



## First Kings - Chapter Sixteen

**IV**      **1 Kings 15:25-16:34 - From Nadab to Ahab**  
**(continues/concludes)**

**IV.b**    **1 Kings 15:33-16:7 - Second Dynasty: Baasha Reigns over Israel**  
**(continues/concludes)**

### Summary of Chapter Sixteen

This chapter is an account of one evil king after another and the fate they met because of their behaviour. Israel moved further and further away from the ways of the Lord as they followed the ways of these kings.

Having come to the throne of Israel by killing King Nadab and all the descendants of Jeroboam, God sent the prophet Jehu to instruct him that his descendants will face the same fate. When he died he was replaced by his son Elah but his reign was short lived for he was murdered by one of his servants called Zimri, who took the throne for himself.

Zimri's reign was extremely brief, lasting just one week. When Israel heard he had killed Elah they sent the leader of their army Omri to besiege Tirzah. Zimri realised his fate was sealed so he set fire to the king's house and died there.

There was now division within the northern tribes with half supporting Tibni and the other half supporting Omri. Tibni was killed and Omri became the sole king. Omri established Samaria as the new capital city in the north and became the worst king so far. He was succeeded by his son, the infamous King Ahab.

Ahab took Jezebel as his foreign queen and established Baal worship throughout Samaria and his kingdom, making him an even more evil king than his father Omri. During his reign Hiel rebuilt Jericho, fulfilling a prophecy made by Joshua when the city was first conquered many generations before.

<sup>15:33</sup> In the third year of King Asa of Judah, Baasha son of Ahijah began to reign over all Israel at Tirzah; he reigned for twenty-four years.  
<sup>34</sup> He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, walking in the way of Jeroboam and in the sin that he caused Israel to commit.

### 1 Kings 15:33-34

Baasha son of Ahijah began to reign over all Israel at Tirzah. As expected with a man who came to the throne through assassination, Baasha was a wicked man and ushered in a dreadful period for Israel, both spiritually and politically. It seems that Jeroboam had moved his court from Shechem to Tirzah (1 Kings 14:17), and now Baasha continues to reign from there.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, walking in the way of Jeroboam and in the sin that he caused Israel to commit. The summary puts it simply. Although Baasha was not a genetic descendent of Jeroboam, having just murdered his family, he was certainly a spiritual descendent of Jeroboam, perpetuating the evil that pervaded the northern kingdom.

<sup>16:1</sup> The word of the Lord came to Jehu son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, <sup>2</sup> ‘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 caused my people Israel to sin, provoking me to anger with their sins, <sup>3</sup> therefore, I will consume Baasha and his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat. <sup>4</sup> 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 air shall eat.’

### 1 Kings 16:1-4

Jehu son of Hanani is only mentioned on a couple occasions in Scripture. Here, he prophesies against Baasha and later he will prophesy to King Jehoshaphat of Israel for fighting alongside King Ahab. Although it contains a rebuke for doing so, his prophecy is more favourable for Jehoshaphat was generally a good king. This was some 50 years after this word to Baasha, indicating that he was one of the longest serving prophets recorded in Scripture. Jehu also published a record of the kings in his day that was available to the authors of Chronicles at least: <<***Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, from first to last, are written in the Annals of Jehu son of Hanani, which are recorded in the Book of the Kings of Israel***>> (2 Chronicles 20:34). His father Hanani is also mentioned in 2 Chronicles 16:7-10, where it describes how he suffered imprisonment because he was a faithful prophet in speaking to King Asa.

Since I exalted you out of the dust and made you leader over my people Israel.

1 Kings 15:27 states that Baasha was head of a conspiracy to kill Nadab, the son of Jeroboam. It reveals nothing of God's hand with Baasha, but here it is learned that behind the scenes God moved even through the conspiracy of Baasha against Nadab. Baasha was not from the noble classes and his name, 'he who lays waste', tells only too accurately what kind of a ruler he proved himself to be.

