

King Manasseh

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[0 : 00] We're starting at chapter 33, 2 Chronicles. Manasseh was 12 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for 55 years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.

He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had demolished. He also erected altars to the baals and made asher poles. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshipped them.

He built altars in the temple of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, My name will remain in Jerusalem forever. In both courts of the temple of the Lord, he built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his children in the fire of the valley of Ben-Hinnom, practiced divination and witchcraft, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists.

He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, arousing his anger. He took the image he had made and put it in God's temple, of which God had said to David, to his son Solomon, In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever.

[1 : 23] I will not again make the feet of the Israelites leave the land I assigned to your ancestors, if only they will be careful to do everything that I commanded them, concerning all the laws and decrees and regulations given through Moses.

But Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites.

The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, and they paid no attention. So the Lord brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles, and took him to Babylon.

In his distress he sought the favor of the Lord, his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty, and listened to his plea.

So he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God. Afterwards he rebuilt the outer wall of the city of David, west of the Gihon Spring in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate and a circle in the hill of Ophel.

[2 : 49] He also made it much higher. He stationed military commanders in all the fortified cities in Judah. He got rid of the foreign gods and removed the image from the temple of the Lord, as well as all the altars he had built on the temple hill and in Jerusalem, and he threw them out of the city.

Then he restored the altar of the Lord and sacrificed fellowship offerings and thank offerings on it, and told Judah to serve the Lord, the God of Israel.

The people, however, continued to sacrifice at the high places, but only to the Lord, their God. The other events of Manasseh's reign, including his prayer to his God, and the words the seer spoke to him in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, are written in the annals of the kings of Israel.

His prayer and how God was moved by his entreaty, as well as all his sins and unfaithfulness, and the sites where he built high places and set up asher poles and idols before he humbled himself. All these are written in the records of the seers. Manasseh rested with his ancestors and was buried in his palace, and Ammon, his son, succeeded him as king.

[4 : 14] Amen. Amen. Well, in July 2015, a 94-year-old former sergeant who served in the concentration camps in Auschwitz testified in a trial that it was his role to help operate the death camps.

And while he was on trial, all of the various different things that he had a hand in doing were freshly laid out before him.

So he was reminded freshly of the role that he played in the deaths of many, many innocent men, women, and children.

Well, towards the very end of this trial, he was given a chance to speak. And in response to all that he did, with tears in his eyes, all he said was this, I can only hope for God's forgiveness. He had done the worst of things to his fellow human beings. He had a hand in the most cruel deaths possible. And at the end of the day, he could only hope that God would forgive someone who has done even the worst of the worst.

[5 : 49] Well, in relation to people doing the worst of the worst, the worst of things, when it comes to Scripture, I don't think we will find someone who did worse things than King Manasseh.

Looking at Scripture, King Manasseh, I think, is at the very top of the list in terms of someone doing the worst of things. In fact, King Manasseh is known not only to scholars, but if you look at children's books, children's Bibles, and things like that, King Manasseh is known as the evil king. That's what he's known as. Well, what did he do to earn such a bad reputation? Well, our passage this morning tells us what he did.

At the beginning of verse 2, we are told that he did evil in the eyes of the Lord. And then in verses 2 to 10, we're told about his evil acts in a little bit more detail.

So what evil did he do? Well, in verses 3 to 4, we see that Manasseh, he worshipped false gods. King Manasseh was deeply involved in the worship of false gods.

[7 : 06] We read in verse 3 that he actually rebuilt the altars that his father, King Hezekiah, had taken away. So Manasseh's father was King Hezekiah, and he was a godly man.

And when he was king, he took down all of these altars to these different false gods. Well, then when Manasseh became king, what did he do?

He decided he would rebuild all of these altars to these different false gods. And going a step further, imagine this, verse 4. Manasseh actually put these altars in the temple of the Lord.

If we think about how bad was that, you know, not only did he worship false gods, not only did he rebuild these altars to false gods, but he actually brought these altars into the very temple of the Lord, almost rubbing his false worship in the very face of the Lord.

He brazenly, if you like, worshipped false gods in the presence of the Lord. Well, that really is only the start, because to add to that, as part of his false worship to these false gods, he practiced child sacrifice.

[8 : 33] And we read here in verse 6 that he actually sacrificed his children in a fire in the valley of Ben-Hinnom. Now, at this time, at certain times of the year, it was the practice that people would bring their children down into this valley.

