

## Manasseh

A Lesson in Repentance

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 02-Jan-16; Sermon #1302

As we have done in the last few sermons, we will concentrate in the book of II Chronicles. I seem to have found myself in a series here—I am not calling them a series, I want them all to be kind of standalones. But they work as a series as well.

As I mentioned in the last few sermons, Chronicles has a unique perspective on Old Testament history. Unlike the book of Kings which was probably written much closer to the time that the actual events happened, Chronicles was written after the Jews came back from exile (actually several generations after that). So, because he has a more long-range view of history, the chronicler uses that to come up with some conclusions and writes specifically to these themes that he comes up with in his “protracted sermon” (as I would like to call it), or treatise, that gives us the lesson/theme of these sermons: ***God has said what He will do, and He does what He has said.***

Because of this very positive statement about God, we should trust Him to react in the same way all the time. He does not act any other way. He acts according to what He has said He will do, and so He does.

If we have a question or a trial and we need answers, we can look in the Bible and know God’s pattern in these sorts of situations, and we can know what God wants us to do. We can trust Him that when He is looking at us in that particular situation, He is going to react to us in the way that He has reacted in His Word to other people having a similar problem.

So, God has said He will do, and He has done what He has said. That is the foundation and the basis on which we base our faith—because we can trust God to speak and act in a very stable way. He never varies from that pattern.

Now the chronicler realizes that God’s actions and reactions—His behaviors—toward Israel stem from the all-important covenant that He had made with them. The things that He has said He will do were written in the covenant.

The covenant itself is a major theme in the books of Chronicles—because that is what he is always going back to, to show his readers what God has said and what God will do, because it is right there in the covenant. In New Testament terms, then, we could say that the covenant was based on the love and faithfulness of God.

God's love is shown in that He always wanted to bless them and He had made these wonderful promises of prosperity, and of peace, and of power—all physical promises. But He gave them these promises in order to make them strong, healthy, and good (as good as they could be). He always behaved in good faith in accordance with those terms. He always tried to bless them with these promises that are included in the covenant.

But, on the other hand, when Israel acted against the terms of the covenant—God would never act against the terms of the covenant; the breaking of the covenant was always one-sided, it was *always* on the side of the people—the terms of the covenant that they broke were always something having to do with worshipping other gods and failing to keep His commandments. Even then God was faithful. He was faithful to visit the punishments on them that He said He would do if they disobeyed.

This is why I say His actions were always based on love and faith—because it was loving even to punish them for the things that they were doing. Then, of course, He was faithful to what He had said. That is His pattern.

Numbers 23:19 is out of the mouth of Balaam. But it is an important concept, an important principle that we have to know.

**Numbers 23:19** God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent [change His mind; go a different way] . . .

He does not change that way. He does not need to repent from sin, obviously, so this is talking about God having to go a different way than you expect Him.

**Numbers 23:19** . . . Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

This is the idea that we keep coming back to in the books of Chronicles because that is one of the main themes of the books.

Please go now to Ecclesiastes 12. The Chronicler, we find, makes himself as wise as Solomon because he comes up with the same conclusion. This is the conclusion of the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon says:

Manasseh by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

**Ecclesiastes 12:13** Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

My dad just said the whole duty of children is to obey their parents perfectly. Well, here we have basically the same thing said in terms of all of us.

**Ecclesiastes 12:14** For God will bring every work into judgment [so He is faithful that way] including every secret thing . . .

We cannot hide things from God. He knows everything that we are doing. We cannot do something in the back room and think we are going to get away with it. Not with God.

**Ecclesiastes 12:14** . . . whether it is good or whether it is evil.

The instruction here is if we show deep reverence for God and follow His instructions, we will find blessing and peace and live worthwhile lives. That is what Solomon is getting to.

How can we live worthwhile lives in a world of vanity? Well, the way we do it is to fear God and keep His commandments—to worship Him with reverence and to follow His instructions. If we fail to do this though, there are consequences.

We know that judgment is now on the house of God (I Peter 4:17), meaning this is our time of judgment. This is when all the cash is on the table. This is when we got to make good. If we, like Israel, are not doing this—if we are not fearing God and keeping His commandments—we are going to find ourselves under the adverse judgment of God. God is weighing our works and behaviors against the terms of the New Covenant, not the Old Covenant.

