

Who was King Zimri in the Bible?

Two people named Zimri are mentioned in the Bible. Numbers 25:14 mentions Zimri, son of Salu, a Simeonite prince. Nothing more is revealed of this Zimri. The second Zimri, of whom we know more, became the fifth king in the northern kingdom of Israel, ruling while Asa was king over Judah. First Kings 16 details the treasonous way Zimri became king, his brief reign of seven days, and his suicide before he could be assassinated by the next king.

First, some background to Zimri's history. While King Baasha reigned in Israel, a prophet delivered a message from the Lord. The Lord was angry with Baasha for the way he had led Israel into sin. God told him, "So now I will destroy you and your family, just as I destroyed the descendants of Jeroboam son of Nebat. The members of Baasha's family who die in the city will be eaten by dogs, and those who die in the field will be eaten by vultures" (1 Kings 16:3-4).

When Baasha died, his son Elah became king and continued the evil of his father. He reigned for two years until one of his own military officials, Zimri, decided to assassinate him. While Elah was drinking with his palace administrator, Azra, Zimri crashed the party and murdered the drunken Elah (1 Kings 16:9). He immediately sought out and murdered every member of Elah's family to protect his claim to the throne. Without realizing it, Zimri was the fulfillment of God's judgment on Elah's father, Baasha (verse 11). With all of Baasha's family dead, Zimri took the throne of Israel, believing himself invincible. That fantasy lasted seven days.

While Zimri gloated over his coup, ruling from a city called Tisrah, members of Israel's army learned what he had done. Infuriated, they chose a new commander, Omri, and marched

against Zimri. Receiving word that the army was coming against him, Zimri locked himself inside the citadel of his palace and burned it down around him. His treason thus led to his early death.

Later, Queen Jezebel used Zimri's name as a taunt against Jehu when she learned that he had been anointed the next king over Israel in place of her husband, Ahab (2 Kings 9:31). She falsely compared Jehu's rightful claim to the throne to treasonous Zimri's seizure of it. However, God was not deterred by her protestations and brought her to an unsavory demise. Jehu ordered her servants to throw her out of a window, and they did. She died in the fall, and the dogs ate her body (verses 32-37).

King Zimri had the reputation in Israel of being a traitor, much in the same way that Americans think of Benedict Arnold. Even though Baasha and his son Elah were wicked kings and led Israel into sin, Zimri was equally wicked and took matters into his own hands rather than waiting on God. Daniel 2:21 says that God removes kings and sets up kings. God Himself chose the first king of Israel, Saul (1 Samuel 10:1). And it was God who chose his successors (1 Samuel 16:1; 1 Kings 11:29-31).

We learn from King Zimri that God will not honor our attempts to promote our own greatness. He will not bless selfish plans. In contrast to Zimri's demand for the throne was David's patient waiting on the Lord. David had been anointed as Israel's next king but refused to lift his hand against the reigning King Saul (1 Samuel 26:9). David righteously refused to harm "the Lord's anointed" (verse 11), but Zimri had no such scruples. David refused to take the throne until God handed it to him; Zimri usurped the throne in a mad grab for power. When we, like David, determine to wait on the Lord, He will exalt us in His time (Psalm 37:34; Isaiah 40:31).