

2ND KINGS

Week 32, Chapter 21

Open your Bibles to 2nd Kings Chapter 21. We'll be doing quite a bit of reading and referencing today from this chapter as well as it's parallel in 2nd Chronicles 33.

Manasseh is the current King of Judah, having replaced his deceased father the former King of Judah, **Hizkiyahu** (Hezekiah). Manasseh is hands down the most wicked king yet to rule the southern kingdom. Although we're told that he became king at the tender age of 12 years old, in fact he co-ruled with his father Hezekiah for a full decade until he became the sole ruler of Judah at 22 years of age when Hezekiah died.

The first half of 2nd Kings 21 spells out a long list of terrible sins committed by Manasseh. His behavior and his decisions were appalling as he essentially set about to undo every good thing his father had done. We briefly touched on this last time, by saying that part of the reason for this intentional reversal of policy by Manasseh was due to the morally bankrupt nature of Judah's society at that time. Hezekiah essentially forced his reforms upon his people. And even though it was surely the right thing to do, one can't force a Godly brand of morality on corrupt and unwilling hearts and expect any more than an illusion of true change. What is required is for people to have a change of nature, not merely a change of rules. Hezekiah could enforce rules, but he couldn't enforce a change in his peoples' natures. So in harmony with the tone of this chapter, it seems that all Manasseh did was to enact policies that pleased the bulk of his people because it released them from Hezekiah's righteous regulations that most of them didn't want to be encumbered with.

This matter is discussed from a slightly different perspective in the New Testament in the Book of Galatians.

Gal 5:19-23 CJB

¹⁹ And it is perfectly evident what the old nature does. It expresses itself in sexual immorality, impurity and indecency;

²⁰ ***involvement with the occult and with drugs; in feuding, fighting, becoming jealous and getting angry; in selfish ambition, factionalism, intrigue***

²¹ ***and envy; in drunkenness, orgies and things like these. I warn you now as I have warned you before: those who do such things will have no share in the Kingdom of God!***

²² ***But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,***

²³ ***humility, self control. Nothing in the Torah stands against such things.***

Notice how neatly those characteristics listed as the fruits of the old nature line up with the listing of the immoral policies that Manasseh re-introduced to the people of Judah. Thus despite ***Melech Hizkiyahu's*** (King Hezekiah's) whole-hearted attempt to pull the people of Judah away from their back-slidden path, and on the surface it sort of appeared as if it was working, their hearts and minds stayed firmly rooted to their old nature. So when Manasseh took the throne he merely gave the people what they wanted. Certainly he had his opponents who indeed had been profoundly affected by King Hezekiah's righteous reign and so submitted to a holy voice, and that is what is meant by 2nd Kings 21:16:

2Kings 21:16 CJB

¹⁶ ***Moreover, M'nasheh shed so much innocent blood that he flooded Yerushalayim from one end to the other- this in addition to his sin through which he caused Y'hudah to sin by doing what is evil from ADONAI's perspective.***

As proof that the deteriorated moral state of the average Judahite cannot be laid exclusively at King Manasseh's feet, and that the Lord held the common citizens accountable for their choices and their inner thoughts are the words of verses 8 and 9.

2Kings 21:8-9 CJB

⁸ ***Also I will not have the feet of Isra'el wander any longer out of the land which I gave their ancestors- if only they will take heed to obey every order I have given them and live in accordance with all the Torah that my servant Moshe ordered them to obey."***

⁹ But they did not take heed; and M'nasheh misled them into doing even worse things than the nations ADONAI had destroyed ahead of the people of Isra'el.

The key word is “they”; “they” did not take heed, meaning the people themselves. And because the people didn’t ***shema*** to Yehoveh (didn’t listen and obey), then Yehoveh allowed Manasseh to mislead them to doing even worse things, which in turn cemented the coming divine judgment against them that was to be their exile to Babylon. I have often taught that a great and terrifying God-principle is that God will usually give His people the leaders they deserve. Sometimes, in His boundless mercy, He will give His wandering people a strong and righteous leader that works tirelessly to lead his nation back from the brink of God’s judgment. And I think that one of the most profound lessons that we can take from King Hezekiah’s reign, and now Manasseh’s, is that even the best of leaders is incapable of changing the hearts and souls of the individuals who form his nation. And even the worst of leaders cannot change the hearts and souls of the righteous to become wicked, unless the people, individual by individual, acquiesce to it.

