

Who was King Omri in the Bible?

King Omri was the sixth king of the northern kingdom of Israel. Despite his precarious ascension to the throne, Omri ruled for twelve years (885-874 BC) before his son, King Ahab, succeeded him. As the others before him, Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, but Omri is noted in the Bible for being the worst of the kings to that point (1 Kings 16:25).

Omri's reign began amidst turmoil. King Elah had reigned for two years before he was assassinated by one of his officials, Zimri (1 Kings 16:8-14). Zimri reigned for only seven days (1 Kings 16:15-20). The Israelites heard of Zimri's plot against Elah and "proclaimed Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel that very day there in the camp" (1 Kings 16:16). Omri and his men laid siege to the capital city of Tirzah. Upon seeing this, Zimri went into the royal palace and set it on fire, killing himself. Not everyone was sure they wanted Omri to be their king; the people of Israel were split over whom to support. Half of them rallied to Omri, but the other half preferred Tibni for king (1 Kings 16:21). "But Omri's followers proved stronger than those of Tibni son of Ginath. So Tibni died and Omri became king" (1 Kings 16:22).

Omri took undisputed control of Israel during the thirty-first year of King Asa's reign in the southern kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 16:23). Omri died in the thirty-eighth year of Asa's reign, which accounts for only eight years of the twelve that Omri ruled. This means that Omri must have first risen to power in the twenty-seventh year of Asa and then spent four years in conflict with Tibni. Omri ruled for six years in Tirzah, and during his reign he purchased a hill called Samaria, an easily defended natural stronghold (1 Kings 16:23-24). Samaria remained the capital of Israel for as long as the northern kingdom lasted. The city of Samaria and its surrounding area would later become

the home of the despised Samaritans during Jesus' time.

As did the kings of the ten northern tribes of Israel before him, Omri committed the same sins as Jeroboam, and increasingly so. First Kings 16:25-26 says, "Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord and sinned more than all those before him. He followed completely the ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat, committing the same sin Jeroboam had caused Israel to commit, so that they aroused the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, by their worthless idols." Ahab, Omri's infamous son, went on to do even more evil in God's eyes (1 Kings 16:30-33). The dynasty begun by Omri lasted four generations before God judged their wickedness and brought an end to Omri's line.