

“King Manasseh: If God Can Forgive the Very Worst...”
2 Chronicles 33:1-20
Pastor Steve Newman
July 20, 2008

Narrator: Manasseh of ancient Judah was an exceedingly wicked man. His story is told in 2 Chronicles 33.

I. Manasseh’s great sins. 2 Chronicles 33:1-9

“Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five 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 Asherah poles. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped 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 sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced sorcery, divination and witchcraft, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger. He took the carved image he had made and put it in God’s temple, of which God had said to David and to his sons Solomon, ‘In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my Name forever. I will not again make the feet of the Israelites leave the land I assigned to your forefathers, if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them concerning all the laws, decrees and ordinances 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.”

This description of Manasseh’s sins is supplemented in 2 Kings 21:16,
“Moreover, Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end – besides the sin that he had caused Judah to commit, so that they did evil in the eyes of the LORD.”

II. Manasseh’s judgment. 2 Chronicles 33:10-11

“The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but 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.” (v. 10-11)

III. Manasseh’s repentance and restoration. 2 Chronicles 33:12- 20

“In his distress he sought the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. 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. Afterward 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 encircling the hill of

Ophel; 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 seers 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 Asherah poles and idols before he humbled himself – all are written in the records of the seers. Manasseh rested with his fathers and was buried in his palace. And Amon his son succeeded him as king."

The following is a dramatic monologue of King Manasseh

How many of you have killed another person? I've killed many. How many of you have decided to worship idols that make no demands upon you instead of worshipping the true God, who is the moral Lord of all? I have. How many of you have desecrated God's temple with idols? I have. How many of you have sacrificed your own sons on pagan altars? I have. How many of you have indulged in spiritual practices of occultism that God has specifically forbidden? I have done that also. Compared to me, all of you are merely petty sinners. No matter how bad you think you are, you've done nothing really significant compared with me. But you can learn an important lesson from my life.

My name is Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah king of Judah. My grandfather, Ahaz, was an evil man. As king of Judah, he was charged with leading the people spiritually. But he led the people into spiritual destruction instead. He had idols made for worshipping the Baals. He sacrificed some of his sons in the fire of idolatrous worship and followed the detestable ways of the nations that the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. My grandfather Ahaz offered sacrifices and burnt incense on the high places on the hilltops and under every spreading tree, ancient places of pagan worship that God had said should be destroyed from Israel. My father, Hezekiah, in contrast, was a good king. He loved the Lord and tried to purify the land. He got rid of the idols of Baal and cleared out the ancient high places. He led the people in sacrificing to the Lord only and in renewing the ancient celebrations commanded in the Law of Moses.

I was twelve years old when I became king, and I reigned in Jerusalem for 55 years. I began my reign in self-will and rebellion. I was a teenager with power and did not want to follow the commands of the Lord. I was intrigued by the practices of the pagan religions. I was also enticed with promises that my advisors gave me that following these pagan practices would lead to political

alliances that would enhance my position and power and wealth. Instead of leading Judah to be a light to the world through our obedience to the law of God given to Moses, I led my people into following the detestable practices of the very Canaanite nations whom the Lord had driven out before our ancestors. I rebuilt the high places that my father Hezekiah had demolished. Many of the people were happy with me for doing this. They had emotional and nostalgic connections to some of the high places. God had told us to worship him and bring sacrifices only to the central sanctuary, which in my day was at the temple in Jerusalem. In this way, the sacrifices could be overseen by the priests who were supposed to make sure that the worship of the Lord was not paganized. But I did not want to be so confined. I wanted to do what I wanted to do. Do you ever have the same desire? I wanted to let people do what they wanted to do. Do you ever want to let the people in your life do what they want to do so that they will be happy with you even if what they are doing is wrong? Because I wanted to please them, I rebuilt the high places.

The high places were based on ancient traditions of worshipping the Baal gods of the Canaanites. Being high on hills and mountains, they were thought to be closer to the gods in the heavens. These Baal gods were fertility gods. We were told that worshipping them would increase agricultural produce and help make our nation rich. This would make me richer. So I reestablished the high places and let people worship the Lord or the Baals or both there. I also erected altars to various Baal gods throughout the land. And I made Asherah poles. Asherah was the consort or girlfriend of Baal in the ancient Canaanite myths.

