



Second Chronicles - Chapter Thirty Three

III 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23 - The Kingdom of Judah Down to the Exile (continues)

Summary of Chapter Thirty Three

After all the reforms of the mostly good King Hezekiah, his son Manasseh reverts to the ways of his grandfather Ahaz, abandoning the Lord and setting up shrines to pagan gods, including the sacrificial offering of his own son. Therefore, the Lord brought the Assyrians against him and Manasseh was taken away in chains to Babylon. There, he humbled himself, repented and acknowledged the Lord was his true God. He returned to Israel and brought the people back to serving the Lord, even if some of them did so at the high places.

When Manasseh died he was succeeded by his father Amon, who had not learned from his father's repentance and worshipped all the pagan idols that his father had initially set up. He was assassinated but his killers too were killed by the people, who set up his son Josiah to reign as their king.

III.m 2 Chronicles 33:1-20 - Manasseh

Chronicles differs most markedly from the parallel account in 2 Kings 21:1-10 and 21:17-18 by including a section describing Manasseh's imprisonment in Babylon and his religious reforms (vv.11-17), and by omitting 2 Kings 21:11-15, where Manasseh is condemned as a primary cause of the exile. The reason for the difference lies in their respective aims: the author of Kings presents Manasseh as the worst of Judah's kings whose sins make the exile inevitable, while Chronicles uses him to illustrate the possibility of forgiveness and restoration, even for the foremost of sinners. Both accounts are highly selective in their treatment of the longest reign in Judah's history, and the additional material in Chronicles should not be considered fictional. The Chronicler would certainly agree with Second Kings that Manasseh's sins contributed to the final outcome of exile, just as the king's own

punishment in v.11 anticipates what will happen to the people. Manasseh's repentance and reforms may also explain why the exile did not come in his day: they had the effect of postponing, but not entirely removing, the consequences of Israel's unfaithfulness, on which God had pronounced judgement.

III.m.i 2 Chronicles 33:1-9 - Reign of Manasseh

Manasseh sets about reversing all the reforms his father had instituted, promoting idolatry and succumbing to the depravity of child sacrifice and sorcery.

¹ Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign; he reigned for fifty-five years in Jerusalem. ² He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.

2 Chronicles 33:1-2

Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign; he reigned for fifty-five years from 697-642 BC, including probably a co-regency of ten years with Hezekiah. Therefore, he would have been twenty two years old when he had sole regency of the kingdom of Judah. This was both a remarkably long and a remarkably evil reign. A long career or longevity is not necessarily evidence of the blessing and approval of God. Charles Spurgeon comments, "He was a son of David, but he was the very reverse of that king, who was always faithful in his loyalty to the one and only God of Israel. David's blood was in his veins, but David's ways were not in his heart. He was a wild, degenerate shoot of a noble vine."

Some commentators take the statement to mean that he was only twelve years old when his father died and was thus born following the Lord's reprieve of Hezekiah's illness, which gave him a further fifteen years of life: <<Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the Lord, the God of your ancestor David: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life>> (Isaiah 38:5). This would then indicate that this wicked king was spawned after Hezekiah's illness pointing to the consequences of Hezekiah's reprieve. They further comment that had Hezekiah known this then he would have rather died from his illness than inflict such a wicked king on his people. However, this does not sit well with Hezekiah's response to Isaiah's rebuke when the king's pride had allowed him to show off the wealth of the nation to Babylonian envoys: <<Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, 'Hear the word of the Lord: Days are coming when all that is in your house, and that which your ancestors have stored up until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the Lord. Some of your own sons who are born to you shall be taken away; they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.' Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, 'The word of the Lord that you have spoken is good.'

For he thought, ‘Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?’>> (2 Kings 20:16-19).

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Despite his later repentance and reforms, this is the caveat for which Manasseh will be remembered.

According to the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. Manasseh imitated the sins of both the Canaanites and the Israelites of the northern kingdom like his grandfather Ahaz for: <<*he walked in the way of the kings of Israel*>> (2 Kings 16:3a). Since God brought judgement on these groups for their sin, casting them out of their land, then similar judgement against an unrepentant Judah should be expected.