You have walked in the way of Jeroboam. God's judgement would come upon Baasha and his house both because of his being like the house of Jeroboam and because he destroyed Jeroboam's descendants; refer to 1 Kings 15:29. The fact that God had ordained that Jeroboam's house should be destroyed did not absolve Baasha of moral responsibility for his actions. God, who looks upon the heart, sees him but as an assassin for the accomplishment of his ambitious designs, slaying king Nadab and the entire house of Jeroboam. Similar revulsion to bloodshed is expressed in: *<<And the Lord said to him, 'Name him Jezreel; for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel>>* (Hosea 1:4), even though that bloodshed was also God-ordained, according to 1 Kings 21:21-24. The reason Hosea named his first son Jezreel is reflected in 2 Kings 9:14-10:17 when Jehu killed King Joram, starting a series of killings including Jezebel and all of Ahab's descendants.

The death of Judas Iscariot is often debated as to whether he had any real choice but to betray Jesus unto death. The Christ had to die and someone had to be the one to give him up to the authorities. God's judgement on Judas seems to indicate that he was culpable because he did have the choice to follow Jesus and not betray him, but he did not and paid with his life.

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 air shall eat. This same judgement was promised and fulfilled against the house of Jeroboam; refer to 1 Kings 14:11. It was considered a special disgrace to have a corpse desecrated and kept from proper burial.

<sup>5</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Baasha, what he did, and his power, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

<sup>6</sup> Baasha slept with his ancestors, and was buried at Tirzah; and his son Elah succeeded him. <sup>7</sup> Moreover, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Jehu 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.

## 1 Kings 16:5-7

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

The word of the Lord came by the prophet Jehu son of Hanani against Baasha and his house. In v.1 Jehu received the word from the Lord. Here, the author is confirming that he had delivered it to Baasha before he died.

In being like the house of Jeroboam, and also because he destroyed it. Baasha's condemnation is double for he had acted in the wicked ways of Jeroboam and he also murdered Nadab and the descendants of Jeroboam for personal gain.

## IV.c 1 Kings 16:8-14 - Elah Reigns over Israel

Baasha's son Elah took over where his father left off. When he was drunk one of his army commanders murdered him and took the throne for himself.

<sup>8</sup> In the twenty-sixth year of King Asa of Judah, Elah son of Baasha began to reign over Israel in Tirzah; he reigned for two years. <sup>9</sup> 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 in charge of the palace at Tirzah, <sup>10</sup> Zimri came in and struck him down and killed him, in the twenty-seventh year of King Asa of Judah, and succeeded him.

## 1 Kings 16:8-10

Elah son of Baasha began to reign over Israel in Tirzah; he reigned for two years. The hope of every king is to pass the throne on to his son and to further a lasting dynasty. Because Baasha was a wicked king, God did not bless his dynasty and his son only reigned for two years.

When he was at Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza. Elah is not the only king in history to have behaved in this way but it is hardly fitting for a king who was serving God's people. Interestingly, Jesus too was accused of this sort of behaviour. However, in his case the accusations were made out of malice with intent to discredit Jesus: <<*For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, "He has a demon"; the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!" Nevertheless, wisdom is vindicated by all her children*>> (Luke 7:33-35).

**King Lemuel gives advice on kings and alcohol:** <<*It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink; or else*

*they will drink and forget what has been decreed, and will pervert the rights of all the afflicted>> (Proverbs 31:4-5).*

Zimri came in and struck him down and killed him, in the twenty-seventh year of King Asa of Judah, and succeeded him. Even as Baasha gained the throne through assassination, so the son of Baasha was assassinated by Zimri, an officer in the army of Israel, i.e. Zimri, commander of half his chariots.