So while leaders bear great responsibility in God’s eyes for the corporate sins of their congregation (or nation), the congregation (or nation) is held accountable for their individual moral choices and behavior. Thus the Torah (and the entire Bible) shows us that while even the righteous will be affected when God judges on a national or corporate level, that the righteous will not be judged along with the wicked on an individual level.

Let’s re-read part of 2nd Kings 21.

RE-READ 2ND KINGS 21:10 – end

The Scriptures say that God spoke this oracle that is contained in verses 11-15 in His typical way, through His prophets. Yet, there are no named prophets. I had previously mentioned that the only prophets whose records are kept in the Bible and who seem to have lived and prophesied during Manasseh’s time are Isaiah and then possibly Nahum. The tradition is that Manasseh was so angered by Isaiah’s prophecies of condemnation against him that the King had him executed. That doesn’t mean that other Prophets weren’t alive in Manasseh’s time, and that they didn’t comment later on and perhaps indirectly about Manasseh (those like Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Joel). But we get no direct confirmation of any specific prophet dealing with Manasseh. Rather we get this general comment about the Lord speaking through His prophets and it seems to be that just as in earlier times there were many lesser prophets living in Judah who the Lord used to carry His message to the people, and directly or indirectly to the King, that is the sense of it here. The venerated Jewish commentator Rashi says that the reason no prophet’s name is scripturally attached to Manasseh is so as not to give honor to this most evil king. Perhaps, but that is only his personal speculation and we have the Biblical

record of other prophets called out by name for chastising evil Hebrew kings so I don't necessarily agree with Rashi on that point.

Verse 11 begins with an explanation by the Lord about why He is going to judge Judah as He is. Take note: we only occasionally get a specific reason in the Bible as to why God did what He did, and so we need to pay close attention when we run across it. Notice that since the judgment is going to be a national judgment (as opposed to individual judgments) then the leader of the nation is being held responsible. The Lord says that because King Manasseh did disgusting things (we got the list of the disgusting things earlier in this chapter), and that these disgusting things were even worse than the disgusting things that the heathen Amorites did (God ejected the Amorites from Canaan and ordered them destroyed) that He is going to bring a divine catastrophe upon Judah and great suffering upon Yerushalayim. The Hebrew word being translated in our CJB as "disgusting" is **to'evah** and elsewhere in the English Bible the word is translated as "abomination". So from God's perspective sins that are **to'evah** (abominations) are the worst of the worst and in almost all cases are sins of humanity directed at God, rather than sins of humanity directed at other humans. And by the way, it really doesn't matter if what God calls abominable, many human societies now call good or just an amoral issue of personal choice. That we have made civil laws and national moral choices that take what God says is evil in His sight and declared it as good, or vice versa, changes nothing. Frankly, that is precisely the nature of what Manasseh did in His new governmental policies that overturned his father's Godly governmental policies.

I'll mince no words; by our contemporary federal government sanctioning abortion, championing gay marriage of adults and gay adoption of young children, and actively prohibiting any mention of God or Christ from our public schools, government assemblies, and our courts, and our current President declaring that under his watch we will be a secular nation, and our previous President declaring that Allah and Yehoveh are the same god, we have put ourselves on a collision course with the Lord. That the majority of voters in our nation elect political leaders who openly declare that they embrace these terrible things is equivalent to the people of Judah who eagerly embraced Manasseh's ungodly policies. That a substantial segment of the modern church stands behind these **to'evah** governmental policies (or at least looks the other way) is equivalent to the corrupt Priesthood of Judah and Israel supporting their kings' abhorrent edicts. And please notice that the Priesthood of Israel has gone completely dormant for almost 2000 years as a result of their sinful choices.

Because the Lord is of course dealing with Judah in this narrative of 2nd Kings 21 (Israel, the northern kingdom, is long gone), He now compares their spiritual state with that of exiled Israel. He says that He will use the same standard for judging Judah and their capital Jerusalem as He did for Israel and their capital Samaria. Using the metaphors of a level that assures something is straight on a horizontal plane and a plumb-line that assures something is straight on a vertical plane, God says that Judah is crooked beyond repair and so using those measurements God calculates that Judah must be destroyed.

