

## Manasseh the Prodigal King

[2 Kings 21:1-9 HCSB](#) Manasseh was 12 years old when he became king; he reigned 55 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah. (2) He did what was evil in the LORD's sight, imitating the abominations of the nations that the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites. (3) He rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had destroyed and reestablished the altars for Baal. He made an Asherah, as King Ahab of Israel had done; he also worshiped the whole heavenly host and served them. (4) He would build altars in the LORD's temple, where the LORD had said, "Jerusalem is where I will put My name." (5) He built altars to the whole heavenly host in both courtyards of the LORD's temple. (6) He made his son pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and divination, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did a great amount of evil in the LORD's sight, provoking *Him*. (7) Manasseh set up the carved image of Asherah he made in the temple that the LORD had spoken about to David and his son Solomon, "I will establish My name forever in this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel. (8) I will never again cause the feet of the Israelites to wander from the land I gave to their ancestors if only they will be careful to do all I have commanded them--the whole law that My servant Moses commanded them." (9) But they did not listen; Manasseh caused them to stray so that they did greater evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites.

### Introduction

I am sure that many of you have things in your life that you would like to be able to forget, memories that from time to time come back to haunt you. I know that I do. Many things in my past make me feel guilty, defiled, and unacceptable. Time and again, I have had to turn to the Scriptures to find release from a sense of guilt about my past, and I have discovered that there is encouragement and instruction there which sets me free.

The story of Manasseh has ministered to me in this respect, so I want to share with you some things the Lord has taught me from the life of this character: King Manasseh, the prodigal king.

The account begins at:

- [2 Kings 20:21 – 21:1 HCSB](#) Hezekiah rested with his fathers, and his son Manasseh became king in his place. [21:1](#) Manasseh was 12 years old when he became king; he reigned 55 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah.

**Manasseh's father Hezekiah** - Manasseh was the son of Hezekiah, who was one of the few kings in David's line (the kings of Judah) called "good." Most of them were evil. Hezekiah was responsible for a spiritual revival during his reign that swept the entire nation. He did away with the idolatry that his father, Ahaz, had established, and purged the nation of apostasy. We know that the prophetic ministry of Isaiah and Micah, whose writings are preserved for us in the Scriptures, helped him in his reign. There were a couple of invasions of Judah during this time by Sennacherib, the king of Assyria. On both of these occasions, the Lord used Hezekiah and Isaiah to protect Jerusalem. Although almost all of the land of Judah was devastated by the Assyrians, the capital city was preserved. Isaiah said that Jerusalem looked like a caretaker's hut in the midst of a cucumber field. All the fortified cities had been destroyed but Jerusalem was left. It was Hezekiah's wise leadership that made possible the preservation of the city and its people. Hezekiah was a powerful spiritual force in Judah.

**Manasseh's heritage** – But Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, came to the throne when he was twelve years old. Manasseh reigned for about ten years as co-regent with his father. Then when Manasseh was twenty-two, his father died and he took over the reins of government. It is helpful to keep in our mind something of the heritage that this young man enjoyed. He had

a godly father and lived in a time of spiritual vitality and prosperity. He had the words of the prophets Isaiah and Micah ringing in his ears. He had seen the Lord deliver Jerusalem in a very miraculous way when it was under siege by the Assyrians.

**Manasseh's rebellion** – And yet, note what he did:

- **2 Kings 21:2 HCSB** He did what was evil in the LORD's sight, imitating the abominations of the nations that the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites.

The nations referred to here are the Canaanite nations that were expelled by Joshua and the twelve tribes when they first entered the land. The Canaanites worshipped sex. Archaeologists have confirmed that the Canaanite civilization was shot through with venereal disease. Even the children were infected.