And I don't want to get too graphic here, but this is what was happening. They would burn their children alive in an act of worship to this false god, Baal. I mean, can you imagine that, bringing your children down into a valley and burning them alive in an act of worship to this false god?

This is the height of evil. You know, this is King Manasseh. Well, it continues, because in verse 6, speaking about evil, he basically practiced every kind of evil thing that was going.

If it was dark and if it was evil, you name it, he was into it. Verse 6 covers a lot. He practiced divination, witchcraft.

He sought omens. He consulted mediums and spirits. Every dark and demonic thing that was going, he was doing it.

[9 : 47] And the evil continues. He also shed so much innocent blood. And just turning for one second to 2 Kings chapter 21, in verse 16, we are told that Manasseh shed so much innocent blood that he filled the streets of Jerusalem with blood from end to end.

How shocking is that? He was so bloodthirsty. He killed so much innocent people that it was said about him in 2 Kings chapter 21, verse 16, that the streets of Jerusalem were filled with blood from the end to end.

Incidentally, according to Jewish tradition, it was King Manasseh who murdered the prophet Isaiah. So it seems like anyone around that time, he was so bloodthirsty.

So this was a nasty, nasty, evil man. And to cap it all off, to make all of it worse, is it wasn't just that he was led astray himself.

We read in verse 9 that with his actions as king, he was responsible for leading many people astray with him. So it wasn't just that he was led astray himself.

[11 : 09] As king, he led many, many other people into evil with him. How many more people did he lead to sacrifice their children? How many more people did he lead into witchcraft?

So this is King Manasseh. And I'm not sure if we've heard too much about him before, but it's not a pretty picture when we look at who he is.

It really is a picture of just how evil and just how bad mankind can be. It doesn't get much worse than false worship, sacrificing children, practicing every kind of evil, killing thousands and thousands of people, leading people astray, left, right and center.

There was not many in scripture who could rival this level of evilness. He wanted nothing to do with God and he wanted everything to do with darkness.

Well, that was all about the change because in verse 11, the Lord brought the Assyrian army up against Manasseh and Manasseh was defeated by the Assyrians and they took him prisoner and they did so in a pretty uncompromising way.

[12:25] Verse 11, they put a hook in his nose, they bound him in bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. They basically chained him up like a wild animal.

So all of a sudden, King Manasseh, who up until now was the king who did whatever he wanted, all of a sudden found himself in a truly desperate situation.

Well, it is now in this moment of distress that all of a sudden, Manasseh wants something to do with the Lord. We read in verse 12, that in his distress, he sought the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors.

So it is now in this moment of distress that all of a sudden, Manasseh is looking to the Lord for his favor. It's now in this moment of distress that all of a sudden, Manasseh decided to humble himself before the Lord.

It's only now you might say that when he kind of needs something and wants something, it's only now that he's looking to the Lord. Well, the question is, how would the Lord respond to all of this?

[13:49] Look at what this man has done. Look at the terrible things he has done, the evil he has done, the child sacrifice, the witchcraft, so on, so on.

And after all that he has done, how will the Lord respond to Manasseh in his cry to him for his favor? Well, it is at this very moment that we get a wonderful glimpse of just how merciful and compassionate and forgiving and gracious is the heart of our God.

Because after all that Manasseh has done, how does the Lord respond to him in his cry for help? After all the evil he has done, after all the killing, the false worship and everything he has done, the Lord responds to him with incredible mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

Because despite all of the evil that he did in verse 13, we're told that the Lord was moved by his plea and listened to his cry.

Has to be one of the most amazing verses in all of Scripture. The Lord listened to his plea, the Lord heard his cry, the Lord saw his heart and forgave him.

[15:18] And not only did the Lord forgive him and save him from the Assyrians, the Lord went a step further again. Not only did the Lord hear his cry and forgive him and save him, we read at the end of verse 13, the Lord actually brought him back to Jerusalem so that he could rule as king again.

You know, the Lord could have said, I will forgive you, I'll save you from the Assyrians, but you know, that's it. That's enough for you because of all that you have done.

But no, the Lord forgave him, saved him, and restored him to be king again. The Lord, by his incredible mercy and grace, despite all that he had done, brought Manasseh back to his kingdom and allowed him to rule as king again.

And interestingly, he ruled for 55 years, and that's the longest reign of any king of Judah. That's a longer reign than King David, that's a longer reign than Solomon, that's a longer reign than King Hezekiah.

