

Who was King Elah in the Bible?

Elah was the fourth king of the northern kingdom of Israel. He reigned only from 886 to 885 BC. King Elah was doomed from the very beginning of his reign, for before he took the throne the Lord had sent word through the prophet Jehu against Elah's father, King Baasha, promising to destroy Baasha's family for his sin of leading the people into idolatry. God's judgment on Baasha's house was severe: "I am about to wipe out Baasha and his house. . . . Dogs will eat those belonging to Baasha who die in the city, and birds will feed on those who die in the country" (1 Kings 16:3-4).

King Elah ruled Israel from the city of Tirzah. The years of his reign fell within the reign of King Asa of Judah. Elah followed in his father's footsteps, continuing the practice of idol worship (1 Kings 16:13). For one reason or another, one of Elah's own military officials, Zimri, decided to assassinate King Elah. Zimri took his chance while Elah was getting drunk with Arza, the palace administrator, in Azra's own home (verse 9). Zimri burst in and killed Elah in his dissipated state, subsequently becoming the next king. Zimri's first act as king was to kill every member of Baasha and Elah's family, fulfilling God's prophecy of judgment (verse 11).

Sadly, the idolatry that was now common throughout the kingdom of Israel did not stop with the death of Baasha's family. Zimri was as idolatrous as Elah before him (1 Kings 16:19), and so were many kings after him. God gave the people of Israel many chances to repent by sending word through His prophets, including Elijah and Elisha, but the wickedness of idol worship continued and eventually resulted in God's complete destruction of the kingdom by the Assyrians.