
Character Biography

Gil-galad

By Oshun

Most lovers of Tolkien's works first become aware of Ereinion Gil-galad in *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Fellowship of the Ring* when Gandalf tells Frodo the history of the One Ring, or from the lines of the poem,

*"Gil-galad was an Elven-king.
Of him the harpers sadly sing:
The last whose realm was fair and free
Between the mountains and the sea."*

as quoted by Sam Gamgee, and which Aragorn claims are a translation by Bilbo of part an old lay, originally written in Quenya.

Ereinion Gil-galad was the last High King of the Noldor, whose reign far outlasted any of those of his predecessors. He takes up the High Kingship of the Noldor in the First Age, after the death of Turgon in the fall of Gondolin, reigning until his death in the final battle of the war of the Last Alliance of Elves and Men in the year 3441 of the Second Age. The name Ereinion means "scion of kings" and Gil-galad is translated as "star of radiance."

The simplest version of the historical events of Gil-galad's life, spanning the end of the First Age throughout the entire Second Age, is not extremely difficult to piece together. Unfortunately, the questions raised regarding details--foremost among those, the question of who is Gil-galad's father--are legion and have been the subject of voluminous and continuing debate among Tolkien scholars and fanfic writers alike. The published version of *The Silmarillion* states that Gil-galad is the son of Fingon, while in *The Shibboleth of Fëanor (History of Middle-earth, Volume 12)* Orodreth is said to be his father. Christopher Tolkien has commented upon the discrepancies and how he came to make the choices he made when preparing the text for *The Silmarillion*. From the way this writer reads him, he tends to settle upon Orodreth as more likely to have been the intended father of Gil-galad. That, however, would have caused a whole series of additional and related discrepancies in *The Silmarillion*. A resolution of the differences of opinion on these questions seems impossible and even an intelligent commentary upon them is far beyond the scope of this article. In light of that, the remainder of this short biography will be based upon the history as it is represented in *The Silmarillion* and the Appendices to *Lord of the Rings* unless otherwise noted.

Gil-galad was born as the only child of Fingon and an unnamed mother in Beleriand in the late First Age. When the Watchful Peace of the Siege of Angband was broken, with the rout of many of the Elven realms by Morgoth in the Dagor Bragollach, Fingolfin was killed. Fingon became High King of the Noldor and sent the young Gil-galad away from a suddenly, dramatically less secure Hithlum, into the custody of Círdan at the Havens. A few years later when Fingon fell in the Nirnaeth Arnoediad, the crown passed, not to Gil-galad, but to Turgon ruling from Gondolin. (Why Turgon would receive the Kingship of Noldor, tucked away as he was in his hidden city

from which he was ill-prepared to actively govern, is one of the questions left unanswered by the presumption of Gil-galad as Fingon's heir. One possible explanation could be that Gil-galad was still too young to assume this responsibility.)

After the destruction of Gondolin, Gil-galad finally assumed the Kingship of the Noldor. He governed from the Mouths of the Sirion for the remainder of the First Age, where exiles from Gondolin, and others displaced from Doriath, dwelt as well.

After the War of Wrath, in which Gil-galad participated, and the breaking apart of Beleriand with the largest part of it falling into the sea, Gil-galad founded his kingdom in Lindon in the northwest, between the Blue Mountains and the Great Sea. A great many of both the Noldor and the Sindar had left for the West with the Host of Valar and Eldar who had come from Valinor to vanquish Morgoth. By that time, Gil-galad's settlement would have been composed of refugees from virtually every shattered Elven realm and many of those rendered homeless by the great geographic upheaval.

That country had of old been named Lindon by the Noldor, and this name it bore thereafter; and many of the Eldar still dwelt there, lingering, unwilling yet to forsake Beleriand where they had fought and laboured long. Gil-galad son of Fingon was their king, and with him was Elrond Half-elven, son of Eärendil the Mariner and brother of Elros first king of Númenor.

The Silmarillion, "Of The Rings Of Power And The Third Age"

A segment of the Sindar, survivors of Doriath and Ossiriand, would eventually split off to travel east, to found the kingdom of Oropher in Greenwood the Great. It was in Lindon that Elrond became a counselor and collaborator of Gil-galad and from which his brother Elros left for the newly-established port of Mithlond (Grey Havens) on the shores of the Gulf of Lhûn to sail West to become the first king of Númenor.

Noldorin elves founded a realm called Eregion and from their city of Ost-in-Edhil carried out trade and collaboration with the nearby Dwarves of Khazad-dûm (later known as Moria). There the Noldorin craftsmen of the Gwaith-i-Mírdain (jewel-smiths) reached heights previously only achieved by Fëanor himself. Chief among them was Fëanor's grandson Celebrimbor, son of Curufin. It was to the elves of Eregion that Morgoth's lieutenant Sauron came in the year 1200 of the Second Age. Under the guise or fair-form of Annatar (Giver of Gifts), he offered them further skill. Gil-galad and Elrond mistrusted Annatar and turned him away from Lindon, but he continued to work with the elves of the Gwaith-i-Mírdain, who doubtless found the gifts of knowledge and craft that he offered irresistible. After the elves forged the three Rings of Power. Celebrimbor gave two of the rings to Gil-galad. Even after Gil-galad learned that Sauron had made the One Ring and deceived the elves, he did not destroy them, but hid them--an interesting political decision. Gil-galad gave a ring to Elrond before he died and the other he left with Círdan (which is later revealed to have been passed along to Gandalf). Galadriel held the third ring.

The revelation of the One Ring and the identification of Annatar set off a struggle of the elven forces of Gil-galad, in collaboration with the Men of Númenor, which was to last for the rest of Gil-galad's life. In 1695 Sauron launched an all-out war against the elves and an invasion of Eriador. Gil-galad appointed Elrond the leader of his forces in Eregion. While Elrond was unable to prevent the destruction of Eregion, he was able to organize an orderly retreat to Rivendell.

The battle against Sauron for Eriador did not end until Tar-Minastir of Númenor intervened on the side of the elves with reinforcement by sea directly from Númenor. Sauron was finally militarily squashed and driven out of Eriador in 1701.

After the destruction of Númenor near the end of the Second Age, Sauron returned to Middle-earth, and little-by-little, Gil-galad became aware again of Sauron's presence and the extension of his influence. Meanwhile, Elendil, along with his sons, had also come to Middle-earth and founded the kingdoms of Gondor and Arnor. In the final days of the Second Age, Gil-galad was instrumental in building the Last Alliance of Elves and Men to march on Mordor. This is the act for which Gil-galad is most remembered and his one offensive, rather than defensive, move against Sauron. The combined armies of the Last Alliance do defeat Sauron, but temporarily and at great cost.

The Silvan Elves who had joined the Alliance to fight Sauron refused to put their armies under Gil-galad's command and Oropher led a reckless assault, which resulted in his death and the loss of two-thirds of his forces. The strength of the joint forces of Gil-galad and Elendil, however, forced Sauron to leave his stronghold and personally engage them in battle. Sauron's physical form was destroyed, but both Gil-galad and Elendil were slain and, as everyone knows, thanks to Peter Jackson, Isildur took the One Ring and refused to destroy it.

Tolkien described Gil-galad's last venture eloquently through the words of Elrond in *The Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring*:

'I remember well the splendour of their banners,' he said. 'It recalled to me the glory of the Elder Days and the hosts of Beleriand, so many great princes and captains were assembled. And yet not so many, nor so fair, as when Thangorodrim was broken, and the Elves deemed that evil was ended for ever, and it was not so.'

About the Author

Oshun's *Silmarillion*-based stories may be found on the [SWG archive](#).