<sup>11</sup> When he began to reign, as soon as he had seated himself on his throne, he killed all the house of Baasha; he did not leave him a single male of his kindred or his friends. <sup>12</sup> Thus Zimri destroyed all the house of Baasha, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke against Baasha by the prophet Jehu — <sup>13</sup> because of all the sins of Baasha and the sins of his son Elah that they committed, and that they caused Israel to commit, provoking the Lord God of Israel to anger with their idols. <sup>14</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Elah, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

#### 1 Kings 16:11-14

When he began to reign, as soon as he had seated himself on his throne, he killed all the house of Baasha. Zimri in turn fulfils the word of the prophet Jehu (v.7), although he then reigns for only seven days (v.15) — just before the civil war described in vv.21-22, from which Omri emerges as king. This was common practice in the ancient world, and was exactly what Baasha did to the house of Jeroboam; refer to 1 Kings 15:29. David's treatment of the house of Saul was a glorious exception to this common practice. This massacre was an exact fulfilment of the word of the Lord through the Prophet Jehu, the son of Hanani (vv.2-4).

*In less than fifty years the first two dynasties of Israel's kings had come to an end and every member of their families had been exterminated. God meant to make their doom an example to those who should thereafter live ungodly.*

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

#### IV.d 1 Kings 16:15-20 - Third Dynasty: Zimri Reigns over Israel

Zimri was never accepted as the king of Israel and as soon as the army heard of his accession they sent their leader Omri to lay siege on Tirzah. Realising his position was untenable Zimri set fire to his palace and died in the blaze.

<sup>15</sup> In the twenty-seventh year of King Asa of Judah, Zimri reigned for seven days in Tirzah. Now the troops were encamped against

Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines, <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> So Omri went up from Gibbethon, and all Israel with him, and they besieged Tirzah. <sup>18</sup> When Zimri saw that the city was taken, he went into the citadel of the king’s house; he burned down the king’s house over himself with fire, and died – <sup>19</sup> because of the sins that he committed, doing evil in the sight of the Lord, walking in the way of Jeroboam, and for the sin that he committed, causing Israel to sin. <sup>20</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and the conspiracy that he made, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

### 1 Kings 16:15-20

Zimri reigned for seven days in Tirzah. The man who assassinated Elah, the son of Baasha, did not enjoy a blessed reign. His end came soon.

Now the troops were encamped against Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines. This siege had been continuing since the time of King Nadab who was killed by Baasha there: <<*Baasha son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him; and Baasha struck him down at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines; for Nadab and all Israel were laying siege to Gibbethon*>> (1 Kings 15:27).

Therefore all Israel made Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel that day in the camp. This shows that the democratic influence in Israel was greater than is often thought. The people - especially it would seem the army - simply did not want Zimri to reign as king over them. They therefore rejected his authority and appointed Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel.

Omri besieged Zimri at Tirzah. This site is probably to be identified with modern Tell el-Farah that was excavated in the 1940s. The first Iron Age level at the site is covered by an ash layer, which indicates destruction, perhaps relating to Omri’s capture of the city.

When Zimri saw that the city was taken, he went into the citadel of the king’s house; he burned down the king’s house over himself with fire, and died. Zimri is one of the few suicides in the Bible, along with Samson (Judges 9:54), King Saul (1 Samuel 31:4), Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:23), and Judas Iscariot (Matthew 27:5). The Bible never approves of suicide. It is sin; the sin of self-murder. Yet, the church is wrong if it regards suicide as the unforgivable sin, as Jesus confirms: <<*Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever*

*blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin>> (Mark 3:28-29), and: <<And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven>> (Luke 12:10). Anyone who does commit suicide has given in to the lies and deceptions of Satan, whose purpose is to kill and destroy according to Jesus in John 10:10. The loved ones of those who commit suicide need to find it in their hearts to forgive those who do choose to end their own lives for whatever reason. Again, this is in live with the teaching of Jesus: <<Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven>> (Luke 6:37).*

Zimri only reigned for seven days, but in those days he walked in the way of Jeroboam. Jeroboam is once again held up as the benchmark for evil and wickedness in a king, although there will be those who surpassed even him. God allowed many of the wicked kings of Israel to reign much longer than he did Zimri, but he was under no obligation to do so. God is within his rights to bring judgement sooner rather than later.