We have, I will not say ‘a more difficult time,’ but it is, in a way. It is more difficult. Our judgment is more severe, because now we have the Holy Spirit, and we have got to make sure that we comply with what God wants us to do—obey Him—because this is our time, this is our day of judgment. We have got make sure that we learn the lessons that the chronicler is giving us here because it does not apply just to the Old Covenant, or just to the physical people of Israel.

This is a principle that carries itself into the New Testament and we need to be careful

that we do those same things—fear God, keep the commandments, worship only Him, and do what He has instructed us to do.

If you know your chapters, Exodus 23 is part of the Old Covenant as given from Mount Sinai, and if you know the number of the chapters there—from Exodus 20 through 23—you will know this is right at the end of the Old Covenant. These are the final paragraphs of the Old Covenant that we will be reading. I want you to think about this in terms of, let us say, a narrative, a speech, a book, a movie, or something like that. They say that you are known by your entrances and your exits. So, you are known by the way you open and by the way you close—the way you start and by the way you finish.

Now, in the Old Covenant, God started with the Ten Commandments—the Big Ten. He started even that with “You shall have no other gods before Me.” That was the big thing He wanted them to be hit with immediately: “You shall have no other gods before Me”—fear God and the Ten Commandments, keep the commandments, obey His instruction. And then He goes on and gives a lot of different laws. But that is the beginning that He starts with in the Old Covenant.

Now the other part that is important in any narrative (story, movie, whatever) is the end. It is what you leave the reader, or viewer, with. What you leave them with is what they remember, as they go forward in to their lives and they do their next things. That is the thing that lingers in the back of their minds. Let us read what God left Israel to linger in their minds. Starting in verse 20.

**Exodus 23:20-27** Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off. You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars. So you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. I will send My fear before you.

Manasseh by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

**Exodus 23:32-33** You shall make no covenant with them [meaning the people of the land], nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you [The End].

Wow! What does He leave them with? He leaves them with a dire warning. But He essentially leaves them with this same theme that I have been talking about. God's parting shot, His memorable theme—His memorable idea that He leaves them with—is found actually in several places here in Exodus 23. It is found, first of all, in verse 21. And then its counterpart, or the opposite, is given in verse 22.

**Exodus 23:21** Beware of Him and obey His voice . . .

This is essentially “Worship God and keep the commandments; obey His instruction.”

**Exodus 23:21** . . . do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions [“If you sin, you are going to be judged,” He says]; for My name is in Him.

He is saying that this Angel has all the power of God's name in Him and He was Yahweh, the Angel, the Lord. Of course, He then gives them the opposite of this which is the other side—the counterpart—which is the good thing.

**Exodus 23:22** But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies . . .

So He gave them the negative and then He gives them the positive. But it is very clear: You do good, you will be blessed; you do evil, you will be cursed. If you do good things, good things will follow you in return. If you do bad things, then you can expect bad things. That is just the way it works. What you sow is what you reap. It is going to happen.

That is what the covenant essentially tells them time and time again. All you have got to do is obey these words, worship God (He is the only One that you serve), and things will turn out very well. But if you apostatize—if you go away from God, if you reject Him—then you are going to feel His wrath. That is just the way it is.

But it comes up again in the chapter. He actually says a similar thing three times in this final long paragraph so that they make sure they get the point. In verses 24-26 it is said again, but this time it is more focused on worshipping false gods.

**Exodus 23:24-25** You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars. [Then He says, on the opposite side] So you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water.

So He gives them again the negative and the positive, telling them what they need to do to make sure they stay on the positive side. But notice here that the disobedience that God has His eye on, most particularly, is the worshipping of foreign gods—of other gods. That is the one that He wants to see least of all because it is the worst of all. It is the thing that leads into even greater sins of other kinds. He makes sure He lets them know “Make sure you get this one sin off the table. Make sure you do it right in regard to this one sin in particular.” Because that is the bad one and that is the one He had His eye on.

Most of all, He does not want Israel to have anything to do with the gods of this world, especially the gods of that land (or *any* other god). But He was sending them into this land and He knew that they were going to be tempted by these other gods because they were particularly sensual gods—gods that appealed to their senses, their sexuality, and their worst base instincts—and it was going to be a big trial, a big temptation. He made sure He let them know that they needed to be on guard against this.

He goes on to say, as we go down into this closing paragraph here, that He wants their idols and their altars utterly destroyed and smashed to pieces. “Get them totally out of the land. Don’t let them crop back up. They’re going to be a snare to you. They’re going to cause problems, so get them out of the way. Don’t let your eyes linger on them.”

