

2ND KINGS

Week 33, Chapter 22

Last time we concluded 2nd Kings 21 with the notice that a new king of Judah was now on the throne, a fellow named **Yoshiyahu** (Josiah). Josiah was the son of Amon and grandson of Manasseh. It is the year 641 B.C. when **Yoshiyahu** takes over from his father Amon who was murdered by his own royal court; barely more than 40 years before Judah will be exiled to Babylon.

Back and forth Judah has gone from evil kings to righteous ones and then back again. King Manasseh was a bit of an anomaly in that he had periods of both wicked and good leadership. The first 49 years of Manasseh's reign is described as the worst Judah had even known. Manasseh was accused by God of being even more evil than the nations that had been driven from Canaan so that Israel could inherit the land for themselves. However late in his reign King Manasseh was arrested and taken in chains to the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal who was residing in Babylon. There the rebellious and idolatrous Manasseh came to realize that his true god was Yehoveh, and that it was Yehoveh who had allowed this calamity. His heart became contrite, and he approached God in humble prayer asking for forgiveness and restoration.

It is fascinating to me that we don't read about this change in Manasseh in 2nd Kings. If we leave our understanding of his reign to only reading the words of 2nd Kings 21 then we never learn of his repentance. It is in 2nd Chronicles 33 that we read about his change, and that he was released and allowed to return to Jerusalem where he reigned generally in righteousness as a good king for the next 6 years until he died. I also think it is fascinating that we don't have a record of the content of this prayer in our bible, because it seems like it would have made an awfully good prayer model for those who have lived wicked lives but have seen the light and wonder if God would forgive them. I want to take a short detour and talk about that for a few minutes. I'm going to ask for all your attention because what I'm going to tell you few Christians know, and it is imperative that it is exposed and acted upon.

The reality is that there is a record of Manasseh's prayer, but you won't find it in most bibles. It was considered apocryphal material at one time by Jews, Catholics and Protestants and was actually part of the standard Christian Bible as early as the 4th century A.D. It was placed at the end of the Book of 2nd Chronicles like an appendix. It remained part of the Christian Bible for 12 centuries until the 1500's A.D. when the rebellious German monk Martin Luther decided it ought to be removed. Let me make that clear: from the moment that there was such a thing as

a New Testament (a little after 200 A.D.) and it was finally added to the long existing Hebrew Bible in order to create what we could call the first Christian Bible, not only was Manasseh's prayer included, so were all the Books of the Apocrypha.

Even though Martin Luther demanded that the Apocrypha to be removed in the 1500's A.D., oddly he ordered that the Prayer of Manasseh should be kept. However the Geneva Bible continued to retain all of the Apocrypha (that was the bible that the Pilgrims and Puritans used) and the King James Bible did as well. In fact, Martin Luther also ordered the Book of Hebrews to be removed from the New Testament, and it was. However a few decades after his death it was re-included in most Christian Bibles. The Apocrypha has remained part of the Eastern Orthodox Christian bible, without interruption, to this day.

Why did Martin Luther do this? Because he considered the Apocrypha and the Book of Hebrews "too Jewish". His anti-Semitism is not speculation it was infamous, controversial and is well recorded by his contemporaries and by his own hand. There is no doubt that at first Luther was not a Jew hater; but as we follow the progression of his career and his literary works, he became so. Thus those who today seek to defend Luther as not being anti-Jewish will always point to his earliest works. However later he rescinded those words and became virulently anti-Semitic and as far as anyone knows died in that condition.

In 1543 Luther published a famous work called [On the Jews and Their Lies](#) in which he says that the [Jews](#) are a "base, whoring people, that is, no people of God, and their boast of lineage, circumcision, and law must be accounted as filth." Luther's theology has affected far more than only the Lutheran denomination; it has impacted most of Western Protestant Christianity. Thus the modern bibles that most Western Christians carry around with us accept, embrace, reflect and memorialize Luther's views on the worthlessness of Jews, the Apocrypha, the Torah (the Law) and the Old Testament in general. As a result, even though Luther commended it, the Prayer of Manasseh has typically been removed from our bibles as well.