Why would God allow someone who was so evil, the vilest of kings, to come back and occupy the throne for 55 years, longer than any king in the history of Judah?

[16:47] Well, I think the answer is clear, to show us the depths of his grace, of his mercy, of his forgiveness. This man deserved the worst, as they say, he deserved hell.

He practiced every kind of conceivable act of evil that you could think of. But he cried out to God, and God answered him, and God didn't just save him and forgive him, he restored him and blessed him to rule for the longest of any king.

God's mercy and his grace is just beyond our comprehension. salvation. It's above and beyond because he forgives and he restores even the worst of the worst.

And just to finish with, I think that this is encouraging for at least two reasons. Number one, this is encouraging when we look at our own lives.

The fact that God forgives even the worst of the worst of things is encouraging when we look at our own lives. And that when we come to him, we can be forgiven and we are forgiven for anything that we have done.

[18:09] And I just wonder, is there something in your life and when you look back on it, it just seems especially bad to you. And it just seems especially wrong.

Maybe something you have done or something. And you haven't fully let it go as in maybe you're wondering, has God really forgiven you for that one thing?

Or maybe for those couple of things? Or for those a lot of things? But you're wondering, has the Lord really forgiven you or is he still somehow going to count it against you?

Well, these verses are proof. Manasseh is proof that the Lord forgives, even the worst of things, even the worst of the worst. He forgives, he restores, he sets free even the worst of things.

It is his heart to forgive and to restore and to not hold things against us. So I just want to remind us as believers that that thing we might have done that we look back with and we find it especially hard maybe to fully let go, we have been forgiven, we have been set free, it has been paid for in full, our God forgives even the worst of things.

[19:35] So the fact that God forgives even the worst of things is encouraging when we look at our own lives, but number two, the fact that God forgives the worst of the worst is encouraging when we look at the lives of others in that we might have loved ones, we might have sons or daughters or mothers or fathers or brothers or sisters who when we look at their lives it might just seem to us that they're just walking so far away from the Lord.

It might even seem to us that they're walking in darkness. That can be so hard to see, but let's remember Manasseh and let's remember that no one has gone too far away from the Lord that can't be brought back if they would simply just turn to him in a simple cry for help.

Let us remember that no one is beyond hope. no one has gone too far away that the Lord can't forgive them and won't forgive them if they would just turn to him.

I think King Manasseh is a testimony of just that. King Manasseh went from the evilest of men to a man who was walking his child down into a valley to burn them alive to a false God, to a precious child of the living king.

when he simply cried out to the Lord and the Lord forgave him for all that he had done. We are not beyond hope.

[21:11] Our friends and family are not beyond hope. That man involved in the concentration camps is not beyond hope. Such is the abundance of God's mercy and forgiveness.

No one is beyond hope. a poor homeless lady from the streets of London had never been outside the streets of London.

Well, one day a group of volunteers decided that they were going to take her on a day trip over to Brighton. I don't know too much about Brighton, but I know that the football team is called the Seagulls, so I presume that's a trip to the seaside.

And they wanted to show her the ocean. So they took her out to Brighton to see the ocean. And as soon as she got a glimpse of it, she burst out in tears.

And those who brought her were kind of wondering, you know, what's wrong with her? And they said, why are you crying? Well, she pointed out at the ocean and she said, this is the only thing that I have ever seen that there is enough of.

[22:26] She was from the streets of London and she had nothing. She said, this is the only thing that I've ever seen that there is enough of. Well, God has oceans and oceans of mercy.

There is more than enough of his mercy for the worst of the worst. There's more than enough of his mercy for you and for me.

In many ways, our own heart is the worst heart that we should know. And there's oceans of mercy for anyone who would ever come to him.

I think King Manasseh reminds us of that. We're going to sing a song to finish with and I think the song is so fitting in relation to this passage of scripture and in relation to the King Manasseh.

We're going to sing a chorus but then the next verse, I just love the words. What love could remember, nor wrongs we have done. Omniscient all knowing, he counts not their sum.

[23 : 34] Thrown into a sea without bottom or shore, our sins they are many, his mercy is more. And I think that that is so encouraging. Whatever we have done, his mercy is more.

Whatever someone else has done, his mercy is more. So let's sing and worship our Lord and as we do, let us just have a thankful heart for the mercy that he has shown us.

He has forgiven us, he has set us free. So let's worship our Lord together. Our sins they are many, his mercy is more. Lord together. Thank you.