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#### IV.e 1 Kings 16:21-23 - Fourth Dynasty: Omri Reigns over Israel

If life in Israel was not bad enough as part of a divided kingdom, it now got worse as the northern tribes divided into two. Half followed Omri and the other half wanted Tibni to be their king, and civil war alone would determine the outcome. When Tibni died, Omri reigned supreme, although never supremely!

<sup>21</sup> Then the people of Israel were divided into two parts; half of the people followed Tibni son of Ginath, to make him king, and half followed Omri. <sup>22</sup> But the people who followed Omri overcame the people who followed Tibni son of Ginath; so Tibni died, and Omri became king. <sup>23</sup> In the thirty-first year of King Asa of Judah, Omri began to reign over Israel; he reigned for twelve years, six of them in Tirzah.

#### 1 Kings 16:21-23

Then the people of Israel were divided into two parts; so Tibni died, and Omri became king. Omri defeated the forces loyal to Tibni, so Tibni died - presumably, killed by Omri after the defeat of his forces. The people of Israel fell into their own civil war; yet neither this nor any other of God's dreadful judgements could

bring them to repentance; which is further evidence of their prodigious impiety and incorrigibility, and how ripe they were for ruin.

The division of the kingdom between Tibni and Omri began in the twenty-seventh year of King Asa (v.15); this division lasted about five years, during which Omri, had but a share of the northern kingdom. Tibni's death allowed Omri to come into the possession of the whole kingdom, which he held seven years; this was in the thirty-first year of King Asa of Judah.

He reigned for twelve years, six of them in Tirzah. Tirzah had become the sight of the royal household since the time of Jeroboam, who moved there from Shechem at some point in his reign. As will be seen in the next section, Samaria would become the next and final capital for the northern kingdom.

#### IV.f 1 Kings 16:24-28 - Samaria the New Capital

The only recorded events of Omri's reign are the purchase of the hill of Samaria and the building of a new northern capital on it. The authors of 1-2 Kings did not consider anything else of any great importance, even though Omri's house held the throne for over 100 years and the northern kingdom in due course became so identified with this dynasty that even after the Omride period it could be referred to in Assyrian records as 'the land of Omri.' This suggests that Omri was a more substantial international figure than could be deduced simply from First Kings. Archaeologists have determined that the city of Samaria was inhabited from the time of Omri, circa 886-875 BC, until it was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC.

<sup>24</sup> He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; he fortified the hill, and called the city that he built Samaria, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill.

#### 1 Kings 16:24

He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver. At least the land was purchased legitimately for Omri could have taken it by force had he chosen to do so in the manner of many kings throughout history. Indeed, King Ahab would take Naboth's vineyard when Jezebel devised plans to have Naboth murdered following false allegations against him; refer to 1 Kings 21:1-16.

And called the city that he built Samaria. This became the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel. Omri built a capital that was politically neutral since it was a new city with no previous tribal associations and was in a strong defensive position on top of a hill. Excavations at Samaria show that Omri was the first builder on the one hundred metre high hill. This site was a good choice, for it was to withstand several sieges.

<sup>25</sup> Omri did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; he did more evil than all who were before him. <sup>26</sup> For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam son of Nebat, and in the sins that he caused Israel to commit, provoking the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger by their idols. <sup>27</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Omri that he did, and the power that he showed, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? <sup>28</sup> Omri slept with his ancestors, and was buried in Samaria; his son Ahab succeeded him.