And yet the Scriptures say that Manasseh *outdid* the Canaanite nations in his wickedness. Note verse 9 of chapter 21,

- **2 Kings 21:9 HCSB** But they did not listen; Manasseh caused them to stray so that they did greater evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites.

and verse 11,

- **2 Kings 21:11 HCSB** "Since Manasseh king of Judah has committed all these abominations--greater evil than the Amorites who preceded him had done--and by means of his idols has also caused Judah to sin,

He was more wicked than the nations that God drove from the land when the Israelites took possession of it.

Verses 3 through 9 explain the abominations that Manasseh introduced. First,

- **He rebuilt the high places that Hezekiah his father had destroyed.**

The father of Hezekiah was Ahaz. Ahaz had built these "high places"; groves on the tops of hills throughout Judah where idols were worshipped. Hezekiah destroyed them. Manasseh built them again.



- **He erected altars for Baal.**

Baal was the chief Phoenician deity.

- **He made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done.**

An Asherah was a female deity representing the goddess of sex and fertility. Many scholars believe that the monuments built in her honor were phallic symbols. Manasseh introduced this Assyrian sex cult into the nation of Israel.

- **He worshipped all the host of heaven and served them.**

He worshipped the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars, and practiced astrology.

- **He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord.**

He actually placed altars to foreign gods in the temple itself--in the outer court, and in the holy place where the priests worshipped.

- **He made his son pass through the fire.**

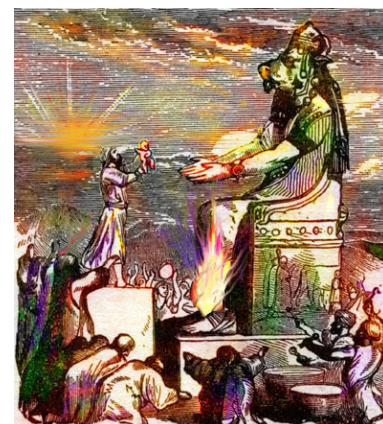
He sacrificed his own baby son to Molech, the god of the Amorites.

And he

- **He practiced witchcraft and used divination, and dealt with mediums and spiritists.**

The Hebrew is much stronger here than the English translation. He actually took mediums and spiritists and those who dealt in the occult and placed them in positions of leadership. And as if THAT weren't enough:

- **2 Kings 21:7-8 HCSB** Manasseh set up the carved image of Asherah he made in the temple that the LORD had spoken about



to David and his son Solomon, "I will establish My name forever in this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel. (8) I will never again cause the feet of the Israelites to wander from the land I gave to their ancestors if only they will be careful to do all I have commanded them - the whole law that My servant Moses commanded them."

He took these phallic symbols, these monuments he had built in honor of the goddess of sex, and he put them in the Holy of Holies, in the place where the Spirit of God dwelt.

**Yahweh was excluded.** Now, it is significant that nowhere in this account is there any mention of the worship of Yahweh. Manasseh selected his pantheon from all the cultures surrounding Israel - from the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Philistines, the Phoenicians--but not one reference is made to the worship of the God of Israel. Only He was excluded.

Again, verse 9 says, in summary, that:

- **2 Kings 21:9 HCSB** But they did not listen; Manasseh caused them to stray so that they did greater evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites.

And in verse 10:

- **2 Kings 21:10-13 HCSB** The LORD spoke through His servants the prophets, saying, (11) "Since Manasseh king of Judah has committed all these abominations - greater evil than the Amorites who preceded him had done--and by means of his idols has also caused Judah to sin, (12) this is what the LORD God of Israel says: 'I am about to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that everyone who hears about it will shudder. (13) I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line *used on* Samaria and the mason's level *used on* the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem clean as one wipes a bowl--wiping it and turning it upside down.

What a vivid picture! There will not be one thing left - total extermination.

- **2 Kings 21:14-15 HCSB** I will abandon the remnant of My inheritance and hand them over to their enemies. They will become plunder and spoil to all their enemies, (15) because they have done what is evil in My sight and have provoked Me from the day their ancestors came out of Egypt until today."