³ For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had pulled down, and erected altars to the Baals, made sacred poles, worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. ⁴ He built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, ‘In Jerusalem shall my name be for ever.’ ⁵ He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. ⁶ He made his son pass through fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom, practised soothsaying and augury and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. ⁷ The carved image of the idol that he had made he set in the house of God, of which God said to David and to his son Solomon, ‘In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name for ever; ⁸ I will never again remove the feet of Israel from the land that I appointed for your ancestors, if only they will be careful to do all that I have commanded them, all the law, the statutes, and the ordinances given through Moses.’ ⁹ Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that they did more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the people of Israel.

2 Chronicles 33:3-9

For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had pulled down. Manasseh opposed the reforms of his father Hezekiah and he brought Judah back into terrible idolatry. This shows that repentance, reform and revival are not permanent standing conditions. What is accomplished at one time can be opposed and turned back at another time.

Manasseh erected altars to the Baals, made sacred poles. The king did not want to imitate his godly father. Instead, he imitated one of the very worst kings of

Israel, Ahab. He embraced the same state-sponsored worship of Baal and Asherah, who was honoured with a wooden image, that marked the reign of Ahab.

He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. It was bad enough for Manasseh to allow this idol worship into Judah. Worse still, he corrupted the worship of the true God at the temple and made the temple a place of idol altars, including those dedicated to his cult of astrological worship, i.e. he **worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.** Manasseh did not only bring back old forms of idolatry; he also brought new forms of idolatry to Judah. At this time the Babylonian Empire was rising in influence, and they had a special attraction to astrological worship. Manasseh probably imitated this.

Spurgeon again comments, “But this Manasseh sought out for himself unusual and outlandish sins. Bad as Ahab was, he had not worshipped the host of heaven. That was an Assyrian worship, and this man must needs import from Assyria and Babylonia worship that was quite new.”

He made his son pass through fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom. Manasseh sacrificed his own son to the Canaanite god Molech, who was worshipped with the burning of children.

Manasseh **practised soothsaying and augury and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with wizards.** Therefore, the king invited direct satanic influence by his approval and introduction of these occult arts.

The Hebrew word for wizards or spiritists is *yiddeoni*, meaning ‘a knowing one.’ It referred originally to ghosts, who were supposed to possess superhuman knowledge; but it came to be applied to those who claimed power to summon them forth, i.e. to witches.

The carved image of the idol that he had made he set in the house of God. The Chronicler seems too polite to say it, but 2 Kings 21:7 states that this idol was Asherah, the Canaanite goddess of fertility. This god was worshipped through ritual prostitution. This means that Manasseh made the temple into an idolatrous brothel, dedicated to Asherah. It is no wonder that he provoked the Lord to anger.

God said to David, ‘In this house, and in Jerusalem I will put my name for ever.’ The Chronicler is reminding the people of his generation of the sanctity of the temple. Once it is restored they know that God’s Holy Spirit will be present with them once more.

Manasseh misled Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that they did more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the people of Israel. Second Kings 21:9 reveals what the attitude of the people was: they paid no attention. This described the basic attitude of the people of Judah during the fifty five year reign of Manasseh. They paid no attention to the generous promises of

God, promising protection to his obedient people. In addition, they were willingly seduced by Manasseh's wickedness and were attracted to do more evil.

This was a transformation of the culture from something generally God-honouring to a culture that glorified idolatry and immorality. In general it can be said that this happened because the people wanted it to happen. They did not care about the direction of their culture.

It is easy to blame Manasseh and, indeed, any leader who takes people away from the Lord. However, it is also an indication that their faith and their commitment to Hezekiah's reforms were only superficial. Jesus warns all believers but leaders especially: *<<If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea>>* (Mark 9:42), and they are further warned: *<<Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness>>* (James 3:1). However, each individual has the ultimate responsibility for their own actions and faith: *<<Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth>>* (Luke 21:34-35), *<<And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus>>* (Philippians 4:7).