### 1 Kings 16:25-28

Omri did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; he did more evil than all who were before him. Although it goes on to say that he walked in all the way of Jeroboam, Omri was even more evil and distant from the ways of the Lord than even the wicked Jeroboam had been. This makes Omri the sixth king of Israel since the division of the once-unified kingdom. Jeroboam was the first king, and each of the five kings after him followed in the evil ways of Jeroboam. He seems to have formulated laws: *<<For you have kept the statutes of Omri and all the works of the house of Ahab, and you have followed their counsels. Therefore I will make you a desolation, and your inhabitants an object of hissing; so you shall bear the scorn of my people>>* (Micah 6:16), making Jeroboam's calf-worship, or other forms of idolatry, obligatory throughout his realm, which remained in force until the end of the kingdom, more than two hundred years later.

In the records of secular history, Omri is one of the more successful and famous kings of ancient Israel. Omri's fame as a monarch, while downplayed by the author of Kings, was widely recognised in other places. The Moabite stone, discovered in 1868, refers to him as the conqueror of Moab. Assyrian inscriptions make mention of him as a great warrior. For years the Assyrians referred to Israel as the house of Omri.

Omri means heaping; and by his iniquity he helped to heap up wrath against his dynasty, which was finally executed thirty-six years later on his great-grandson Joram, to the total extinction of the guilty house: *<<Jehu drew his bow with all his strength, and shot Joram between the shoulders, so that the arrow pierced his heart; and he sank in his chariot>>* (2 Kings 9:24), and: *<<So Jehu killed all who were left of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, all his leaders, close friends, and priests, until he left him no survivor>>* (2 Kings 10:11).

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

#### IV.g 1 Kings 16:29-30 - Ahab Reigns over Israel

This brief statement introduces arguably the worst king in history. The account of his reign will continue over several chapters with his death being recorded in Chapter 22.

<sup>29</sup> In the thirty-eighth year of King Asa of Judah, Ahab son of Omri began to reign over Israel; Ahab son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria for twenty-two years. <sup>30</sup> Ahab son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him.

#### 1 Kings 16:29-30

In the thirty-eighth year of King Asa of Judah. Asa reigned for 41 years in total; refer to 1 Kings 15:10. During his 41 years there were seven different kings of Israel, none of them good.

Ahab son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord more than all who were before him. Each of the previous kings of Israel walked in the wicked pattern of Jeroboam. Ahab distinguished himself in being worse than Jeroboam and even Omri. His father Omri was a political and economic success for Israel but a spiritual failure. Ahab picked up where his father had left off. Reinforcing the father-son relationship is the name Ahab, which can be translated brother of the father or resembling the father. It can be said of some sons, "He has his father's eyes." It could be said of Ahab, "He has his father's lies."

Jeroboam intended to serve the Lord through idolatrous images such as the golden calf and in disobedient ways, e.g. altars and high places other than Jerusalem. Ahab introduced the worship of completely new, pagan gods. In his disobedience Jeroboam said, "I will worship the Lord, but do it my way." Ahab said, "I want to forget about the Lord completely and worship Baal." In his later years, Solomon tragically worshipped pagan gods. Yet Omri and Ahab were far worse in that they commanded the worship of idols. He made statutes in favour of idolatry, and obliged the people by law to commit it.

Many centuries later three Jewish exiles in Babylon showed the courage needed in such situations: *<<Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought in; so they brought those men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar said to them, 'Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up? Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the statue that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you out of my*

*hands?’ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defence to you in this matter. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up’>> (Daniel 3:13-18).*

#### IV.h 1 Kings 16:31-34 - Ahab Marries Jezebel and Worships Baal

The last and worst of the Israelite kings who ruled during the reign of Asa in Judah was Ahab son of Omri. He added to the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat a marriage to a foreign woman, Jezebel, who inevitably led him into the worship of a foreign god, Baal.