Many of you have probably heard bible teachers and pastors speak of the mysterious biblical "silent period" that comes just before the beginning of the New Testament. That is, Malachi is usually placed as the last book of the Protestant Old Testament, however historically on a timeline Ezra and Nehemiah are the latest and those books take us no further than about 400 B.C. So this so-called "silent period" is the institutional Western Church saying that there is a mysterious hole in our bibles and there is no biblical information on the time period of 400 B.C. to about 1 A.D.; the 4 centuries leading up to the birth of Yeshua. But as I just explained to you, that "silent period" is a manmade illusion first created by Martin Luther who removed the Apocrypha, which are the books that cover the biblical history of that 400 year time period that is supposedly non-existent.

Later since the 1960's, those views of what ought to be and ought **not** to be in the bible were taken a step further when during the Jesus Movement the Old Testament began to be seen as so irrelevant to modern Christianity and to salvation efforts that it was removed altogether and many Evangelicals now carry with them a so-called bible that consists only of the New Testament. So what we see is an evolution of the bible that has been cut down and made smaller and smaller over the centuries by a Church that wanted to rid itself of as much Jewish influence as possible, and to reduce the presence and relevance of The Father (the Old Testament God) in order to more completely replace Him with The Son (the New Testament God).

I hope this little history lesson startles you. In fact I hope it makes you angry. What I have told you is not my opinion; the highest levels of Hebrew and Christian scholarship generally acknowledge that what I just shared with you is simply recorded historical fact that anyone can read about if you care to. I hope this causes you to go home and research everything I said in order to verify it so that you can come back and tell me how wrong I am. But I must give you a word of caution; what you will find out when you do some serious digging makes what I just explained to you seem mild by comparison and only the tip of the iceberg. This knowledge of our faith roots that is beginning to become known among Believers who care to seek it out is the basis of the so-called Hebrew Roots Movement. A movement to reform the ekklesia, the Church, and bring it back to its first love: the Word. And as John in the New Testament explains the Word is BOTH Christ **and** His given Word, the bible; the ENTIRE bible. It is the movement's hope to try to undo much of the harm and violence that has been done to our faith by agenda driven religious leaders, and to acknowledge the prophesied rebirth of Israel as a nation, the centrality of Israel and the Jewish people to the past, present, and future of redemption history, of God's continuing love and concern for them, and to expose all the doctrine that disagrees with the Word of God but some of which forms the basis for what passes as modern Church orthodoxy and theology.

So before we review the Prayer of Manasseh, let me address a question that is bound to come up: should Believers read the Apocrypha (those books that Luther removed from the bible)? Should we take those books seriously? Should we consider them as Holy Scripture? In a nutshell, the answers are yes to reading it, yes to taking it seriously, and **no** it should not be regarded as Scripture. That was the view of the Jews and Christians from the earliest times and right up until Luther. The Apocrypha contains truth, it belongs in our bibles, but it is of a level of divine inspiration below all the other books of the bible. Thus a good way to think of it is that its nature lies somewhere between Holy Writ and merely accurate Hebrew history. And I urge you to buy a good English translation of the Apocrypha (of which there are several) and read it. It is easy reading for the most part and as informative as it is fascinating.

Now that I've sufficiently opened this can of worms, let's examine the Prayer of Manasseh. First let me say that while the prayer is beautiful and inspiring, the likelihood of it having been uttered by Manasseh exactly as we have it is small. However it cannot be ruled out. Although the Apocrypha was not written until several centuries after Manasseh's day, it is

certainly possible the prayer was handed down word of mouth and its essence retained, because 2nd Chronicles 33:18 explains that indeed the words of Manasseh's prayer WERE recorded in a book called the Annals of the Kings of Israel. Here is the prayer as translated in the King James Bible version that is published including the Apocryphal writings:

O Lord, Almighty God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and of their righteous seed; who hast made heaven and earth, with all the ornament thereof; who hast bound the sea by the word of thy commandment; who hast shut up the deep, and sealed it by thy terrible and glorious name; whom all men fear, and tremble before thy power; for the majesty of thy glory cannot be borne, and thine angry threatening toward sinners is importable: but thy merciful promise is unmeasurable and unsearchable; for thou art the most high Lord, of great compassion, longsuffering, very merciful, and repentest of the evils of men. Thou, O Lord, according to thy great goodness hast promised repentance and forgiveness to them that have sinned against thee: and of thine infinite mercies hast appointed repentance unto sinners, that they may be saved. Thou therefore, O Lord, that art the God of the just, hast not appointed repentance to the just, as to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, which have not sinned against thee; but thou hast appointed repentance unto me that am a sinner: for I have sinned above the number of the sands of the sea. My transgressions, O Lord, are multiplied: my transgressions are multiplied, and I am not worthy to behold and see the height of heaven for the multitude of mine iniquities. I am bowed down with many iron bands, that I cannot life up mine head, neither have any release: for I have provoked thy wrath, and done evil before thee: I did not thy will, neither kept I thy commandments: I have set up abominations, and have multiplied offences. Now therefore I bow the knee of mine heart, beseeching thee of grace. I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned, and I acknowledge mine iniquities: wherefore, I humbly beseech thee, forgive me, O Lord, forgive me, and destroy me not with mine iniquities. Be not angry with me for ever, by reserving evil for me; neither condemn me to the lower parts of the earth. For thou art the God, even the God of them that repent; and in me thou wilt shew all thy goodness: for thou wilt save me, that am unworthy, according to thy great mercy. Therefore I will praise thee for ever all the days of my life: for all the powers of the heavens do praise thee, and thine is the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

This prayer is powerful proof that Manasseh became a changed man and a reformed king while detained in Babylon. To me, this is a pattern that will hold true when, a few years later, all of Judah was hauled off to Babylon in chains. After several years in Babylon, thousands of Jews realized their error, realized this calamity was caused by Yehoveh, repented, changed, and were readied to come back and re-establish themselves as a better people, a more godly people, in the Promised land,

It is little wonder that Luther allowed this one remnant of the Apocryphal writings to remain in his authorized bible. This prayer so well captures the essence of the condition of all humans:

absolute guilt without exception. Luther's primary gripe against the Catholic Church was that the Bible says that grace and grace alone (through Christ) is the path to atonement and forgiveness, but the Church had made it the province of the human Church government to grant forgiveness or to withhold it. Thus for them salvation came not from God but from the institutional Church. And by the way, generally speaking that is how Catholicism sees it to this day.

This prayer also expresses that our only hope for eternal survival is for God to forgive us in His mercy and grace. So powerfully does it illustrate the love of God for humanity, and the divine source of redemption that He has prepared for us, that Manasseh's Prayer is regularly chanted by the congregations of the various Eastern Orthodox Churches, and to this day is part of the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church of America.

Let's return from our detour to our study of the Book of 2nd Kings 22.

READ 2ND KINGS 22 all

Just as with chapter 21, there is a lot more information (or at least another perspective) about Josiah and his turn on the throne in 2nd Chronicles. So we will be reading chapters 34 and 35 at the appropriate time.

Judaism regards **Yoshiyahu** as Judah's last great king. Part of the reason for this is that the advent and actions of this particular king were actually prophesied by name.

^{CJB} **1 Kings 13:1** *Just then, as Yarov'am was standing by the altar to burn incense, a man of God came out of Y'hudah, directed to Beit-El by a word from ADONAI.*

2 *And by the word from ADONAI he cried out against the altar: "Altar, altar, here is what ADONAI says: 'A son will be born to the house of David; his name will be Yoshiyahu; and on you he will sacrifice the cohanim of the high places who burn incense on you! They will burn human bones on you!'" (1Ki 13:1-2 CJB)*

This event and the accompanying prophecy happened 3 centuries before the time of Josiah, **Yoshiyahu**, and 2nd Kings 22. It happened as King Jeroboam stood in front of the 10 tribes of the breakaway northern kingdom (just a few years after Solomon's death) and prepared to burn incense to an idol. Well, finally, that prophecy was about to be fulfilled precisely as ordained. Those 10 tribes that hailed Jeroboam for his idolatrous behavior had been driven out

of their land a bit more than 90 years earlier and scattered around the Assyrian Empire, with only small remnants of them remaining in the area surrounding Samaria.