This theme, then, is repeated, last of all, in verses 32 and 33 where He adds: “Do not make any agreements with the people of the land because that is going to lead you to their gods. Their covenants are going to lead you to their gods”—just like His covenant was made to lead people to Him. Then He adds there “nor with their gods.” They go together.

Then He says this astounding statement: “They shall not dwell in your land.” Does He mean the gods or does He mean the people? Well, He was going to push the people

out at this point so that the people would not even be a temptation to them. But notice why He did not want them there. “For they will make you [force you, cause you] to sin against Me.”

They are of a different mind, a different set of attitudes, a different set of beliefs, a different way they grew up. These people would lead Israel astray, so keep them out, and especially their gods out.

“For if you serve their gods [which is what He was getting at all the time, that would be the ultimate end of playing nice with these other people], it will surely be a snare to you.” They would be caught. And what happens when an animal is snared? It does not go well with the animal. They are usually killed and eaten.

It is a very severe, very serious warning that He leaves them with as He ends the covenant, and it is that particular thing that He is trying to get through their thick skulls. But they remained thick (What was it called? ‘Foreheads of iron’ or whatever) that they never got it. They always let those foreign gods entice them.

This is not a difficult concept. I know you have all got it. But this is what this covenant begins and ends with: “You shall have no other gods before Me.” That is what He says. If you want it in simple terms, it begins with that idea and it ends with that idea. It is a little bit more positive in the beginning, and, at the end of it, it is very severe: “It will be a snare to you if you disobey this particular commandment.”

But, in a sense, “You shall have no other gods before Me” is all that God requires. I mean, if you want to concentrate it down in to the simplest of terms, if we have God as our only source of truth and we serve only Him, then everything else—bearing His name, keeping the Sabbath, honoring parents, respecting life and marriage and property and truth, and not coveting, and all the other commands that God gives—come as a matter of course.

We have got to get the first one right—“You shall have no other gods before Me”—and then we are not going to be tempted by these other things. We are not going to do the things that they want us to do. We are going to do what is right, what God wants us to do. So, the first commandment is all important. If we get the commands about idolatry right, we create the environment and the attitude to follow God’s way in every facet of life. There is a lot more.

We will go to Deuteronomy now which, as my Dad has taught, is essentially the covenant given again. It is expanded from what is given in Exodus 20 through 23. There

Manasseh by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

is a fair amount of repetition in there, as well as some of the things that were taking place just as the Israelites were about to go in to the land. But it is essentially a repetition of the covenant to another generation—the generation that was going to go in to the Promised Land. But this same principle—“You shall have no other gods before Me, and if you do, you are going to be punished” or “If you do worship Me and no other, then you are going to be blessed”—keeps coming up time and time again.

Of course, it goes all the way to and through the blessings and the curses in Deuteronomy 28 which is: “If you do what is right, I will do this, this, this for you”—all these good things—“but if you do not do right, then I will do this, this, this”—all these bad things ending in destruction, death, scattering, exile, and all the rest. This is a major theme of the book of Deuteronomy because it is a major theme of the covenant. It just keeps getting repeated.

Let us go to Deuteronomy 6. This is one of the chapters that a lot of people know even if they do not know the Old Testament very well. They at least know this one scripture (verse 4) but we are going to start in verse 1. I want you to get the gist of what he is telling them here. This is right after he has repeated the Ten Commandments, in chapter 5.

**Deuteronomy 6:1-3** Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the Lord your God [does that sound a little bit like Ecclesiastes 12 and what is said elsewhere?], to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you—‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’

So what does this lead to?

**Deuteronomy 6:4-5** Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one [meaning there is only one God to worship]! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.

Pretty clear, except he has flipped them here for us. He first gives us the

commandments and then he gives us the command to worship only God and love Him with all you have got.

**Deuteronomy 6:10-15** And it shall be, when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant—when you have eaten and are full—then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you (for the Lord your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.

He says it again. If you did not get it the first time, now he says it again. In verse 24 it is talking about the question of a son to a father about these things, a part of the father's reply here.

**Deuteronomy 6:24-25** And the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us.

So here we are given a repetition of this “Do good, you will get blessing; do evil, you will be cursed” theme that keeps cropping up—because God has said what He will do, and He has done what He has said. All this repetition becomes rather monotonous when you read it all back to back. But, obviously, the repetition is for emphasis. God is saying: “Do you get the point? This is how it works.” “First, worship only Me,” He says, and everything will come up roses. It will all be good. “But if you don't, then there is going to be judgment.” It will work this way every time. This is how God is.