I also love the use of the plate wiped clean and turned upside down to demonstrate God's intended actions upon Jerusalem. The picture is of first an action of abandonment, but then also of a preparation for future re-acceptance. First the plate is wiped completely clean of every contaminated thing that was formerly laid upon it, all refuse and uncleanness is removed, and then the plate is turned upside down to keep it clean and ready for use when its owner deems it is time to fill it once again. Notice that the plate itself is not annihilated or discarded; it is cleansed and sort of put into state of storage. Later, after Jerusalem is emptied of its uncleanness and corruption, and those unclean and corrupt things (the people) are sent away to Babylon, God will determine when they have been sufficiently chastised and cleansed of their sinful ways. Then the clean plate that is Jerusalem will be turned back over by the Lord, ready to be filled with kosher (clean) food (which are the cleansed people and the purified Priesthood). So here is a message that while Judah will be destroyed, the damage sustained in Jerusalem is actually for the purpose of purification and it will only go unused for a time. And of course, that is exactly what happened.

Back in verse 11, God blamed Manasseh's sins for the coming national judgment. Now in the concluding verses of God's judgment oracle, verses 14 and 15, He says that the people have also angered and provoked him since the moment He led them out of Egypt. And because **they** (the people) have also done evil, they will have their possessions plundered by the enemy, and they will become as prey to those same enemies that up to now God has protected them against.

The final indictment against Manasseh is that he killed many innocent people, no doubt those who railed against his wicked policies. Then chapter 21 says he died and was buried with his son Amon taking his place as king.

The writer/editor of 2nd Kings in some ways does us a disservice because there is another important side to this story of Manasseh's reign that we're not told about. However it is told in 2nd Chronicles 33. Let's turn there now where we'll discover it.

READ 2ND CHRONICLES 33 all

The first 9 verses of the chapter offer nothing new than we've already read in 2nd Kings 21. However beginning with verse 10, some important details emerge. It begins with saying that the Lord spoke to BOTH Manasseh and to the people. In other words, it confirms that the prophets carried God's warning both to the King of Judah and to the common citizens of Judah; thus not the royal court, the elders, nor the priesthood were commissioned to take God's oracle of warning that had been delivered to the King and bring it also to the people. Rather the people received it directly from the prophets; but neither the king nor the common folks would pay any attention to God's message of warning to them.

Many years later, the Prophet Jeremiah would speak of it in retrospect in this way:

CJB **Jeremiah 44:1 - 6**

This word came to Yirmeyahu concerning all the people from Y'hudah living in the land of Egypt- in Migdol, Tachpanches, Nof and the land of Patros:

² "Here is what ADONAI-Tzva'ot, the God of Isra'el, says: 'You have seen all the disaster I inflicted on Yerushalayim and all the cities of Y'hudah; there they are today, ruined, with no one living in them.

³ It came about because of the wicked things they did to make me angry- sacrificing to and serving other gods, whom they did not know, neither they, nor you nor your ancestors.

⁴ I had sent you all my servants the prophets, sent them frequently, with the message, "Don't do this horrible thing which I hate!"

⁵ But they neither listened nor obeyed, so as to turn from their wickedness and stop offering to other gods.

⁶ Hence my fury and anger were poured out and ignited in the cities of Y'hudah and the streets of Yerushalayim; so that they became waste and desolate, as they are today.'

So as a result the Lord did as He so regularly does, He used an enemy of Israel as His means of punishing His own chosen people. So we are told that Ashur's army (remember, Ashur is the god of Assyria) was used to take King Manasseh off to Babylon in chains. Until very recently the standard scholarly take was that this verse was suspicious because the capital of Assyria was Ninevah, not Babylon. It made no sense that King Manasseh would be taken to Babylon instead of to the Assyrian capital. However it is now known that the latest King of Assyria, Ashurbanipal, took up residence in Babylon for several years after re-conquering it yet again. It seems that Babylon was a difficult kingdom to hold onto, and every few years Babylon would rebel and regain its independence from Assyria for a few years. So the King of Assyria stayed there to help keep control, so valuable was the possession of Babylon that it was viewed as a strategic asset. So indeed Manasseh was taken to King Ashurbanipal in Babylon.