III.m.ii 2 Chronicles 33:10-17 - Manasseh Restored after Repentance

Because of his rejection of the Lord, Manasseh is taken away in chains to Babylon by the Assyrians. There he repents and is restored to his kingdom, leading the people back to the true worship of God.

¹⁰ The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they gave no heed. ¹¹ Therefore the Lord brought against them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh captive in manacles, bound him with fetters, and brought him to Babylon.

2 Chronicles 33:10-11

The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people alludes to 2 Kings 21:10 and is intended as a summary of the prophecy of judgement in 2 Kings 21:11-15. This was the great mercy of God. He was under no obligation to warn or correct them; God would have been completely justified in bringing judgement immediately for they paid no attention. In their rejection of God's Word, Manasseh and his people prefigure the last generation of the kingdom: *<<The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling-place; but they kept mocking the*

messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord against his people became so great that there was no remedy>> (2 Chronicles 36:15-16).

Despite God's gracious warnings, neither the king nor the people would listen. God found more compelling ways to speak to the rulers and people of Judah. The author of Second Kings identifies the terrible extent of Manasseh's sin: *<<Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides the sin that he caused Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of the Lord>> (2 Kings 21:16).*

Therefore the Lord brought against them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh captive in manacles, bound him with fetters, and brought him to Babylon. God allowed Manasseh to be taken and carried away as a captive, after the pattern of his own sinful bondage. Manasseh's imprisonment in Babylon is not attested to outside the Bible. However, this account is often associated with the widespread rebellion in 652-648 BC by Shamash-shum-ukin, king of Babylon, against his younger brother and overlord Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria. Once he had taken Babylon, Ashurbanipal turned his attention to the western part of his empire and its vassal states, which included Judah. Manasseh may have joined in the rebellion, or at least have been suspected of supporting it.

As stated above, no mention is made of Manasseh's exile in Assyrian sources, even though Manasseh appears in the annals of Esarhaddon (680-669 BC) and Ashurbanipal (668-626 BC) as a rather unwilling vassal forced to provide supplies for Assyria's building and military enterprises. It is quite possible that he rebelled against these impositions at some point. Yet, Manasseh's presence in Babylon is not surprising, since Assyria had had a long interest in Babylon, which was under the direct control for the whole of Esarhaddon's reign and after Shamash-shum-ukin's demise.

¹² While he was in distress he entreated the favour of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. ¹³ He prayed to him, and God received his entreaty, heard his plea, and restored him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord indeed was God.

2 Chronicles 33:12-13

While he was in distress he entreated the favour of the Lord. Manasseh was not the first and will not be the last to turn back to God after a severe season of affliction. It has been said that God speaks to people in their pleasures and he shouts to them in their pains. Manasseh finally listened to God's shouting through affliction. The description of Manasseh's prayer and God's response is strongly

influenced by the thought and vocabulary of: <<*if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land*>> (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Spurgeon explains, “The Assyrians were notoriously a fierce people, and Manasseh, having provoked them, felt all the degradation, scorn, and cruelty which anger could invent. He who had trusted idols was made a slave to an idolatrous people; he who had shed blood very much was now in daily jeopardy of the shedding of his own; he who had insulted the Lord must now be continually insulted himself.”

And humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. The word humbled is a reminder that the essence of Manasseh’s sin was pride.

The phrase the God of his ancestors is a statement that Manasseh returned to the godly heritage he received from his father Hezekiah and all the godly kings who had preceded him. This is an excellent example of the principle: <<*Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray*>> (Proverbs 22:6). Manasseh was raised by a godly father, yet he lived in defiance of his father’s faith for most of his life. Nevertheless, at the end of his days he truly repented and served God.

God received his entreaty, heard his plea, and restored him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. God graciously restored the late repenting Manasseh. This gracious response to Manasseh was the final step in his return to the Lord, i.e. then Manasseh knew that the Lord indeed was God. He was convinced by his own experience of God’s power, justice, and goodness, that Jehovah alone was the true God, and not those idols which he had worshipped, by which he had received great hurt and nothing good.