Let us go to Deuteronomy 29, after the blessings and the curses. This is, as it says here in the New King James, ‘The Covenant Renewed in Moab.’ This is kind of a formal thing that they are doing, as they are going to go across Jordan, and so this is told to them. I just want verses 24 through 28 because this is, again, an answer to a question about why the people are not doing well, especially the whole of Israel, more exactly.

**Deuteronomy 29:24-28** All nations would say, 'Why has the Lord done so to this land? [meaning done a great deal of devastation and killed a lot of the people] What does the heat of this great anger mean?' Then men would say: 'Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt; for they went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods that they did not know and that He had not given to them. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against this land, to bring on it every curse that is written in this book [God has done what He has said]. And the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger, in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.'

This is a prophecy of what would happen if the people of Israel forsook God, and this is the answer that would be given by an observer about what happened. And it happened. It happened to Israel and then it happened to Judah. Therefore it happened to all Israel, just at different times.

God, here, is speaking about the Israelites walking in the imagination of their hearts, going their own way, and serving other gods. That was what made, and makes, Him angry. That is what arouses His wrath: When people think that they know another way and they go and commit idolatry. And it does not fail to bring awful punishments from Him, unless it is repented of quickly. The reason here is encapsulated very succinctly—the destruction, death, and exile that came from God for forsaking Him and serving other gods. It is that simple.

Finally, let us get kind of a flip side to this so we do not leave this section depressed.

**Deuteronomy 30:1-10** Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you, and you return to the Lord your God [you repent] and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the Lord

Manasseh by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. Also the Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. And you will again obey the voice of the Lord and do all His commandments which I command you today. The Lord your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the Lord will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

What He does here is He strikes a much different tone than He ended the last chapter with. Here He is very gracious, very compassionate, very welcoming to those who repent—those who turn from their evil ways, and worship Him, and do good, and obey His commandments.

He promises to prosper such a person—bless his work and his progeny, his livestock, his land. And you know what he says? He says, at the end of the chapter here, “This is what I want for you. I have given you a choice. But choose the life, choose the good, choose what is right, all the blessings. Love God,” he says. “Obey Him, cling to Him” because, he says (very important phrase here), “He is your life and your length of days” (verse 20).

Do you want to live, do you want to really live, and do you want to live forever? Worship the true God and no other, and obey His voice. That is what it takes. That is the consistent theme of the covenant and the consistent theme of Chronicles.

Now, today, we are going to look at yet another king, one unlike the kings that we have looked at in the past in the last few sermons. This one is a decidedly *evil* king. Actually, in almost everyone’s estimation, he is the worst of Judah’s kings. He is Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, just a thorough scoundrel, a very wicked man. But, in his life, the chronicler sees an important counter-balance to a few other examples of other kings, specifically the kings Asa, Joash, Amaziah, and Uzziah.

It is probably a good idea to set the scene for Manasseh because not all of us are up on Judean history all that well, so we do not know where things fit. But, believe it or not, the worst king of Judah had the longest reign! Manasseh reigned 55 years, starting in his

Manasseh by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

twelfth year of life. Most likely he did not reign by himself that whole time. More than likely, he had a co-regency with his father Hezekiah for about the first nine or ten years (the last few years of Hezekiah's life), and he probably had a co-regency with his son Amon at the end of his life.

But he was the king essentially for most of that time: 55 years (697 BC to 643 BC), so it was actually near the end of the kingdom of Judah. Jerusalem fell 586 BC. We can see there that it was not a long time between the end of Manasseh's reign and the end of Judah. As a matter of fact, if I did my math right, it is about 56 years to the destruction of Jerusalem. In that 56 years, six kings ruled. Most of that period, though, was under Josiah (31 years) who was a very good king.

The time when Manasseh lived (going on in to the time of Josiah, and even further) was a time of great turmoil—a lot of war and change going on in the Middle East. This is the time we know as the Axial Period when the old empires were weakening and dying and crumbling, and new ones were rising and filling their places.

If you remember, Hezekiah, Manasseh's father, had weathered a very horrifying invasion by the Assyrians under Sennacherib. If you have ever done any study into it, you will find out that what happened was that Sennacherib came in with a huge army and just totally overwhelmed Judah and burned and destroyed just about every city in the land, except for Jerusalem. Sennacherib makes a comment in his annals that he had Hezekiah trapped like a bird in a cage.