But then something astonishing happened. Verse 12 says that his unexpected capture and imprisonment shook Manasseh to his core, and he realized that it was Yehoveh's doing that his kingdom was attacked and that he was hauled off in chains to Babylon. Manasseh sincerely humbled himself before Yehoveh (meaning he admitted his wrong and accepted his accountability for his sins). In response to his sincere repentance and change of heart, the

Lord had mercy upon him and he returned to Jerusalem and resumed his office as a far better King of Judah.

Further, as a changed king, he not only began building fortifications and repairing war damage, he also went about removing all the idols he had years ago ordered installed, tore down the pagan altars he had built in the Temple courtyards, and he also repaired and cleansed the Altar of Burnt Offering from the abominable sacrifices to other gods that he had formerly ordered to occur there. He even went so far as to command his people (that is, like his father Hezekiah he used force) to allow only worship of Yehoveh within Judah.

What recent archeological discoveries tell us is that Ashurbanipal was in Babylon in precisely 648 B.C., and it was in that same year that Manasseh was brought to him. But what exactly was the reason for Manasseh's imprisonment in the first place, and why did Ashurbanipal let him go? It turns out that several other kings in the west were also arrested by Ashurbanipal and brought to him in Babylon. All, including Manasseh, were accused of treason. Why treason? Because they all had some sort of vassal arrangement with Assyria that had kept them in power and Assyria from conquering them. Thus after Ashurbanipal demonstrated his power and control over them by going to their own homelands, damaging their kingdoms and capturing the kings and bringing them to him in Babylon, they better understood their precarious place. Assyria was their master, like it or not, and they were vassals, like it or not, and Ashurbanipal would brook no disobedience nor lack of proper allegiance. Manasseh got the message and left Babylon to go home as a trusted vassal and ally of Assyria. The build-up of fortifications all over Judah that we read about in 2nd Chronicles 33:14 were NOT to protect Judah from Assyria; rather they were to help protect Assyrian interests IN Judah from other invaders (Egypt being a particularly troublesome one).

Verse 18 takes us one step further in regards to Manasseh's changed stance towards the God of Israel, but even more importantly, God's changed perspective of Manasseh's spiritual condition before Him. There it says that seers (**chozeh** in Hebrew) spoke to Manasseh in the name of Yehoveh God of Israel. So the implication is that now, for the 1st time, Manasseh was receiving instruction and direction from the Lord. And yet, the use of the word **chozeh** instead of the standard word for prophet (**navi**) hints that perhaps the information given to Manasseh in God's name was not of the same level of inspiration or intimacy as would have come from God's prophets. But, there is not enough information to know for sure. What we can know though, is that Manasseh made an enormous turn towards good (and not just in outward behavior), and God commended him for it. Even so, Manasseh was now a puppet governor for Assyria with little choice but to do their bidding. He was caught in a snare as now being a righteous king but having to compromise with the superior power of heathen Assyria; and this was caused mostly by his previous sins.

So to kind of bring an end to the story of Manasseh, we see that he ruled as a thoroughly wicked king (in the fact the worst king Judah had ever known) for the first 49 of his 55 years of

reigning over Judah. During all that time he did not know or follow the God of Israel, and the God of Israel didn't lead Manasseh or communicate with him in any significant way that we're aware of. But, as a result of a great tragedy in his life and the sincere repentance that followed, Manasseh established a relationship with the Lord and lived out the final 6 years of his life in a far better spiritual state, and as a generally good king.

What hope that ought to bring for everyone, especially those of us who are older. Many people have lived their entire adult lives in opposition to the Lord, or in rebellion against Him, and even in denial of His existence. Some have done the most heinous and immoral things imaginable; or have adhered to the most carnal and foolish of doctrines. Perhaps some have made the most tragic mistakes, treated our families terribly, and even intentionally done great harm to others. And yet, there remains the real possibility that if a person will humble themselves before God, admit their sin, accept the salvation and lordship of Yeshua and begin a new life of faithfulness towards the God of Israel they can have divine forgiveness and die in peace and harmony with God, and look forward to an eternity with the Lord.