The Chronicler here focuses more on Manasseh’s repentance than he does on his sin. The whole purpose here is to demonstrate just how gracious and merciful God is, even to the worst of sinners - a category that even the apostle Paul identifies himself with: <<*The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the foremost*>> (1 Timothy 1:15).

In his sermon ‘The Old Testament Prodigal’ Spurgeon imagined what it would be like for the remnant of believers in Jerusalem to hear that Manasseh was returning from Babylon. They had a brief pause in the persecution they had suffered from the evil king, and at least a slowdown in the official promotion of idolatry. Now to hear he was coming back must have driven them to their knees, asking God to have mercy on them once again. Imagine their surprise when they found that King Manasseh returned a repentant, converted man!

Spurgeon adds, “Oh! I do not wonder at Manasseh’s sin one half so much as I wonder at God’s mercy.” This puts it all into context.

Manasseh knew that the Lord was God is similar to a very common expression by Ezekiel, the prophet of the exile: <<*My anger shall spend itself, and I will vent my fury on them and satisfy myself; and they shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken in my jealousy, when I spend my fury on them*>> (Ezekiel 5:13). Refer also to Ezekiel 7:27 and 13:21.

¹⁴ Afterwards he built an outer wall for the city of David west of Gihon, in the valley, reaching the entrance at the Fish Gate; he carried it around Ophel, and raised it to a very great height. He also put commanders of the army in all the fortified cities in Judah. ¹⁵ He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built on the mountain of the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem, and he threw them out of the city. ¹⁶ He also restored the altar of the Lord and offered on it sacrifices of well-being and of thanksgiving; and he commanded Judah to serve the Lord the God of Israel. ¹⁷ The people, however, still sacrificed at the high places, but only to the Lord their God.

2 Chronicles 33:14-17

Afterwards he built an outer wall for the city of David west of Gihon. Manasseh’s building projects and military measures can be understood in light of Assyria’s need for a buffer state in the southwest against Egypt, following the suppression of Shamash-shum-ukin’s rebellion. Before he was humbled and repentant, Manasseh did not care very much for the defence of Judah and Jerusalem. Now, with a more godly perspective, he cared deeply about the security of God’s people and the Kingdom of Judah. Building projects and military might are regular marks of blessing on faithful kings; refer to 2 Chronicles 11:5-12, 14:6-8, 17:12-19 and 26:9-15.

He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the Lord. Before he was humbled and repentant, Manasseh promoted the worship of idols. Now, he destroyed idols and promoted the worship of the true God of Israel alone; he even commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel.

He also restored the altar of the Lord and offered on it sacrifices of well-being and of thanksgiving. Manasseh’s religious reform was directed at removing his earlier pagan innovations. The reform centred on the temple, and little if any of it extended beyond Jerusalem. Verse 17 makes it clear that the people continued in their familiar ways for they sacrificed at the high places. Manasseh removed the

idols, but it is not stated that he destroyed them, as Josiah did; refer to 2 Chronicles 34:4-7. Amon would later put them back to use.

The people, however, still sacrificed at the high places, but only to the Lord their God. This is a further reminder that two types of high place existed: those used for pagan worship and those that were used exclusively to worship the Lord. The people worshipped God but they did so contrary to his law.

III.m.iii **2 Chronicles 33:18-20 - Death of Manasseh**

The Chronicler has considerably expanded the concluding formula in 2 Kings 21:17-18 to emphasise that Manasseh's prayer and his humble repentance constitute the chief significance of his reign.

¹⁸ 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, these are in the Annals of the Kings of Israel. ¹⁹ His prayer, and how God received his entreaty, all his sin and his faithlessness, the sites on which he built high places and set up the sacred poles and the images, before he humbled himself, these are written in the records of the seers. ²⁰ So Manasseh slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in his house. His son Amon succeeded him.

2 Chronicles 33:18-20

The Annals of the Kings of Israel was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the Chronicler had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings. Second Kings does not mention the repentance of Manasseh, and does not reveal anything about his reign substantially different than what the Chronicler records.

