

TABLE 13.1 *Dates of the reigns of the first kings of Israel and Judah*

Israel	Dates	Judah	Dates
Jeroboam	926-906	Rehoboam	926-909
Nadab	906-905	Abijam	909-907
Baasha	905-882	Asa	907-867
Elah	882-881		
Zimri	881		

Source: Gunneweg 1972.

military attack on northern Israel. Galilee was devastated, and as the Israelite king turned his back on the south to concentrate on the enemy in the north, Asa took the chance to build his own border fortress in Ramah, using the materials already present.

Baasha of Israel and his successors (15:25-16:14)

(15:25-32) *Baasha's coup d'état* The narrative now turns its eyes on the kingdom of northern Israel. Here Nadab, son of Jeroboam I, attempted to found a dynasty in the manner of the Davidides in the south. He failed after only a short time (which does not keep him from receiving a poor rating from the editors—it is enough that he was Jeroboam's successor). Nevertheless we see Nadab waging war against the Philistines, indeed upon Philistine territory. He apparently resumed the war which Saul had begun (1 Sam 13-14; 31). We find out nothing about his motives or those of Baasha, his overthrewer. The entire royal family is liquidated in the coup, partly due to collective thinking, partly in fear of blood-revenge. The Bible is not interested in this, however, only stating that everything came to pass as it had to: Jeroboam was sinful, his 'house' had to disappear. The prophet Ahijah had announced as much and Baasha carried it out. Is this a licence for political murder? Not at all: we are told in 16:7 that Baasha and his son will pay for the bloodbath he brought upon the house of Jeroboam. Even if God uses humans as instruments of his judgement, he does not condone their crimes.

(15:33-16:7) *Baasha's Reign* We already know a significant amount about the second (if you include Saul, the third) founder of a dynasty: where he came from, when and how he came to power (15:27-8), and how he became involved in a war on two fronts against Judah and Syria (15:17-22). Now all we learn is that he reigned for twenty-four years in Tirzah, a Manassite city which Jeroboam had already used as a residence (14:17) and which is generally identified as el-Far'ah (about 10 km. north of Nablus). Despite his bloody slaughter of the previous dynasty, the editors regard Baasha as 'walking in the way of Jeroboam'. The criteria for judgement are not political but religious. Baasha may have destroyed a sinful dynasty, but left its sin, the bull cult of Bethel (and Dan), untouched. Thus a prophet confronts him, as with Jeroboam, and gives him a warning and a scolding (vv. 2-4) very similar to that of Ahijah of Shiloh (14:7-11). Both the Deuteronomistic authorship and a conscious effort to draw parallels between the two dynasties are unmistakable. Their fates, as we shall see, are indeed strikingly similar. One can assume that only the name of the prophet, Jehu ben Hanani, and the fact of his appearance at the time of Baasha were known to

the editors. This may be implied by the separate note 16:7, the core of which stems from the Annals, according to some critics.

(16:8-14) *Zimri's reign* As was the case with Jeroboam, woe does not befall the founder of the dynasty, but his son, very soon after his accession. This time it is not war that gives the usurper his chance to strike, but a drinking bout. The rebel Zimri is a high-ranking officer, commander of half the chariot troop, a military form used in Israel since Solomon's times (1 Kings 5:6, 10:26). Again one can draw parallels, this time with the later putsch organized by another officer of a chariot troop, namely Jehu (2 Kings 9). The army often seems to have a hand in overthrowing regimes in northern Israel. The ideas of charismatic leadership and democracy do not seem to have been important factors in their view of monarchy (see Alt, 1951 = 1964). The underlying instability in northern Israel could, however, be attributed to its tribal origins: attempts to centralize power conflict with the centrifugal force of the regions. The editors are not interested in such assumptions. They are only convinced that YHWH steered the history of Israel with justice and purpose. Those who ignore his will cannot expect a stable mutual co-existence.

