

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

Jehu the prophet denounces the destruction of Baasha, 1 Kings 16:1-7. Zimri conspires against him, and slays him and his family, and reigns seven days, 1 Kings 16:8-15. The people make Omri king, and besiege Zimri in Tirzah; who, finding no way to escape, sets fire to his palace, and consumes himself in it, 1 Kings 16:16-20. The people are divided, half following Tibni, and half Omri; the latter faction overcomes the former, Tibni is slain, and Omri reigns alone, 1 Kings 16:21-23. He founds Samaria, 1 Kings 16:24. His bad character and death, 1 Kings 16:25-28. Ahab reigns in his stead; marries Jezebel, restores idolatry, and exceeds his predecessors in wickedness, 1 Kings 16:29-33. Hiel the Beth-elite rebuilds Jericho, 1 Kings 16:34.

Verse 1

Then the word of the Lord came to Jehu - Of this prophet we know nothing but from this circumstance. It appears from 2 Chronicles 16:7-10, that his father Hanani was also a prophet, and suffered imprisonment in consequence of the faithful discharge of his ministry to Asa.

Verse 2

Made thee prince over my people - That is, in the course of my providence, I suffered thee to become king; for it is impossible that God should make a rebel, a traitor, and a murderer, king over his people, or over any people. God is ever represented in Scripture as doing those things which, in the course of his providence, he permits to be done.

Verse 7

And because he killed him - This the Vulgate understands of Jehu the prophet, put to death by Baasha: Ob hanc causam occidit eum, hoc est. Jehu filium Hanani prophetam; "On this account he killed him, that is, Jehu the prophet, the son of Hanani." Some think Baasha is intended, others Jeroboam, and others Nadab the son of Jeroboam. This last is the sentiment of Rab. Sol. Jarchi, and of some good critics. The order is here confused; and the seventh verse should probably be placed between the 4th and 5th.

Verse 9

Captain of half his chariots - It is probable that Zimri, and some other who is not here named, were commanders of the cavalry.

Verse 11

He slew all the house of Baasha - He endeavored to exterminate his race, and blot out his memory; and the Jews say, when such a matter is determined, they not only destroy the house of the person himself, but the five neighboring houses, that the memory of such a person may perish from the earth.

Verse 13

For all the sins of Baasha - We see why it was that God permitted such judgments to fall on this family. Baasha was a grievous offender, and so also was his son Elah; and they caused the people to sin; and they provoked God to anger by their idolatries.

Verse 15

The people were encamped against Gibbethon - It appears that, at this time, the Israelites had war with the Philistines, and were now besieging Gibbethon, one of their cities. This army, hearing that Zimri had rebelled and killed Elah, made Omri, their general, king, who immediately raised the siege of Gibbethon, and went to attack Zimri in the royal city of Tirzah; who, finding his affairs desperate, chose rather to consume himself in his palace than to fall into the hands of his enemies.

Verse 21

Divided into two parts - Why this division took place we cannot tell; the people appear to have been for Tibni, the army for Omri; and the latter prevailed.

Verse 23

In the thirty and first year of Asa - There must be a mistake here in the number thirty-one; for, in 1 Kings 16:10 and 1 Kings 16:15, it is said that Zimri slew his master, and began to reign in the twenty-seventh year of Asa; and as Zimri reigned only seven days, and Omri immediately succeeded him, this could not be in the thirty-first, but in the twenty-seventh year of Asa, as related above. Rab. Sol. Jarchi reconciles the two places thus: "The division of the kingdom between Tibni and Omri began in the twenty-seventh year of Asa; this division

lasted five years, during which Omri had but a share of the kingdom. Tibni dying, Omri came into the possession of the whole kingdom, which he held seven years; this was in the thirty-first year of Asa. Seven years he reigned alone; five years he reigned over part of Israel; twelve years in the whole. The two dates, the twenty-seventh and thirty-first of Asa, answering, the first to the beginning of the division, the second to the sole reign of Omri.â€• Jarchi quotes Sedar Olam for this solution.

Verse 24

He bought the hill Samaria of Shemer - This should be read, â€œHe bought the hill of Shomeron from Shomer, and called it Shomeron, (i.e., Little Shomer), after the name of Shomer, owner of the hill.â€• At first the kings of Israel dwelt at Shechem, and then at Tirzah; but this place having suffered much in the civil broils, and the place having been burnt down by Zimri, Omri purposed to found a new city, to which he might transfer the seat of government. He fixed on a hill that belonged to a person of the name of Shomer; and bought it from him for two talents of silver, about £707 3s. 9d. Though this was a large sum in those days, yet we cannot suppose that the hill was very large which was purchased for so little; and probably no other building upon it than Shomer's house, if indeed he had one there. Shomeron, or, as it is corruptly written, Samaria, is situated in the midst of the tribe of Ephraim, not very far from the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and about midway between Dan and Beer-sheba: thus Samaria became the capital of the ten tribes, the metropolis of the kingdom of Israel, and the residence of its kings. The kings of Israel adorned and fortified it; Ahab built a house of ivory in it, 1 Kings 22:39; the kings of Syria had magazines or storehouses in it, for the purpose of commerce; see 1 Kings 20:34. And it appears to have been a place of considerable importance and great strength.