But Jerusalem was the only 'nut' that he could not 'crack' because God was there and God saved the city of Jerusalem; He saved the Temple, He saved Hezekiah, and He saved Isaiah and all those others who were there starving—because that is what they were doing in the siege: They were trying to starve Judah out. God did this by sending a plague amongst the army outside the walls. I believe it was Isaiah where it said that 185,000 men died of the Assyrian army. They, of course, had to withdraw. When Sennacherib went back, it was not too long before he was assassinated by his sons. So just a harrowing experience for Judah.

Out of this, Judah survived, yes, but they were pretty much demolished except for Jerusalem. They were very weakened. Many people had died, in the various sieges and conquerings of cities that happened during that invasion, and they came out of the war quite poor. Their cities were in ruins. They were weak in terms of manpower and an army. They did not have money. Much of the money was in the royal palace and in the Temple, and that is what they had to work with.

Manasseh by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

So both kings (Hezekiah and Manasseh) had to struggle, both economically and politically. Assyria was still mighty. Even though God had taken away the Assyrian army through the plague, they were still very strong and they could have sent another army of the same size against Judah. Part of the terms was that Judah would be a vassal kingdom of Assyria, even though God had turned Assyria away.

During Manasseh's reign, as it neared its end (probably during the last decade), Assyria began to undergo some internal troubles. It had civil war, or civil problems, because there were rival kings and such. They had to deal with the growing threat of Chaldea—the Babylonians were beginning to rise. They also had to deal with an old nemesis: Egypt. That actually would not come into fruition until the time of Josiah (he tried to take advantage of this and ended up losing his life). But while Manasseh reigned for most of that time period (all those 55 years), Assyria could still reach out and sting him at will. And we will see that they actually did.

What we can deduce from his long reign, and the success of his long evil reign, is that Manasseh was probably a very skilled politician and diplomat. He was the kind of guy that could balance things. Even though he was doing evil, he was balancing Assyria off against Egypt, and he was balancing the people off against the other people and groups, and so he was able to keep his throne.

There is no indication whatsoever in history, or in the Bible, that there was any turmoil in the land from most of the people of Jerusalem and Judea. I mean, look, he really did not get into trouble at all for anything, for most of his reign—55 years! I get the idea (Beth mentioned to me when we were talking about this) he was probably a Bill Clinton kind where he was able to talk to people and be very charismatic and charming, work with this side and work with that side and keep everybody happy—play all the angles and make all the compromises that he needed to make—whatever it took. He was going to keep both internal and international tranquility as best he could. He was an amoral politician who would do whatever it took to get what he wanted done. It seemed like the people liked him and this comes just from the fact that they followed him.

So let us go to II Chronicles 33. We will get our first taste of Manasseh. We are going to read the first ten verses here. This is a near copy of what is written in Kings.

**II Chronicles 33:1-2** Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. But he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.

Not only is he not compared to his father, or any of the other kings of Judah (or even of Israel, like Ahab), here he is compared to the evil people—the Canaanites, the Amorites—whom God kicked out of the land because of their horrible evils. Well, Manasseh was a throwback to them. That is how bad he was.

**II Chronicles 33:3** For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.

So this is an added feature. Not only did he go and worship the Baals and the Ashtoreths, make his groves and put up the poles, and do all the high places and altars for all these gods, he welcomed in *all* the Assyrian gods. When it says here “all the host of heaven,” this is essentially a Hebrew phrase that says these are the Assyrian gods. They worshipped the sun, the moon, and the stars. That is one way he probably compromised with the Assyrians and made Judah look like they were going along with whatever Assyria did.

This ramps up. We are not finished. He did worse.

**II Chronicles 33:4** He also built altars in the house of the Lord . . .

Now not only does God have an altar in the courtyard, Baal has an altar and Ashtoreth has an altar. Evidently there were altars for all the signs of the zodiac in the Temple at this time. So that was twelve more that he had there, and they were kept alight all the time.

**II Chronicles 33:4** He also built altars in the house of the Lord of which the Lord had said, “In Jerusalem shall My name be forever” [no one else’s, just His].

Jerusalem and the Temple was made only for God.