But despite the forgiveness and 2nd chance that Manasseh received, he had done irreparable damage to his nation and to his people. He had advanced Judah yet another step towards the day that the Lord would turn them over to a foreign power and have them removed from their inheritance, the Promised Land. So the other side of hope for salvation and a renewed spiritual life even late in our carnal lives, is that the damage that we did from an earthly perspective cannot always be undone. And perhaps our personal circumstances won't be changed from something unpleasant to something happier, and our guilt for the pain we caused others might even intensify because now we realize and acknowledge it. Such is the awful nature of sin that forgiveness in heaven doesn't wipe clean our present earthly slate or repair the lives of others that our sin may have harmed. But it does give us new spiritual life with the Father, and it can mean a new and meaningful and fruitful earthly life from here forward in the midst of our circumstances, where such a possibility never before existed for us. And I have personally witnessed this exact thing many times.

Back to 2nd Kings 21.

In verse 17 we are not to confuse our current 2 Books of Chronicles with the notation from the writer/editor of the Book of 2nd Kings that there are further details about Manasseh contained in another ancient work called the chronicles (or annals) of the Kings of Judah. The works that the writer/editor of 2nd Kings is speaking about are royal archives that have never been found. Next we're told that Manasseh was buried in the garden of his palace, a place that at the time of the writing of 2nd Kings was called the Garden of Uzza. That in no way means it was called by that name in Manasseh's day. Why was he buried in a garden plot and not in the holy sepulchers of many of the other descendants of David? There are two reasonable explanations for this, although neither can be verified. The first is that he was too ashamed for his past deeds to be interred in the same burial vaults as his ancestor King David. The second (which I

think is the much more probable) is that the elders of Judah refused to let him be buried alongside the better kings of Judah. His past actions had been just too much, and the negative effects were long lasting.

In fact, scholars are fairly confident that a term that is regularly used in Kings and Chronicles in this approximate time in Judah was **am eretz**, which translates as “people of the land”. Until fairly recently it was believed that this was just a general term for the inhabitants of Judah. However it now appears (and I concur entirely) that it came to be used as a label for a certain political and religious faction within Judah that was determined to restore a proper interpretation of the Torah and its requirements to the land, the Temple, and the throne. This faction involved common citizens, members of the government, elders, even members of the priesthood. Calling it a movement might even be a better way to describe it, much as with the modern day Hebrew Roots movement, which is not denominationally driven but rather cuts across most Christian denominations and socioeconomic groups all around the world.

Manasseh’s son Amon took his place and he behaved as Manasseh had in his first 49 years on the throne. He became king at 22 years old, the same age as his father when Manasseh finally had the throne all to himself. His was a short and infamous reign of only 2 years.

It seems that every wicked king wants to outdo his predecessor. So Amon outdid his father. Not only are we informed that he gave himself totally over to false gods, and reinstalled idols in the Temple Courtyards, and completely abandoned Yehoveh, but there is evidence that he put one of the idols inside the sanctuary building, perhaps in the Holy of Holies.

It is interesting that it was his servants (his royal court) that soon killed Amon. In a kind of like-for-like retribution, just as Amon had betrayed Yehoveh, Amon’s servants betrayed their King. And in what can only be seen as proportional justice, we’re told that the people of the land (the **am eretz**) then killed the conspirators who killed Amon. While their reasoning for this is not stated, I think I can reasonably speculate that because Amon was a fully legitimate royal descendant of David, and had succeeded to the throne legally and customarily, that his behavior was secondary to the fact that he was an authorized member of the Davidic Dynasty and so no one had the right to remove him from the throne, let alone assassinate him.

The final notice of Amon is that he was buried in the same place as his father: the Garden of Uzza, and not in the royal burial caves. So even the **am eretz** who avenged his death recognized that a man of such evil character didn’t belong buried with the righteous bones of his ancestors.

2nd Kings 21 ends with the notice that Amon’s son Josiah reined in his place. We’ll take up chapter 22 and the subject of the boy-King Josiah next time.