I also worshipped the stars. I was intrigued by the stories of some that the stars controlled our fates and had great power. I wanted to tap into every source of power that I could find and so I worshipped the stars in the heavens. Then I desecrated the temple of the Lord. God had said that the temple was the place that his Name would remain in Jerusalem forever if we would only obey. But I desecrated the temple and in the very courts of the temple I built altars to the star gods of the heavens, gods I now see to be totally false. But I was enthralled with every form of worship, every religious practice. Following these religions was not just a matter of worshipping God in different ways. It was a matter of worshipping false gods, gods that led to a distorted viewpoint. So twisted had my own mind become that in the Valley of Ben Hinnom I sacrificed some of my own sons in the fire to the pagan gods. Imagine sacrificing your own sons to false gods!

God had commanded us very clearly to stay away from the pagan practices of false religion and occultism. Deuteronomy 18:9-13 says, *“When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD,*

and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the LORD your God."

Instead of paying heed to the revealed will of God in the law, I chased after the fake will of the fake gods and spirits by practicing sorcery, divination, and witchcraft, and by consulting mediums and spiritists. God had clearly told us that he had chosen the temple in Jerusalem as the place to dwell among us in a special way. If we only were careful to do all that he commanded in the laws, decrees and ordinances given through Moses, then he promised that he would give us this land forever and fill us with blessing. Stupidly I ignored the promises of the law. Not only did I ruin my own life, but I ruined the life of my people. Some of you are sneering at me, but don't you do some of the same things? Don't you ignore God's revealed Law and base your life and your daily choices on other things – your desires, the popular trends in your culture, the empty promises that many give that their special ways are the way to true life fulfillment?

I led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray so that they were more evil than the Canaanites. You see, religious distortion brings not only distorted religion but it also brings social and moral distortion as well. It was written about me in the book of Kings that I filled Jerusalem with blood from one end to the other because I ruled with a violent hand. If I wanted something, I took it. If someone opposed me, I had him killed or brutally beaten. If I wanted a woman, I took her. Never mind that she was married or betrothed to another man. People also followed the example of the pagan gods who cared nothing about morality but only about the rituals, offerings and incantations. In these pagan religions, there was no command against murder or adultery or theft. Religion was about rituals and getting the gods on your side, not about morality. Through this path I led the entire nation into ruin religiously, socially, and morally.

The Lord spoke to me and to the people again and again. He sent prophets to us, warning us of what was going to take place. Prophets told us that the Lord said that he was going to bring such disaster into Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who heard of it would tingle. He said he would stretch out over Jerusalem a measuring line used against Samaria and the plumb line used against the house of Ahab, the evil king of the northern tribes who led his nation into Baal worship. The prophets told us that God would wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. We were told that he would forsake the remnant of his inheritance and hand us over to our enemies, by whom we would be looted and plundered. All this because we had done evil in God's eyes and we had forsaken him, provoking him to anger. I didn't care what the prophets said. I was only interested in doing what I wanted to do, and having my own way. And so I rejected the words of the prophets. I ridiculed them. Some I beat, others I persecuted, others I ran out of town, some I killed.

Do not be deceived, though, because God is not mocked. That which God promises, he will fulfill. That which God threatens, that he will bring about. Just because God has not yet brought judgment and confusion into your life, do not think that you will escape. God is delaying right now to give you a chance to repent. Do not make the mistake of following my example. God gave me plenty of opportunities to turn from my evil ways, but I ignored them over and over again.

The Lord raised up the king of Assyria and his army to march against me. I was led into some stupid actions against the king to whom I had paid tribute as his subordinate these many years. In my pride and foolishness I angered him and he came and made me a prisoner. The kings of Assyria were brutal conquerors. Like many others, I was treated like an animal. A hook was put through my nose as if I were a bull or a pig and I was led about in chains and shackles and taken to Babylon where I was imprisoned. I, who once had been the honored and respected and powerful king of Judah, was now reduced to the level of an animal!

As I sat in prison, my life flashed before my eyes. I thought about the kind of king I had become, the kind of man I had become. In my pride and arrogance I thought that I could snub God and have my own way. It seemed to work – at least for a while. I seemed to succeed at having my own way and getting whatever I wanted, paying no attention to any law or authority over me. I found the pagan gods and spirits very comfortable. I could worship them without curbing in the slightest my greed, murder, adultery or violence. But what had become of it all? God had told us in his law how things would turn out for those who disregard him. He told us that judgment would come. Graciously God had warned us again and again through the prophets he sent to us. But foolishly I had rejected the words of the prophets and continued headlong into my course of destruction.