**II Chronicles 33:5-6** And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom . . .

Manasseh by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Notice that—“sons”! He did not just put his firstborn or one of his sons, he made several of his sons human sacrifices. And then it gets worse—or, I guess it is worse.

**II Chronicles 33:6** . . . he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists.

Well, you know what this is, this is Babylonian religion essentially. He has welcomed in the Assyrians and the Babylonians. And we probably should not leave out the Egyptians, I am sure he did that too (other kings did). But he was willing to take any kind of other religion, if it would be helpful. Maybe to get something political done, they put an altar in the Temple of the Lord or something just to help things along. By the way, sending the children through the fire, that is Ammonite—if they were worshipping Milcom or Molech. There was also Chemosh which was some other people’s god, I cannot remember right off the top of my head. But it was like the days of Solomon again where all these things were coming back in to Judah and Jerusalem, maybe or maybe not, for political reasons.

**II Chronicles 33:6-7** He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. He even set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God . . .

Now this actually means ‘in the holy place.’ So we are now going inside the Temple, inside the holy place.

**II Chronicles 33:7-9.** . . of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, “In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers—only if they are careful to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses.” So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.

Not only is he compared to those Canaanites—those wicked Amorites—that were before Israel came in, he did worse than they did. This is an unholy, despicable, wicked person. I do want to just key for a few minutes on this word ‘seduced’ that is in verse 9: “So Manasseh seduced Judah.” It is an interesting word. It is ‘ta’ah’ in Hebrew which

Manasseh by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

means 'to vacillate.' That is its original meaning—to go from one thing to another, to not really make up your mind. It also came to be an action in terms of a person's demeanor. It means to reel or to stagger, like when one is drunk, so that one is unsteady on his feet. That is what happens when you reel or you stagger; you are about ready to fall.

From that point on, it took on the idea of wandering because when you are in this state of vacillation, or reeling, or staggering, you cannot walk in a straight line so you wander. From there it meant 'to err' or 'to go astray.' Here the sense is causative and so what it means is that Manasseh himself was the primary driver of making Israel stagger, and err, and go astray. A lot of the modern translations use the term "Manasseh led them astray"; or they will say "Manasseh misled them."

However it is translated, what it means is it was Manasseh's wicked leadership that moved the people further into apostasy. He was the main driver of all this. He was making it happen. They were following his lead. It is almost as if he was determined to move Judah as far from the God of the covenant as he could. And so the whole nation followed him down on this moral spiral into rank evil, and he succeeded. If those were his aims indeed, he succeeded. Notice what it says in verse 10.

**II Chronicles 33:10** And the Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people [through His prophets; it is made more clear in II Kings], but they would not listen [shut their ears to Him, turned away, shook their heads].

The prophets could be screaming in their faces about what they were doing wrong, and they just would not heed them at all. It was a willful rejection of God.

Let us go to II Kings 21. As I said, the first verses are very much like what is in Chronicles, but I want to pick up verse 16 here before going on to something else. The author of Kings provides a few more condemnatory verses that go even beyond the idolatry and the spiritism that Manasseh did.

**II Kings 21:16** Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides his sin by which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the Lord.

Notice here, it is also repeated that he made them do this sin. He was out front, causing Judah to sin. But here he was also known for shedding innocent blood. There was violence that was associated with the evils that he was doing. This could be what was

Manasseh by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

mentioned both here and in II Chronicles 33. This could be the worship of Molech and the passing of the children through the fire. That would have filled Jerusalem with blood.

Some people think that it was actually abortion or some sort of infanticide that was being promoted. Other people think that it was the 'normal' kind of oppression (if you want to call anything like that 'normal') of various ethnic groups that were in Judah and Jerusalem. Or it could have been forced labor and slavery. It is most likely referring to persecution of those who worshipped God. Tradition says that Isaiah was killed under the order of Manasseh; he was put into a log and sawn in two. You find that referred to in Hebrews 11:37.

Whatever it was, the people seemed to have supported it. Whether it was child sacrifice, abortion or some other form of infanticide, whether it was oppression of ethnic groups, whether it was slavery of certain ones or forced labor, persecution of the righteous, the people just seemed to go along with it. It seemed like the thing to do.

What we have here is a picture of a thoroughly despicable and evil man. There may not, in all of Israelite history, have been a worse. God has nothing good to say about him up to this point. Not at all. And it says here that the people allowed him to do this. It was just that they wanted to go along with him. Now let us go further.