Faithlessness is the key Hebrew theological term *ma'al*; refer to the comment made on 1 Chronicles 2:3-8.

So Manasseh slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in his house. Manasseh was a remarkably bad and evil king; yet at the end of his days he truly repented and served God. Therefore, he was truly at rest.

Manasseh illustrates one of the central themes of Chronicles, that God can fulfil his promise of restoration given in 2 Chronicles 7:12-16 to the repentant even in the most extreme circumstances. Manasseh's conversion helps to explain a longstanding problem in the Books of Kings, namely, why the exile did not fall during or immediately after Manasseh's reign if his sins were really so serious. Yet, his repentance came too late to substantially change the nation.

The widespread revolts during the reign of Ashurbanipal, which occurred from 652-648 BC, may provide the occasion for Manasseh's summons to Babylon and imprisonment; if so, his subsequent release and reform were apparently far too late to have much of an effect on the obdurately backslidden people of God.

III.n 2 Chronicles 33:21-25 - Amon's Reign and Death

The Chronicler has added to the account in 2 Kings 21:19-24 of Amon's brief reign (642-640 BC) the charge that, in contrast to his father, Amon did not humble himself, but rather incurred guilt more and more. His revival of Manasseh's idolatry contributed to God's wrath against Judah, as well as serving as a prelude to Josiah's reform.

²¹ Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned for two years in Jerusalem. ²² He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done. Amon sacrificed to all the images that his father Manasseh had made, and served them. ²³ He did not humble himself before the Lord, as his father Manasseh had humbled himself, but this Amon incurred more and more guilt.

2 Chronicles 33:21-23

Amon reigned for two years in Jerusalem. This unusually short reign is an indication that the blessing of God was not upon the reign of Amon.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done. He did not humble himself before the Lord, as his father Manasseh had humbled himself. Amon sinned as Manasseh had sinned, without having the repentance that Manasseh repented. It is likely that one of the greatest sorrows to the repentant Manasseh was that his sons and others who were influenced by his sin did not also repent. There is not one bright spot in this king's character to relieve the darkness of his life's brief record. Manasseh and Amon in their contrasting ways show that a fatalistic attitude in the face of God's judgement is quite unjustified.

²⁴ His servants conspired against him and killed him in his house. ²⁵ But the people of the land killed all those who had conspired against King Amon; and the people of the land made his son Josiah king to succeed him.

2 Chronicles 33:24-25

His servants conspired against him and killed him in his house. This story of conspiracy and assassination seems to belong among the kings of Israel, not Judah. Yet when the kings and people of Judah began to imitate the sins of their

conquered northern neighbours, they slipped into the same chaos and anarchy that marked the last period of Israel's history.

But the people of the land killed all those who had conspired against King Amon. This was a hopeful sign. Up to this point, the people of Judah had largely tolerated some fifty seven years of utterly wicked kings who led the nation in evil. Now it seems that they wanted righteousness and justice instead of the evil they had lived with for so long. In some way, it could be said that the people of Judah had these wicked kings for more than fifty years because that is what they wanted. God gave them the leaders they wanted and deserved. Now, as the people of the kingdom turned towards godliness, God will give them a better king.

Although the Scriptures give no reason for the conspiracy, its cause may lie within the tangled web of revolts that Asurbanipal suppressed from 642-639 BC and that caused him to turn his attention to the west. Amon's death may thus reflect a power struggle between those who wished to remain loyal to the Assyrian crown and those who aspired to link Judah's fortunes to the rising star of Psammetik I (664-609 BC) of Egypt's Twenty Sixth Dynasty.

The people of the land made his son Josiah king to succeed him. Although king Amon was assassinated, God did not yet allow Judah to slip into the same pit of anarchy that Israel had sunk into. Because of the righteous action of the people of the land, there was no change of dynasty, and the rightful heir to the throne of David received the throne. The only positive contribution Amon made to the history of Judah was to produce one of the best kings to reign on the throne of Jerusalem: *<<Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; he reigned for thirty-one years in Jerusalem. He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the ways of his ancestor David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left>>* (2 Chronicles 34:1-2).