There are a couple of things I want you to note. The **first** is this:

**Manasseh obviously was a wicked man.** He was perhaps the most wicked king that ever reigned over Judah. He did things which no king had ever done before. He led Judah in doing things which no nation had ever done before.

And yet which of us can sit in judgment upon him? We all can look back into our lives and see that we have done the same things! The difference between us is only a matter of degree. We may not have worshipped Baal and Asherah per se, but we have worshipped other things. We have set up other idols in our lives. We worship our vocation, or the pursuit of a degree, or our house, or some boy or girl, or man or woman. Or we may quite literally set up a phallic symbol in our own spirits, the Holy of Holies of man, and worship sex. So we all can look back on our lives and see that we are just as guilty as Manasseh, just as worthy of judgment. That is the first thing we need to recognize.

The **second** thing I want you to do is

**Observe the procedure that the Lord undertakes in order to reclaim his man.** God loved Manasseh, and because He loved him, He would not let Manasseh continue to live in rebellion.

**First, God spoke very quietly to him.** As Manasseh began to indulge in these idolatrous practices, God said, "Manasseh, Jerusalem is where my name is placed." That is, "Jerusalem is My possession. You have no right to set up any other gods there."

And then when Manasseh didn't listen,

**God's voice came with greater clarity and insistence.** He reminded him of his promises, both positive and negative--promises of blessing if Manasseh would obey and of judgment if he did not.

And finally,

**God thundered at him through the prophets** so that everywhere Manasseh turned he was faced with the voice of God. He could not avoid it.

Have you had that experience when you have turned from the Lord? First, the Lord will speak to us in that gentle, quiet, gracious way of His. He reminds us that we belong to Him. If we don't listen, He speaks with greater clarity through His word, and through His Spirit, witnessing to our spirit. And then if we still don't listen, He surrounds us with many witnesses to the truth, so that everywhere we turn we hear the voice of God. We can't get away.

In times when I have been in headlong flight from the Lord, even when I think I've gotten away scot-free, I hear Him say, "Psst, here I am!" I turn on the radio and, "Psst," there He is! I empathize with David's sentiment when he said he would be unable to escape God's presence even in Sheol! If I made my bed in Sheol, I would hear His voice, "Here I am!" I just can't get away from Him.

A preacher had an appointment with a student at Stanford one day. The pastor was waiting for him in front of the chapel, but the student was late. There was another student sitting on a park bench so the pastor sat and started to chat with him. He discovered that the student was born in China. That interested the pastor and so he asked the Chinese student a bit about his past. The Lord opened an opportunity to share the gospel with the young man and to tell him of the Lord's love for him. But as the pastor began to speak, the Chinese student got red in the face and very angry, and he jumped up to his feet! His reaction was so unusually adverse that the pastor was really surprised. So he asked the young man what was wrong.

"Well," he said, "I guess the reason I am reacting this way is that I was born and raised in a Christian home. My parents were missionaries in China. And all my life I have been running away from God. But everywhere I go, God sends someone to talk to me about my relationship with Him."

Brothers and sisters, I can really identify with that young man! The poet Francis Thompson called God, with reverent affection, "the Hound of Heaven" because everywhere we go Yahweh hems us in and keeps reaching out to us. That is exactly what He was doing with Manasseh.

### **Manasseh's resistance.**

But notice verse 16.

- **2 Kings 21:16 HCSB** Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem with it from one end to another. This was in addition to his sin he caused Judah to commit so that they did what was evil in the LORD's sight.



Manasseh was determined to silence the voice of God, and the only way he could silence that voice was to silence the prophets.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, in writing about this event said that he "*slew all the righteous men that were among the Hebrews, nor would he spare the prophets, for he every day slew some of them until Jerusalem was overflowed with blood.*"

There is a very substantial and long-lasting Jewish and Christian tradition that it was during this time that Manasseh put Isaiah in a hollow oak tree and had him sawn in two. This may be what is behind the reference in Hebrews 11 to men of faith, some of whom were "sawn asunder." Manasseh slew the prophets. He wouldn't listen. He didn't want to hear the voice of God. So, he killed those who spoke on God's behalf.