Samaria endured several sieges; Ben-hadad king of Syria, besieged it twice, 1 Kings 20:1, etc.; and it cost Shalmaneser a siege of three years to reduce it, 2 Kings 17:6, etc. After the death of Alexander the Great, it became the property of the kings of Egypt; but Antiochus the Great took it from the Egyptians; and it continued in the possession of the kings of Syria till the Asmoneans took and razed it to the very foundation. Gabinius, pro-consul of Syria, partially rebuilt it, and called it Gabiniana. Herod the Great restored it to its ancient splendor, and placed in it a colony of six thousand men, and gave it the name of Sebaste, in honor of Augustus. It is now a place of little consequence.

Verse 25

Did worse than all - before him - Omri was,

1.An idolater in principle;

2.An idolater in practice;

3.He led the people to idolatry by precept and example; and, which was that in which he did worse than all before him,

4.He made statutes in favor of idolatry, and obliged the people by law to commit it. See Micah 6:16, where this seems to be intended: For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab.

Verse 31

He took to wife Jezebel - This was the head and chief of his offending; he took to wife, not only a heathen, but one whose hostility to the true religion was well known, and carried to the utmost extent.

1.She was the idolatrous daughter of an idolatrous king;

2.She practiced it openly;

3.She not only countenanced it in others, but protected it, and gave its partisans honors and rewards;

4.She used every means to persecute the true religion;

5.She was hideously cruel, and put to death the prophets and priests of God;

6.And all this she did with the most zealous perseverance and relentless cruelty.

Notwithstanding Ahab had built a temple, and made an altar for Baal, and set up the worship of Asherah, the Sidonian Venus, which we, 1 Kings 16:33, have transformed into a grove; yet so well known was the hostility of Jezebel to all good, that his marrying her was esteemed the highest pitch of vice, and an act the most provoking to God, and destructive to the prosperity of the kingdom.

Verse 33

Ahab made a grove - אֲשֶׁרָה (Asherah), Astarte, or Venus; what the Syriac calls an idol, and the Arabic, a tall tree; probably meaning, by the last, an image of Priapus, the obscene keeper of groves, orchards, and gardens.

Verse 34

Did Hiel the Beth-elite build Jericho - I wish the reader to refer to my note on Joshua 6:26, for a general view of this subject. I shall add a few observations. Joshua's curse is well known: "Cursed be the man before the Lord that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho; he shall lay the foundation thereof in his first-born; and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it," Joshua 6:26. This is the curse, but the meaning of its terms is not very obvious. Let us see how this is to be understood from the manner in which it was accomplished.

"In his days did Hiel the Beth-elite build Jericho; he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his first-born, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub; according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua the son of Nun." This prediction was delivered upwards of five hundred years before the event; and though it was most circumstantially fulfilled, yet we know not the precise meaning of some of the terms used in the original execration, and in this place, where its fulfillment is mentioned. There are three opinions on the words, lay the foundation in his first-born, and set up the gates in his youngest son.

1. It is thought that when he laid the foundation of the city, his eldest son, the hope of his family, died by the hand and judgment of God, and that all his children died in succession; so that when the doors were ready to be hung, his youngest and last child died, and thus, instead of securing himself a name, his whole family became extinct.

2. These expressions signify only great delay in the building; that he who should undertake it should spend nearly his whole life in it; all the time in which he was capable of procreating children; in a word, that if a man laid the foundation when his first-born came into the world, his youngest and last son should be born before the walls should be in readiness to admit the gates to be set up in them; and that the expression is of the proverbial kind, intimating greatly protracted labor, occasioned by multitudinous hinderances and delays.

3. That he who rebuilt this city should, in laying the foundation, slay or sacrifice his firstborn, in order to consecrate it, and secure the assistance of the objects of his idolatrous worship; and should slay his youngest at the completion of the work, as a gratitude-offering for the assistance received. This latter opinion seems to be countenanced by the Chaldee, which represents Hiel as slaying his first-born Abiram, and his youngest son Segub.

But who was Hiel the Beth-elite? The Chaldee calls him Hiel of Beth-mome, or the Beth-momite; the Vulgate, Hiel of Beth-el; the Septuagint, Hiel the Baithelite; the Syriac represents Ahab as the builder: "Also in his days did Ahab build Jericho, the place of execration;" the Arabic, "Also in his days did Hiel build the house of idols - to wit, Jericho." The MSS. give us no help. None of these versions, the Chaldee excepted, intimates that the children were either slain or died; which circumstance seems to strengthen the opinion, that the passage is to be understood of delays and hinderances. Add to this, Why should the innocent children of Hiel suffer for their father's presumption? And is it likely that, if Hiel lost his first-born when he laid the foundation, he would have proceeded under this evidence of the Divine displeasure, and at the risk of losing his whole family? Which of these opinions is the right one, or whether any of them be correct, is more than I can pretend to state. A curse seems to rest still upon Jericho: it is not yet blotted out of the map of Palestine, but it is reduced to a miserable village, consisting of about thirty wretched cottages, and the governor's dilapidated castle; nor is there any ruin there to indicate its former splendor.