**II Kings 21:10-12** And the Lord spoke by His servants the prophets, saying [this is the thing they would not listen to, but it is the truth], "Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations (he has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols), therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Behold, I am bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle.' "

This is something that you would never have expected to hear. It is so amazing and just outside the bounds of what is good and right—because God was going to bring the hammer down.

**II Kings 21:13-15** "And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab [What is He saying? He is going to do the same thing to Judah that He did to Israel.], I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. So I will forsake the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become victims of plunder to all their enemies,

Manasseh by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

because they have done evil in My sight, and have provoked Me to anger since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day.”

Because of what Manasseh had done in his evil leadership, in leading Judah astray in this manner, God determined that Judah would suffer a calamity that had never been heard before by anyone—destruction so severe that it would wiping a dish clean and turning it upside down, which is a really interesting metaphor. It is a phrase that we would say is similar to “They are going to be wiped off the face of the earth.”

This is a metaphor of cleaning, of scouring. And the ‘turning it upside down’ is a further insult. What it describes is that the vessel, that has just been cleaned, would be emptied of everything. It is turned over so whatever might be left would drain out of it, and in that state it is unused.

What He is saying here is, He is saying not only is He going to kill almost everybody in the land by wiping them clean as it were, He is also going to turn it over to make sure everything falls out of it, and He is going to put it down so it will not be used. He is saying He is going to remove the remnant from the land that is left, after He has destroyed most of the rest of them, and He is going to leave the land empty.

Note, though, that the dish is not destroyed. Judah was not completely destroyed. They were reduced dramatically, and the people who were left were sent off into exile—just removed—and later the remnant from there would come back. But He was going to be so destructive that it would be like cleaning up the dish and leaving it to dry on the rack as it were. He would judge Judah and Jerusalem, just as He did Israel and Samaria for the sins of Ahab and those that came after him.

What we see here is that Manasseh, personally, bears a great deal of responsibility for Judah’s decline and their eventual downfall. God placed it on his head. He was the Ahab of Judah. Let us go back to II Chronicles 33 because we are not done with him yet. Only the chronicler gives us an epilogue of Manasseh’s life and it is amazing. I have talked this man down for half an hour now. But his life is not over yet.

**II Chronicles 33:11** Therefore [because the people would not listen] the Lord brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria . . .

Evidently, let me explain, what had happened most likely (scholars are not exactly sure but this is what most scholars think) is that right at the end of Manasseh’s life, within

Manasseh by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

about four or five years (somewhere around 648 BC), one of the Assyrian king's brothers (the Assyrian king at the time was Ashurbanipal; one of his brothers he had made king of Babylon) rebelled.

Evidently, what this king did was he got some allies out on the Mediterranean coast. It was more than likely that Manasseh was one of them, but we do not know this for sure. All that we know for sure is that Manasseh was implicated in the rebellion—or they think that Manasseh was implicated in the rebellion. But Ashurbanipal won. The king of Babylon lost to his brother. So Ashurbanipal goes to Babylon to clean up the mess and to do justice—to make his judgments about all these vassal kings that had joined his brother in rebellion. That is what we think happened. The upshot of this is:

**II Chronicles 33:11** . . . who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon.

He was going to get summary judgment at the court in Babylon before the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal.

**II Chronicles 33:12** [But in prison] when he was in affliction . . .

Who knows, he might have been tortured. 'In affliction' could be a lot of things. It could be that he was starved. It could be that he was whipped in some sort of way. Obviously, he was chained and he had a hook probably put in his nose so that he could be led around by a rope. That is what "with hooks" means. He was in quite a great amount of distress. And he was an older man by this time, at least in his sixties I believe.

**II Chronicles 33:12-13** . . . he implored the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed to Him; and He [God] received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God.

Now, remember, when we were going through his evils, we were talking about him bringing the Canaanite gods Baal and Asherah back; and then he brought the Assyrian gods in, and he brought the Babylonian gods in. I speculated that he brought the Egyptian gods back in, and he brought the Ammonite gods in, and he brought Chemosh in, and he brought all these other gods in, and he did all this sorcery like he did not know that there was One God. It was actually like he was thinking that polytheism was

Manasseh by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

the truth and that God Yahweh, the Lord, was just the God of that land—of Israel—and so all of these other gods were equal.

Just put this in the back of your head that Manasseh getting to Babylon (Babylon, of all places!) is kind of a precursor or a prophecy of what would happen to all of Judah just fifty or sixty years down the road, that they would be taken in hooks and fetters to Babylon. Would they react as well as Manasseh, the most evil person that has ever sat on the throne of Judah?