### **Manasseh's reward.**

Do you know that both the author of 2 Kings and Jeremiah affirm that it was because of the sins of Manasseh that the nation of Judah was taken captive? It was only fifty years after Manasseh's death that the nation went into the Babylonian captivity. How would you like to be known to posterity for that? That was Manasseh's reputation. He was responsible. Now look at verses 17 and 18:

- **2 Kings 21:17-18 HCSB** The rest of the events of Manasseh's *reign*, along with all his accomplishments and the sin that he committed, are written about in the Historical Record of Judah's Kings. (18) Manasseh rested with his fathers and was buried in the garden of his own house, the garden of Uzza. His son Amon became king in his place.

I remember the first time I read that passage. I thought, "That's strange! Here is a man who thumbed his nose at God for sixty-seven years and died a ripe old age in his own bed in peace - the most wicked king in Judah's history, and God did nothing! Isn't that strange? He reigned longer than any other king in the history of Israel or Judah. Didn't you see, God? Weren't you aware of what was going on? Can a person really live that way and get away with it?"

Well, you see, the problem is that the entire story of Manasseh's life is not given to us in 2 Kings. The purpose of this book is to show us the precipitous decline of the nation. Many events in the lives of these kings were passed by for that reason. But the account is resumed and supplemented in 2 Chronicles.

I would like you to turn with me to that record, to 2 Chronicles 33, where in the first nine verses we have a restatement of the first nine verses of 2 Kings 21, almost word for word. Then verses 9 through 11 say:

- **2 Chronicles 33:9-11 HCSB** So Manasseh caused Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to stray so that they did worse evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites. (10) The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they didn't listen. (11) So He brought against them the military commanders of the king of Assyria. They captured Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze *shackles*, and took him to Babylon.

This mighty king of Judah, with a ring in his nose and chains on his hands and feet, was dragged off to a Babylonian dungeon! At this time, Babylon was a province of Assyria.

This is one of a number of Old Testament accounts for which we have excellent secular historical confirmation. A number of years ago, archeologists found an inscription which dated from the reign of Esarhaddon, the son of Sennacherib. Sennacherib was the king who invaded Judah during the reign of Hezekiah, Manasseh's father. He died in 680 B.C., interestingly enough, the traditional date of Isaiah's death. Sennacherib never invaded Judah again because his last invasion cost him 168,000 men! But his son, Esarhaddon, was a young, ambitious, militaristic leader who was spoiling for a fight with Judah. You can see that God was preparing His instrument to chastise Manasseh, even though Manasseh seemed to be getting by scot-free. Esarhaddon came to the throne in 680 B.C. and some six years later, he invaded Judah.



The inscription describes this invasion. It says that, "twenty-two kings harkened to him," i.e., he whistled, and like beaten dogs, they came! And, "of these was Manasseh, king of Judah." Esarhaddon took him off to Babylon, and for twelve long years he languished in that Babylonian dungeon with a ring in his nose and chains on his hands and feet. You see, that is the end of the process that God uses in our lives to bring us around. He will speak to us softly, and then with more insistence. Then He hems us on every side, with every witness to the truth that He can bring to bear. And then if we refuse to listen...He lets us have our way. He takes His hands off us, we reap what we have sown, and we become a slave to our own passions and desires. Thus we are brought to the

end of ourselves. That is what happened to Manasseh.

But look closely at verse 12:

- [2 Chronicles 33:12 HCSB](#) When he was in distress, he sought the favor of the LORD **his** God and earnestly humbled himself before the God of his ancestors.

### **Menasseh's repentance**

Did you notice? - he entreated *his* God. He had lost his title but he hadn't lost his relationship. Yahweh was still his God. You see, God intends for us to reign in life, to live in victory over every habit and every circumstance of life. But when we rebel against Him, we lose our capacity to rule, and we become enslaved to our circumstances and to our own passions and habits. But we never lose our relationship to Him, if we are truly His.