The period of Omri's dynasty (1 Kings 16:15-18:29)

The dynasty founded in northern Israel by King Omri is of great significance to the political development of the country, which may only have become a true state at this time. Archaeological studies of Palestine have shown that a great amount of building took place during the ninth century across the entire land: city walls and fortifications, administration centres etc. Non-biblical sources from Assyria, Aram, and Moab show reluctant respect for the far-reaching power and influence of Israel at the time of Omri's dynasty. The biblical authors, however, are not interested in the kingdom's fame, describing it as thoroughly godless. Thus the prophets are increasingly brought to the fore, especially Elijah and Elisha. Always loyal to YHWH, they become necessary counterparts to and sometimes comrades of the kings. They set the standards of what is important and right in Israel.

Omri and Ahab of Israel (1 Kings 16:15-34)

(16:15-28) *Omri's Seizure of Power* The rebel Zimri (cf. 16:9) sweeps to power in the place of Baasha's son Elah whom he has murdered. He only survives for one week, however (which does not hinder the editors from bestowing him with the standard judgement given to all Israelite kings: they did nothing to undo 'Jeroboam's sin' of maintaining holy sites in Bethel and Dan, v. 19). Embroiled in war with the Philistines, the army is not pleased with the coup in its capital. Being a chariot officer, Zimri probably represented the urban, Canaanite elements of the state too strongly for the army to tolerate, it being dominated by more Israelite, tribal forces. In any case, the army chief Omri is spontaneously hailed by the 'people' (i.e. the soldiers) as their leader and immediately marches with them to the royal residence in Tirzah. The city is quickly taken, Zimri loses the citadel after apparently setting it alight himself, and is then killed. Not only Zimri, however, yearns for power, but also a certain Tibni: either a loyal follower of Zimri or precisely the opposite, someone

particularly faithful to tribal Israel. Four years later Tibni dies (cf. the dates in 16:15 and 16:23), probably not of natural causes. The victor's name, Omri, is not Israelite, but might be Arabian. Perhaps he worked his way from army general to head of state due to his unusually charismatic personality. He certainly created Israel's first long-living dynasty and achieved political stability. By founding a new capital city belonging to the crown, as David had done before him (cf. 2 Sam 5), Omri took a first step towards such stability. Samaria (later Sebaste) was geopolitically and strategically well situated and could be built without taking larger, existing structures into account. Omri equipped it with a generous acropolis (about 180 × 90 m., from Ahab's time about 200 × 100 m.), and created an opulent city in all respects (cf. Isa 28:1), which served as the royal residence of the Israelites until the destruction of the state. The editors report that the Israelite rulers' religious failings were even worse than those of their predecessors, though they do not explain why.

(16:29–34) **Ahab and Jezebel** Omri's son and successor, Ahab, sinks some degrees lower in the editors' rating system by marrying the Phoenician princess Jezebel, building a temple for Baal in Samaria, and erecting a cult symbol in honour of the goddess Asherah. Baal is the classic Canaanite god of fertility, responsible for nature's rebirth. Asherah is the mother goddess of the Canaanite pantheon and stands at El's, Baal's, or even YHWH's side, presumably symbolized by some wooden object such as a stylized tree. Perhaps these really are signs of Phoenician influence (cf. Jezebel's father's name: Ethbaal). Ahab, however, must have been driven by the need to appease the religious influence of Israel's urban Canaanite population, since Bethel and Dan were mainly Israelite YHWH-worshipping sites (cf. 1 Kings 12:25–30). The note in v. 34 could stem from the 'Annals'. It is unclear what had been constructed in Jericho by that time, although according to archaeological studies it is unlikely that the entire city had already been built. Two sons of Hiel, who was responsible for the construction of Jericho, died during the building of it (they were not ritually killed, cf. Kaiser 1984)—an event interpreted by the editors as an example of God's unambiguous word: Joshua's curse upon Jericho (Josh 6:26) was a prophetic statement.