Now I found myself in an Assyrian prison in Babylon. I saw how very foolish I had been. I started to grasp the evil of my ways and so I prayed to the Lord. I confessed my many sins. I'd sinned against my father and his example. I'd sinned against the people of my country, the people I was supposed to be leading toward the Lord. I confessed that I had led the nation into spiritual ruin. I confessed to my own individual sins of murder, adultery, stealing, pride, arrogance, rebellion, idolatry, sorcery, divination, witchcraft and everything else. I told God that I was sorry for what I had done and what I had become. I told him that I realized that I had sinned against him primarily. He was the God who had loved his people and cared for us. But now I had turned against his love and led his nation into ruination. I asked him to forgive me, though I knew I was totally unworthy of forgiveness and did not expect to get it.

Surprisingly, God did forgive me. I could feel something different in my soul, and then, not long after my prayer, a soldier came and told me I was to leave the

prison. I was brought back into the royal court and told that I was being sent back to Judah and would be restored to my throne. I could hardly believe my ears or my eyes.

For some, repentance is shallow and meaningless. All they really want to do is get out of trouble. But my repentance was sincere. I demonstrated that by my actions. When I got back to Judah I began rebuilding Jerusalem. I also began a religious reform. I got rid of the foreign gods and removed the image from the temple of the Lord that I had put there. I removed the altars from the temple hill and around the city of Jerusalem. I did what I could to lead my people back to God and his ways. Unfortunately, the damage I had done was very severe and the reform did not deeply touch our nation. But I was sincere in my repentance and did what I could to turn back to the Lord.

So what does my story mean to you? Is anyone here as bad as I was? No. We've already established that. So think about it. If God could forgive me, then he can forgive you, too. What is the nature of your sins? Why do you feel so weighed down by the burden of your guilt? Yes, any sin is bad. To turn away from the true and living God into our own paths of self-destruction is always a serious violation of the law. But take heart! If God could forgive me, the most wicked king that Judah had ever known, then he can forgive you as well. Don't let your sin be a barrier between you and God.

As Isaiah the prophet later said, *"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD."* (Isaiah 55:6-8) You and I would never forgive someone as wicked as me or maybe someone as guilty as you. But God's ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are not our thoughts.

Isaiah also appealed to you and to me in these words, *"Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.' For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."* (Isaiah 1:18-20) Don't let your sin stand in your way. Some people indulge in a twisted rationalization. Because they've done evil they think that they cannot change. They think that they cannot repent and turn. They think that God will not forgive and therefore their only course is to continue in evil. But God is ready to forgive. He asks you to repent. Turn from the sin, whatever it is, and embrace his goodness. Remember King Manasseh. If God can forgive me, then he can forgive you. And if you decide not to repent, remember what happened to me, a once great king humiliated and brought low. Your pride and rejection of God and rejection of God's ways will bring you to destruction someday. God may be holding back, giving you more time to repent, but he will

not hold back forever. Eventually, either in this life or the next, you will find the sad end to your life like I found in that Babylonian prison.

Narrator: Today, we can understand the process of forgiveness more clearly than Manasseh did. We can understand how Jesus Christ fits into the picture. Jesus Christ gave his life in death on the cross for us so that the full penalty for our sin might be paid and that forgiveness might come freely, fully, and graciously to us.

If you have never received that grace of forgiveness, you can do so today. Think about your life. Manasseh had sinned and so have you. Some of your sins may be deliberate and heinous like Manasseh's were. Others might be simply sins of omission, you didn't do things you know you should have done. Your sins may seem mild compared to Manasseh's, but any sin against the almighty God becomes infinite in importance. Simply tell God that you acknowledge your sins. Tell him that you're ready to repent. That means that you turn from your old life and you want to embrace a new life in him. And tell God that you're putting your trust in Jesus Christ to be your Savior. As you do, then this forgiveness that Manasseh experienced can be yours as well. God can bring you out of the dungeon of guilt and destruction and lead you on a course of new life and restoration.