Let me take a moment to set the stage for us because the historical context is vital if we're going to understand what is happening. The geopolitical situation was quite different for the incoming king than it was for his grandfather Manasseh. All during Manasseh's time Assyria was in absolute control; and we have that reaffirmed for us back in chapter 21 when Ashurbanipal made a show of his power by arresting a number of kings in the west who were behaving a bit too independently to suit him, and among them was Manasseh, King of Judah. But by now Egypt's and Babylon's influence in the region was on the rise and the golden age of Assyria had passed. They had extended their Empire too far, and couldn't defend all their borders. Judah suddenly found itself in a time of relative peace without the fear of any major power trying to lord over them. In fact, Assyria even lost its control over the territory of the former northern kingdom of Israel (now called Samaria) and so we'll see King Josiah try to take his reforms beyond Judah and up to the north to the former territory of the 10 tribes. If one tries to date the moment when Assyria finally lost its grip on the entire Holy Lands, it would probably be about 630 B.C.

So it is into this set of conditions that 2nd Kings 22 opens by telling us that Josiah became king at a mere 8 years old. This was not a co-regency with his father like it had been for his grandfather who became king at 12 years of age; that is he didn't share the throne with his father to learn the ropes until he got older. Rather Josiah's father Amon, who had only occupied the throne for 2 years, was suddenly murdered by his own royal court. Who they intended on putting on the throne isn't clear. But then the murderers were killed and Amon's son Josiah, only 8 years old, was given the throne. Why not an older son? We have no record of any other son of Amon, so it seems whatever group was in control was stuck with an 8 year old. Or.....were they aware of that 300 year old prophecy that specifically named Josiah as a king of righteousness that would cleanse the land of its apostasy and idolatry and so they followed through with the process believing they were God's tools for bringing about his will? Obviously it was the men called the **am eretz** (people of the land) who executed those conspirators who had assassinated the completely legitimate, although horribly wicked, King Amon who was a true descendant of the King David; and these **am eretz** were the true power behind Josiah's throne at least at first. After all, no 8 year old child had any ability to comprehend politics let alone make decisions that affected a nation.

Let me remind you that the **am eretz** was more a movement than a political party. These were people who, in their own way, were trying to restore a Torah-based law and purity to Judah. They cut across all levels of society from the poorest farmers to the government administrators to the priesthood. So to some level at least little Josiah was being given instruction in God's Torah and being led in a generally righteous and honorable way. Thus verse 2 declares that Josiah did what was right from Yehoveh's perspective.

We're told that he ruled for 31 years and then died (actually we'll find out later that he was killed in battle). This means that he hadn't quite reached his 40th birthday when he died. That seems a bit odd since he was such a righteous king, and yet his life span was cut short. We'll address that issue and another related one in due time that has caused a lot of scholarly debate.

Verse 3 jumps over many years and plants us in the 18th year of Josiah. This does not mean he was 18 years old; rather it means he had been king for 18 years so he was 26 years old now. And the first recorded act of **Yoshiyahu** was to order the Temple to be repaired. One can only imagine its deteriorated condition after the reins of so many bad kings who used the Temple and its treasures as their personal bank account and as a place to entertain guests and erect idols. It had been a long time since a serious attempt to make repairs and restoration to the Temple had been undertaken; it was during the reign of Joash around 200 years earlier. In fact the conditions were so similar it is no wonder that Josiah generally followed the same plan and pattern as did Joash to accomplish his goal. Joash was 7 years old and Josiah was 8 years old when they became kings. Thus they had mentors and handlers who guided their every movement and decision. Fortunately, in both cases, godly men and women provided their care and guidance and the result was generally positive.

Chapter 22 is written as though everything we read about happened in the 18th year of Josiah's reign. And that whatever happened in between his 1st and 18th years was unimportant. But common sense tells us that this cannot be the case. There had to be a lot of groundwork laid and earlier reforms made before such an enormous undertaking as refurbishing the Temple could happen. And indeed, in 2nd Chronicles we find some answers to what happened in those earlier years.

Turn now to 2nd Chronicles chapter 34.

READ 2ND CHRONICLES 34:1 – 8

So here we have a brief record of what led up to the decision to rebuild the Temple, the order to commence being given in King **Yoshiyahu's** 18th year. The writer/editor of 2nd Kings condenses this sudden explosion of righteous reform and activity into one grand event: Josiah's 18th year. But the writer/editor of 2nd Chronicles depicts an evolving process with mile markers at Josiah's 8th year and 12th year that culminates with the highlight of extensively repairing the Temple in the 18th year.