But the impression we get here is that when God somehow got Manasseh off the hook (and this is a pun that I have thought about) in Babylon and brought him back and actually placed him back on the throne, fully exonerated. He knew that the God of Israel was THE God who could work even in Babylon against the Assyrian king and overturn all of his schemes to put one man back on the throne, the worst king ever.

And God heard him, turned his life totally around, and set him back on the throne which probably, in all fairness, should have gone to Amon or somebody else. Because, normally, in those situations, if he was brought up on charges on treason against the Assyrian king, he would have been kept there, if nothing else, in Babylon so that he could not do any more harm, and another puppet king would be put there on the throne.

But God did away with all that, fully exonerated him, and put him back on the throne to serve out the remainder of his life as king. And notice what he did with the time.

**II Chronicles 33:14** After this he built a wall outside the City of David on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate [so he is going all around to the north side of the city]; and it enclosed Ophel, and he raised it to a very great height.

When he comes back, he does what good kings do: They restore and strengthen the country.

**II Chronicles 33:15-16** He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem; and he cast them out of the city. He also repaired the altar of the Lord, sacrificed peace offerings and thank offerings on it, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel.

Manasseh by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

He had been leading them so far astray, and he comes back and he says: “Come on back. We’re going the other direction. I was wrong. There is a God in Israel, and He’s the only true God.” He commands them to worship Him.

**II Chronicles 33:17** Nevertheless the people still sacrificed on the high places, but only to the Lord their God.

So they compromised. They syncretized. But, from where they were, this was a big step back in the right direction. You could tell it was not wholehearted on their part. But, for Manasseh, it was.

**II Chronicles 33:18-20** Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the Lord God of Israel, indeed they are written in the book of the kings of Israel. Also his prayer and how God received his entreaty, and all his sin and trespass, and the sites where he built high places and set up wooden images and carved images, before he was humbled, indeed they are written among the sayings of Hozai [actually it is plural—‘the seers’]. So Manasseh rested with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house [now, notice, he still did not get the greatest burial—he was buried in his own house rather than “he rested with his fathers” as the good kings did].

But he still made a huge recovery from the way he was. His repentance had a couple of important consequences. First, Judah’s decline and destruction was delayed. It probably should have happened in his reign, or in Amon’s reign, but it was not. It was delayed, as I said, by about 56 years. There was enough of a turnaround in him and in the people to put it off for about two generations. Granted, though, Manasseh repented and it was sincere and heartfelt; the people as a whole did not. That is why he is said to be responsible for the way Judah fell, not wholly; obviously the people had a great deal to do with it, but he led them, he seduced them into sin.

The second important consequence is that it probably paved the way for Josiah. He was very young and impressionable when Manasseh repented—he was probably still toddling about. Perhaps this, happening in his formative years, bent his character in a godly direction to the point that he actually, in a few years down the road, repudiated his father Amon’s evil ways, and humbled himself and sought the Lord. His good character, and his good works, and his reforms held off Judah’s fall longer than Manasseh’s repentance did. Like I said, he reigned 31 years and he was a good king.

You might want to jot down II Chronicles 6:36-39 and II Chronicles 7:12-15 because there it shows exactly God's promise that if someone did evil but repented, that God would turn to them and bring them back—which is exactly what happened with Manasseh. So we see that Manasseh is not only a prophecy of what would happen with Judah, he is also a fulfillment of this promise of God to bring them back.

**Ezekiel 18:20-22** The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live.

It is beautiful that God is so gracious. This principle is found over and over in the Bible. As Peter writes in II Peter 3:9, He is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." This is just amazing. Isaiah (this is the man Manasseh killed) says something very similar.

**Isaiah 1:16-17-20** Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword"; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

This is, what we could say, the lesson of Manasseh. I think, probably at the top of the list, is that God's grace is astounding in its magnanimity that even a person as wicked as Manasseh can repent and his sins forgiven.

You could also say that the lesson is: Even the worst of sinners can repent and be accepted by God. Think about the sins of Moses, Samson, David, the apostle Paul. All of them committed terrible sins, but all repented; all of them were forgiven; and all of them will inherit the Kingdom of God.

Manasseh by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

I want to leave you with I John 1:9, a very succinct verse.

**I John 1:9** If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And you can take that to the bank.