Baal is not strictly a name but a title meaning ‘lord’ for the ancient Semitic god Hadad – ‘Lord Hadad’ or Baal-hadad – first known from the ancient city of Ebla in north western Syria and from Egypt, but most thoroughly understood through the Ugaritic texts from Ras Shamra on the Syrian coast. These texts depict Baal-hadad as a storm god; the fertility of the land depends on his sending rain. He was known as a son of the high god El and husband of the goddess Anat; his enemies were Yam or ‘Sea’ and Mot or ‘Death’; his weapons were thunder and lightning; and his symbolic representation was the bull.

Baal worship presented an attractive alternative or supplement to the worship of the Lord Yahweh for many Israelites throughout their time in Canaan, no doubt partly because that land was so utterly dependent on rain for its fertility. This is a summary introducing the wicked foreign queen Jezebel, who would become as infamous as her husband and clearly the driving force behind his reign.

<sup>31</sup> And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, he took as his wife Jezebel daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. <sup>32</sup> He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. <sup>33</sup> Ahab also made a sacred pole. Ahab did more to provoke the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than had all the kings of Israel who were before him.

#### 1 Kings 16:31-33

He took as his wife Jezebel daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. Even as the foreign wives of Solomon had led to his spiritual downfall, so Ahab’s foreign wife Jezebel led him and the nation into deep idolatry. Ethbaal means ‘With Baal’. Jezebel’s name may come from a cultic cry used in the worship of Baal meaning ‘Where is Baal?’ Translated into Hebrew the name was also a verbal pun that the Israelites must have relished.

Zebel in Hebrew means dung! Jezebel was a woman infamous for her idolatry, and cruelty, and sorcery, and filthiness.

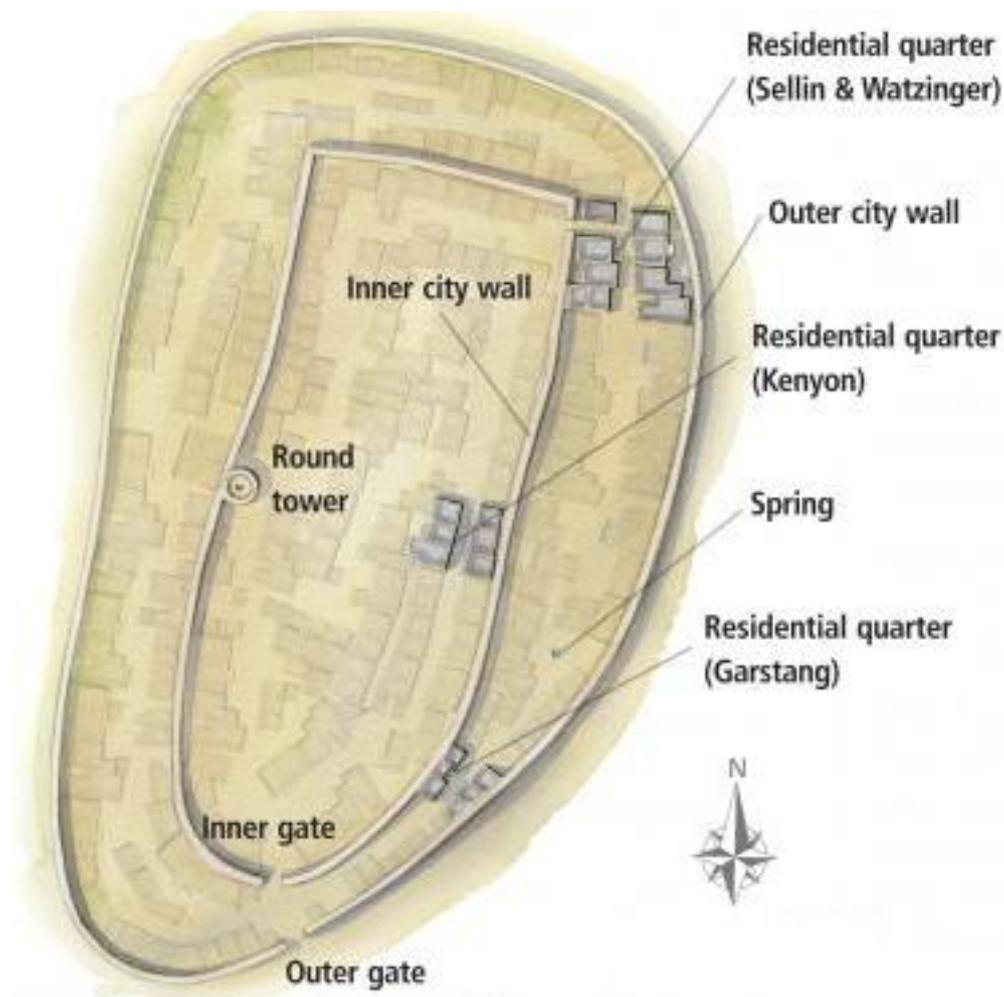
<sup>34</sup> In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho; he laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by Joshua son of Nun.

