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OMRI

om'-ri (omri; Septuagint Ambri; Assyrian "Chumri" and "Chumria");

(1) The 6th king of Northern Israel, and founder of the IIIrd Dynasty which reigned for nearly 50 years. Omri reigned 12 years, circa 887-876 BC. The historical sources of his reign are contained in 1 Ki 16:15-28; 20:34, the Moabite Stone, Assyrian inscriptions, and in the published accounts of recent excavations in Samaria. In spite of the brief passage given to Omri in the Old Testament, he was one of the most important of the military kings of Northern Israel.

1. His Accession:

Omri is first mentioned as an officer in the army of Elah, which was engaged in the siege of the Philistine town of Gibbethon. While Omri was thus engaged, Zimri, another officer of Elah's army, conspired against the king, whom he assassinated in a drunken debauch, exterminating at the same time the remnant of the house of Baasha. The conspiracy evidently lacked the support of the people, for the report that Zimri had usurped the throne no sooner reached the army at Gibbethon, than the people proclaimed Omri, the more powerful military leader, king over Israel. Omri lost not a moment, but leaving Gibbethon in the hands of the Philistines, he marched to Tirzah, which he besieged and captured, while Zimri perished in the flames of the palace to which he had set fire with his own hands (1 Ki 16:18). Omri, however, had still another opponent in Tibni the son of Ginath, who laid claim to the throne and who was supported in his claims by his brother Joram (1 Ki 16:22 Septuagint) and by a large number of the people. Civil war followed this rivalry for the throne, which seems to have lasted for a period of four years (compare 1 Ki 16:15, with 16:23 and 29) before Omri gained full control.

Omri's military ability is seen from his choice of Samaria as the royal residence and capital of the Northern Kingdom. This step may have been suggested to Omri by his own easy conquest of Tirzah, the former capital. Accordingly, he purchased the hill Shomeron of Shemer for two talents of silver, about \$4,352.00 in American money. The conical hill, which rose from the surrounding plain to the height of 400 ft., and on the top of which there was room for a large city, was capable of easy defense.

2. The Founding of Samaria:

The superior strategic importance of Samaria is evidenced by the sieges it endured repeatedly by the Syrians and Assyrians. It was finally taken by Sargon in 722, after the siege had lasted for 3 years. That the Northern Kingdom endured as long as it did was due largely to the strength of its capital. With the fall of Samaria, the nation fell.

Recent excavations in Samaria under the direction of Harvard University throw new light upon the ancient capital of Israel. The first results were the uncovering of massive foundation walls of a large building, including a stairway 80 ft. wide. This building, which is Roman in architecture, is supposed to have been a temple, the work of Herod. Under this Roman building was recovered a part of a massive Hebrew structure, believed to be the palace of Omri and Ahab. During the year 1910 the explorations revealed a building covering 1 1/2 acres of ground. Four periods of construction were recognized, which, on archaeological

grounds, were tentatively assigned to the reigns of Omri, Ahab, Jehu, and Jeroboam II. See SAMAIAS and articles by David G. Lyon in *Harvard Theological Review*, IV, 1911; *JBL*, V, xxx, Part I, 1911; *PEFS*, 1911, 79-83.

3. His Foreign Policy:

Concerning Omri's foreign policy the Old Testament is silent beyond a single hint contained in 1 Ki 20:34. Here we learn that he had to bow before the stronger power of Syria. It is probable that Ben-hadad I besieged Samaria shortly after it was built, for he forced Omri to make "streets" in the city for the Syrians. It is probable, too, that at this time Ramoth-gilead was lost to the Syrians. Evidently Omri, was weakened in his foreign policy at the beginning of his reign by the civil conflict engendered by his accession. However, he showed strength of character in his dealings with foreign powers. At least he regained control over the northern part of Moab, as we learn from the Moabite Stone. Lines 4-8 tell us that "Omri was king of Israel and afflicted Moab many days because Chemosh was angry with his land. Omri obtained possession of the land of Medeba and dwelt therein during his days and half the days of his son, forty years. "

Omri was the first king of Israel to pay tribute to the Assyrians under their king Asurnacirpal III, in 876 BC. From the days of Shalmaneser II (860 BC) down to the time of Sargon (722 BC), Northern Israel was known to the Assyrians as "the land of the house of Omri." On Shalmaneser's black obelisk, Jehu, who overthrew the dynasty of Omri, is called Ja'uaabal Chumri, "Jehu son of Omri."

Omri entered into an alliance with the Phoenicians by the marriage of his son Ahab to Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. This may have been done as protection against the powers from the East, and as such would have seemed to be a wise political move, but it was one fraught with evil for Israel.

4. His Religious Influence and Death:

Although Omri laid the foundation of a strong kingdom, he failed to impart to it the vitalizing and rejuvenating force of a healthy spiritual religion. The testimony of 1 Ki 16:25,26, that he "dealt wickedly above all that were before him," coupled with the reference to "the statutes of Omri" in Mic 6:16, indicates that he may have had a share in substituting foreign religions for the worship of Yahweh, and therefore the unfavorable light in which he is regarded is justified.

Upon his death, Omri was succeeded upon the throne by his son Ahab, to whom was left the task of shaking off the Syrian yoke, and who went beyond his father in making the

Phoenician influence along with Baalism of prime importance in Israel, thus leading the nation into the paths that hastened its downfall.

(2) A Benjamite, son of Becher (1 Ch 7:8).

(3) A Judahite, descendant of Perez, who lived at Jerusalem (1 Ch 9:4).

(4) A prince of Issachar in the time of David (1 Ch 27:18).

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