So when Manasseh hit bottom, he turned to the Lord his God and he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. He said, "Lord, I am sunk. I am beat. I've had it. I am to blame. I have sinned." Josephus says that he "esteemed himself to be the cause of it all." He saw that he had no one else to blame. The problem was not his circumstances, nor the culture in which he lived. He had had every advantage. The problem was his own rebellious heart. He came to the place where he was willing to submit that heart to the Lord. He humbled himself greatly before the Lord his God.

Verse 13:

- [2 Chronicles 33:13 HCSB](#) He prayed to Him, so He heard his petition and granted his request, and brought him back to Jerusalem, to his kingdom. So Manasseh came to know that the LORD is God.

Notice the second phrase in verse 13. It is translated, "He was moved by his entreaty." The Hebrew says, "He was interceded for him," which is awkward and untranslatable, and so it is translated this way. But the point is that someone was standing between God and Manasseh and was interceding for him. Thus, God "was interceded." Now, who was that? Who was standing between the Lord and Manasseh?

We have the same picture in Zechariah 3, where Zechariah sees Joshua, the high priest, standing before the Lord of all the earth. And Satan is there to accuse him, because Joshua is clothed in filthy garments. Satan said in effect, "Look at Joshua. He is filthy! He has no right to be a priest." And the angel of Yahweh, who is the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus, interceded for him, saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him... See, I have taken your iniquity away from you... Put a clean turban on his head..." That was the Lord Jesus interceding for Joshua. He is the one who interceded for Manasseh. And He intercedes for us.

God may have to chasten, because He chastens those whom He loves. He may have to discipline. He may bring 'hardship into our lives because of our rebellion. But He sees us as righteous in Jesus Christ. There is no sin that you can ever commit which will disqualify you in God's sight. You are forgiven! God never stops loving. He never stops accepting those who are truly His.

And so when Manasseh prayed, the Lord "heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem to his kingdom." He was restored to his place of authority. And that is what God does with us. We don't have to work our way back into His good graces. We don't have to prove that we are acceptable. We just keep on walking in a forgiven state.

Paul says,

- [Ephesians 1:7 HCSB](#) In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

And we can never, never, never look back on the past and say that anything we have ever done disqualifies us. We are clean. We are forgiven. We are righteous in God's eyes.

Then, verse 13 says, Manasseh knew that the Lord was, literally, **the** God. He realized that those idols had nothing for him - there was only one God and that was Yahweh.

You see, God uses even our sin, the most despicable sin that we could ever commit, in a redemptive way, to show us that He is the Lord. Manasseh's stubbornness caused him to

have to go through this process in order for him to get where God wanted him to go. It was painful, but yet once given over to God, it was still productive. And he knew at the end of all these experiences that the Lord was the God.

What follows in verses 14 through 17 is an account of his activities in Jerusalem after his kingdom was restored to him:

- **2 Chronicles 33:14 HCSB (14)** After this, he built the outer wall of the city of David from west of Gihon in the valley to the entrance of the Fish Gate; he brought it around the Ophel, and he heightened it considerably. He also placed military commanders in all the fortified cities of Judah.

## **Six Steps Toward Restoration**

**1. He rebuilt and strengthened the wall and the fortress** that protected the city on the east and the southeast, overlooking the Kidron Valley. Evidently, this was the place where the Assyrians had earlier breached the wall when he was taken into captivity. So he went back to that weak spot in the city's defenses and reinforced it.

**2. Then he put army commanders in all the fortified cities of Judah.**

He placed contingents of soldiers with commanders in each of the fortified cities in the outlying districts. He set his defenses out beyond the walls of Jerusalem so that he would not be surprised again by an attack right at the wall.

**3. He also removed the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the Lord**

He removed them as well as all the altars which he had built on the mountain of the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem, and he threw them outside the city. He purged the city of idolatry. He took every Asherah, every Baal, and threw them out of the city. He wanted nothing more to do with them.