So 2nd Chronicles tells us that when he was 16 years old he seems to have gained an independent interest in pursuing the ways of the Lord. Within 4 years he began a program to rid Jerusalem of all the **bamot**, the Asherah, and the metal and wood idol images that his

father had put up. It is important to understand that the **bamot** (the high places) always referred not to pagan altars, but to private altars to Yehoveh God of Israel. And while on the one hand having a private altar to burn incense or perhaps to sacrifice to Yehoveh doesn't seem so bad, God has designated that only the Levite priests can do these functions (not private citizens) and only at the Jerusalem Temple, not anywhere the people choose. But even the best of the Kings of Judah allowed the **bamot** to remain in operation, no doubt due to the political pressures.

Some traditions die hard. I would like for you to recall that prior to Mt. Sinai and the Law of Moses, when the Israelites were in Egypt, they had adopted the typical custom of that era of each family appointing a family member to act sort of like a priest (they weren't called priests), and then each family would have a little altar upon which they'd burn incense, and some would sacrifice animals at their homes. Usually this specified family member was the firstborn son in the household. But when Israel fled Egypt, at Mt. Sinai the law became that the tribe of the Levites alone would from here forward perform the ritual functions of incense burning and animal sacrifice to God, and further it was to occur ONLY at the Tabernacle that was erected at the center of the Wilderness encampment. This never settled well with any of the other tribes, and many of the folks ignored this commandment and continued in their old ways of making burning incense and animal sacrifice a private family ritual. Thus from the time Israel first crossed the Jordan River under Joshua, until the time we're studying and Josiah is the king, **bamot**, high places, the private family altars to Yehoveh, continued in operation. And it was apparently such a hot button and sensitive issue that politically the Kings of Judah felt it was not a fight they could win, and so looked the other way; the people demanded it and it was not worth the battle. But here we find that **Yoshiyahu** felt otherwise and ordered the **bamot** taken down. This would have been very unpopular and come at great political cost.

But Josiah was young enough and zealous for God enough that he was willing to take the plunge and let the chips fall where they may. Then in 2nd Chronicles 33:5 we get the direct fulfillment of the prophecy of 1st Kings 13 as Josiah had the priests killed who worshipped and tended to the various false gods and also had their dead bodies thrown onto their pagan altars and burned up to ashes. This purge by fire was thus a cleansing, a purification, of what had been defiled. But then in verse 6 we see that even though he was King of Judah, he ventured far to the north and did the same in the former territories of Manasseh, Ephraim, Naftali and Shimon (Simeon). By the way, this Simeon was not the former tribal territory of Simeon that was now part of Judah. It was a city or small district in the north. Josiah's mission to the north had to have occurred after Assyria pulled up stakes and left, having lost any ability to control the area of Samaria. Thus it left the territory open to whomever decided they wanted to lord over it, and so King Josiah appears to have felt he had the right since this was at one time Israelite land.

But it also shows us something else, which is confirmed in other biblical and extra-biblical accounts. A significant portion of the remnant of the 10 tribes who somehow managed to stay in the land after Assyria began its large scale deportations of the Israelites to other nations of

the Assyrian Empire (100 years earlier), intermixed through marriage with the people of foreign nations that Assyria brought in to replace the exiled Hebrews. Naturally along with these foreigners came their idols and their gods. It is well known that it was official Assyrian policy to allow all the conquered nations, as well as those under their influence, to continue worshipping their own gods, in their own ways, without interference.

Further since the supposed Hebrew religion of the 10 tribes was based on the Golden Calf cult instituted by Jeroboam, it wasn't hard for these northern Israelite tribal members to accept idols of other gods. So by now there was a strange perverted unholy mix of religion going on in and around Samaria and the former Israelite tribal territories, and so King Josiah decided he was going to do something about it.

We also find out in 2nd Chronicles 34:7 that up north sun worship had taken hold (no doubt imported with foreigners). Sun and moon worship had been standard religions of the Middle East for thousands of years. So the big picture is that every imaginable kind of religious perversion, every variety of idol worship, was now entrenched in the land that God had set apart for His people. None of it had been forced upon the people by foreigners; either their own Hebrew kings insisted upon it or the people themselves sought after it.

We'll continue next week with the rebuilding of the Temple and discuss the discovery of a lost scroll that had an enormous effect on Josiah and on his kingdom.