### 1 Kings 16:34

In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. It seems that Ahab wanted to challenge the prophecy of Joshua after the destruction of the city: <<*Joshua then pronounced this oath, saying, ‘Cursed before the Lord be anyone who tries to build this city – this Jericho! At the cost of his firstborn he shall lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest he shall set up its gates!’*>> (Joshua 6:26). If Ahab did think that he could rebuild Jericho without being affected by this curse, he was wrong: 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 son of Nun. It is not recorded exactly how the sons of Hiel died; they may have died as a curse or Hiel may have sacrificed them. Archæological excavations have uncovered evidence of a practice in ancient biblical times called foundation sacrifices in which children were buried, maybe alive, in the foundations of buildings.

This was a merciful warning to Ahab that he ignored. God told him, “You cannot go against my word without paying the price. Hiel of Bethel, the man you directed to rebuild Jericho, has found this to be true. Take this warning seriously.” Yet Ahab did not take this warning seriously.

Joshua had pronounced a curse on anyone who might rebuild Jericho, and the authors of 1-2 Kings understand this curse as the prophetic word of the Lord. Although the text does not say specifically how the two sons of Hiel died, it is possible that he offered them in sacrifice, or that they died as a special judgement from God, in fulfilment of Joshua’s curse. Child sacrifice was a prominent feature among the polytheistic Canaanite religions of the day. Israel’s Scriptures, however, were steadfastly opposed to any such practice. Solomon’s altars for Chemosh and Molech in 1 Kings 11:7 could have been the point of entry of this pagan abomination into Israel, and the Phœnician Jezebel would have encouraged it. If the sons of Hiel died by sacrifice, this would be evidence of the difference between Israel’s past under Joshua and its present under an apostate monarchy; Israelites no longer conquer the Canaanites at Jericho but rather embrace their religion there.



The City of Jericho

Jericho, today Tell es-Sultan, is perhaps the oldest city on earth, and it is the lowest city on the surface of the planet at circa 750 feet or 229m below sea level. Jericho has undergone massive excavation work; major digs were led by Ernst Sellin and Carl Watzinger (1907-1909, and 1911), John Garstang (1930-1936), and Kathleen Kenyon (1952-1958). Many important finds have been made at the site, one of the most notable being a city wall, some 4.5 feet or 1.5m wide, attached to a monumental round stone tower. These are some of the earliest fortifications known to mankind.

The diagram above portrays some of the remains from the excavations at Jericho from various periods of its history. Thus, the outer city wall comes from the Late Middle Bronze Age (2000-1550 BC), whereas the inner city wall dates to the Early Bronze Age (3200-2200 BC). Jericho was the first city west of the Jordan captured by the Israelites under the command of Joshua; refer to Joshua Chapter 6. Whether or not there exist archaeological remains from that destruction is a hotly debated issue among archaeologists. Following the Israelite destruction, Jericho was abandoned for centuries until a new settlement was established by Hiel the Bethelite in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century BC.