

Who was King Baasha in the Bible?

Baasha was king of Israel from 909-886 BC. His contemporary in Judah was King Asa, the great-grandson of King Solomon. The two kings were polar opposites—while Asa “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as his father David had done” (1 Kings 15:11), King Baasha was an evil ruler and followed idolatrous practices.

Baasha took the throne after assassinating King Nadab son of Jeroboam while Nadab was attacking a Philistine town (1 Kings 15:27). Baasha then killed Jeroboam’s entire family. Although Baasha may not have known it, his actions to secure his throne were actually a part of God’s will. Years earlier, through Ahijah the prophet, God had pronounced judgment on Jeroboam and his descendants for their evil practices (1 Kings 14:1-16). It could be that Baasha had heard of the prophecy against Jeroboam, but he did not learn any lessons from Jeroboam’s fate; instead, he continued in Jeroboam’s wickedness. Because of Baasha’s rebellion against God’s Law, God spoke to the prophet Jehu and proclaimed the same judgment on Baasha’s house that Jeroboam’s family had received: complete destruction (1 Kings 16:1-4).

Throughout his reign, King Baasha was at war against King Asa (1 Kings 15:16, 32). Baasha originally had a treaty with the king of Syria, Ben-Hadad, but, while Baasha was building fortifications in Ramah to keep anyone from going in or out of Judah, Asa took all the silver and gold from the Jerusalem treasuries and sent it to Ben-Hadad, asking the Syrians to ally with him instead. Ben-Hadad agreed, switched alliances, and sent his armies to attack the northern kingdom of Israel. This proved disastrous for Israel, as Ben-Hadad took the cities of Ijon, Dan, Abel, and Beth Maakah, as well as the region of Kinnereth and the territory of the tribe of Naphtali (verse 20).

It seems that Baasha died of natural causes (1 Kings 16:6), but, when his son Elah succeeded him, the Lord's judgment was swift in coming. After King Elah had reigned only two years, one of his commanders, Zimri, assassinated him while he was getting drunk at the house of one of his administrators (verses 9-10). Zimri then did as Baasha had done to Jeroboam's household and killed Baasha's entire family, not sparing "a single male, whether relative or friend" (verse 11).