Elijah and Ahab (1 Kings 17:1–19:21)

(17:1–6) **Elijah's Conflict with Ahab and his Flight** The description of Ahab's mistake is followed immediately by the prophet Elijah's sudden appearance. His name alone is telling: 'My God is YHWH!' Such exclusive worship must have been unusual at that time. Elijah confronts the king with YHWH's word against Ahab's policy of ensuring harmony by syncretizing the worship of YHWH and Baal: the land will suffer drought and hunger. This is a declaration of war against Baal, god of fertility and rain. It will finally be YHWH, not Baal, who brings rain. From here onwards, a tense conflict begins between the two deities which is resolved only in 18:41–5. The prophet of YHWH withdraws to a small east-Jordanian river valley as soon as he has made his declaration. The narrative lays great store by ensuring that each change of scene is directed by a divine order. It is said that Elijah is a man led by God and obedient to him. Miraculously it is ravens,

usually greedy (ravenous) birds, that feed the hermit Elijah. Who can harm such a man?

(17:6–16) **Elijah and the Widow in Zarephath** But Elijah suffers the same fate as his people: his water runs dry. So God sends him on to the Sidon region, home of Queen Jezebel, the lion's den. He expects to find a widow to feed him there. Men of God are often poor, needing the help of others, especially of women. Elijah does not know that the one God has chosen for him this time is terribly impoverished herself. He learns this only after having randomly asked a woman at the gates of Zarephath for water and then for bread. She claims, 'as the Lord your God lives', that she and her son are starving themselves. Elijah repeats his wish, but adding the soothing words, 'Do not be afraid', and continues by prophesying an endless supply of food. The editors explicitly remark that it comes to pass as Elijah had predicted. The power and truth of a prophet's word is proved repeatedly, it being a hallmark of the Deuteronomistic view of prophets.

(17:17–24) **Elijah Awakens the Dead** This story was probably an unconnected piece, attached to the previous episode by the editors. Both stories contain the same three people and deal with the question of whether it is worthwhile to support itinerant men of God. vv. 7–16 show clearly that those who share their food with them end up eating more rather than less. In this passage we learn that their presence does not bring only death (by seeing guilt and bestowing punishment, v. 18), but also life. This story is closely related to that in 2 Kings 4:18–37, and perhaps even stems from it. The prophet plays the role of a magician reviving a dead soul by a ritual action. It is of course God making all this possible—the prophet calls upon and pleads with him twice. Finally death withdraws, though not permanently. The entire OT accepts death, while showing us how to use God's guidance in shaping life. Passages such as this stress that death is not an independent supernatural power, contrary to other oriental beliefs which feared and revered death as a deity. Thus this story is central to the main theme of the Elijah cycle: the true God versus false gods.

(18:1–20) **Elijah and Obadiah** The theme of drought and rain is now resumed in the narrative. The land of Israel thirsts and even the king suffers under the drought. YHWH sends for Elijah in order to bring about the crisis and then the solution to the unfolding conflict. The meeting between the prophet and the (godless) king is preceded by one with a (God-fearing) minister. His name is also telling: Obadiah, 'servant of YHWH'. He is said to have come to the aid of YHWH's servants during a purge of prophets. On unexpectedly seeing Elijah standing before him, he falls to the ground in fear and respect. Elijah can obviously be everywhere and nowhere: a repeating theme for which Elijah was famous. We also learn that Ahab organized a search for Elijah and that Jezebel pursued prophets of YHWH in general. Thus we begin to understand why Elijah's journey took him across the lonely river of Kerith into the foreign territory of Phoenicia.

(18:21–40) **Elijah and the Competition Between the Gods on Mount Carmel** The king asks Elijah, as soon as he meets him, the same question as his minister had (18: 7, 17), only he does not call the prophet 'my lord', but 'troubler of Israel'. Elijah