day Omri?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

7. Describe who is a modern day Jezebel?