**4. He set up the altar of the Lord.**

**5. He sacrificed peace offerings and thank offerings on it.**

**6. He ordered Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel.**

He rebuilt the altar that he had destroyed, and he offered peace and thank offerings - the two offerings which have to do with our relationship with God - peace because we have been reconciled to Him, thanksgiving because it grows out of that reconciliation.

These steps which Manasseh took are the marks of true repentance. If one is truly repentant of the sins he has committed he will do these things.

**1.** He will recognize that there are areas where he is weak, where he has fallen before, and he will rebuild those areas and strengthen them.

**2.** Then he will determine to guard against surprise assaults in areas where he has been defeated before. He will move his defenses out beyond the point of weakness. He will "make no provision for the flesh."

**3.** He will deal with every vestige of idolatry in his life. Every false God will come under judgment and be cast out of the domain.

**4.** He will make Jesus Christ Lord.

**5.** He will live a life characterized by gratitude and love for the Lord.

**6.** He will try to warn others away from rebellion and bring as many into the Lord's camp as possible.

Note the parallel with Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 7, in which he contrasts godly sorrow and worldly sorrow.

- **2 Corinthians 7:10 HCSB** For godly grief produces a repentance not to be regretted and leading to salvation, but worldly grief produces death.

Worldly sorrow, he says, produces death. Worldly sorrow is the sorrow we experience because we have been caught in our sin or have reaped what we have sown, but then there is no desire to set things right. It produces death, defeat, despair, and depression. But there

is a godly sorrow. There is a sorrow that will lead us to true repentance. Paul says that repentance is seen in a determination to clear ourselves. He says,

- [2 Corinthians 7:11 HCSB](#) For consider how much diligence this very thing--this grieving as God wills--has produced in you: what a desire to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what deep longing, what zeal, what justice! In every way you have commended yourselves to be pure in this matter.

That is, "You have determined to do what is right." That is a godly sorrow. Manasseh had that kind of sorrow. He dealt not only with his idolatrous spirit, he moved out into every area of life to deal with all causes of rebellion.

Verses 18 through 20 give us the final word on his life:

- [2 Chronicles 33:18-20 HCSB](#) The rest of the events of Manasseh's *reign*, along with his prayer to his God and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, are *written about* in the Events of Israel's Kings. (19) His prayer and how God granted his request, and all his sin and unfaithfulness and the sites where he built high places and set up Asherah poles and carved images before he humbled himself, they are written about in the Records of Hozai. (20) Manasseh rested with his fathers, and he was buried in his own house. His son Amon became king in his place.

God gave him twenty more years of rule - ten years with his father, thirteen years of wickedness, twelve years in the dungeon, twenty years of righteous rule. He became one of the mightiest kings of Judah. So that is the story of Manasseh.

There are a number of things which speak to me from this biography.

First, we all can identify with Manasseh because God could write "Manasseh" over each of our lives. **We all have sinned as he sinned.**

Second, we can see something of **the process that God uses to bring us to repentance**. First, He speaks to us quietly, then with greater and greater intensity. Finally, He disciplines us in order to bring us to the end of ourselves so that we will turn to Him.

But most important, these passages speak of **the completeness of the forgiveness of God**.

Manasseh was notorious in Israel. He was an evil, wicked man. And yet God reestablished him on his throne. He was fully forgiven. He lived in power and authority throughout the rest of his years.

Do you know what Manasseh's name means in Hebrew?

## מנשה - "Forgotten"

That is the name that God writes over your sordid past. Your sins are forgotten. Every time your past comes back to haunt you, and you say to God, "There, Lord, I have done it again," do you know what the Lord says to you? He says, "You've done what? I don't even remember!" He has forgotten. You can read His own words from Hebrews 10:

- [Hebrews 10:17 HCSB](#) *He adds:* **I will never again remember their sins and their lawless acts.**

"Your sins and your lawless deeds I will remember no more." He has forgotten the past. We walk on in life, forgiven.