



## Second Kings - Chapter Twenty One

### Summary of Chapter Twenty One

After the times of promise under Hezekiah, his son Manasseh not only reversed what his father had done in removing the high places of worship, he actually reintroduced Baal worship and led the people to become far worse in the eyes of the Lord than the nations that he had driven from the land in order to give it to his people Israel. In addition, he had innocent people killed for no good reason. As a result of his evil behaviour God promised that judgement would come upon the nation and he would send them into exile.

After the fifty five year reign of Manasseh his son Amon succeeded him and he continued in the evil ways of his father, abandoning the Lord God of Israel. After just two years of king, he was killed in his own house by his servants, who in turn were killed by the people. His son Josiah succeeded him.

### **X**      2 Kings 21:1-26 - Manasseh and Amon

The Lord has kept faith with the house of David even through the bad times because of his promise to David, but hints abound throughout Chapters 16-20 that Judah will ultimately share Israel's fate and go into exile. With Manasseh, these hints of disaster give way to explicit prophetic announcements of judgement.

#### **X.a**      2 Kings 21:1-18 - Manasseh Reigns over Judah

Manasseh succeeded his father as king of Judah at a young age and ruled for fifty five years as probably the worst king in either the northern or southern kingdoms. He rebuilt the high places his father had demolished and he led the people back into worshipping Baal just as Ahab had done in the north. His evil ways would bring the wrath of God upon the people with the threat that they would soon be taken away into exile just as those in the northern kingdom had been.

Manasseh is the very worst of the Judæan kings, indulging in all that has been most reprehensible in the religion of Israel, both north and south, in the preceding chapters of 1-2 Kings, and adding to it the despicable practices of the nations. His father's reforms are reversed as the high places are rebuilt so that idolatry can resume there, and a new Asherah replaces the one that Hezekiah had removed. Manasseh built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the temple, both in the inner court described in 1 Kings 6:36 and in the middle court described in 2 Kings 20:4.

His grandfather Ahaz is his role model, as he sacrifices his own son in the fire (v.6) and uses fortune telling and omens. Ahab stands behind Ahaz; and King Saul's reign is also echoed in the reference to mediums and necromancers, divination by inquiring of the dead. The Lord of hosts has become to Manasseh merely a god among hosts, with a consort goddess Asherah for company and open to manipulation by occult means. If the Lord previously drove out before the people of Israel the nations that did these things, what will happen now to Judah?

<sup>1</sup> Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign; he reigned for fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah.

<sup>2</sup> He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, following the abominable practices of the nations that the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.

### 2 Kings 21:1-2

Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign. This means that he was born in the last fifteen years of Hezekiah's life, the additional fifteen years that Hezekiah had been granted by God because of his earnest prayer; refer to 2 Kings 20:6. Those additional fifteen years brought Judah one of its worst kings. Manasseh is named in Assyrian annals as Menasi or Minse, King of Yaudi, as being among twelve rulers of Palestine who brought tribute in kind to their overlord.

He reigned for fifty-five years in Jerusalem. This was both a remarkably long and a remarkably evil reign from 686-642 BC. A long career or longevity is not necessarily evidence of the blessing and approval of God.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, following the abominable practices of the nations that the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. Manasseh imitated the sins of both the Canaanites and the Israelites of the northern kingdom: *<<but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even made his son pass through fire, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel>>* (2 Kings 16:3). 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.

<sup>3</sup> For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he erected altars for Baal, made a sacred pole, as King Ahab of Israel had done, worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. <sup>4</sup> He built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, ‘In Jerusalem I will put my name.’ <sup>5</sup> He built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. <sup>6</sup> He made his son pass through fire; he practised soothsaying and augury, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. <sup>7</sup> The carved image of Asherah that he had made he set in the house of which the Lord 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; <sup>8</sup> I will not cause the feet of Israel to wander any more out of the land that I gave to their ancestors, if only they will be careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them.’ <sup>9</sup> But they did not listen; Manasseh misled them to do more evil than the nations had done that the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel.

### 2 Kings 21:3-9

For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had destroyed. 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.

He erected altars for Baal, made a sacred pole, as King Ahab of Israel had done. Manasseh 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 is honoured with a wooden image, that marked the reign of the wicked King Ahab.

He worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. Manasseh not only brought 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.

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. This corruption was unprecedented up until this time.

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

He practised soothsaying and augury, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. Manasseh invited direct satanic influence by his approval and introduction of these occult arts.

He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. The only surprise here is that God did not deal with such a wicked king immediately. However, he is a gracious and merciful God and he clearly was giving both Manasseh and the people of Judah time to realise their terrible ways and to repent. Had he exiled them or even killed them all with some plague there and then, no one could have complained about his just judgement. God once again showed that he was long suffering for his people: <<*The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, 'The Lord.'* *The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation'*>> (Exodus 34:5-7).

The carved image of Asherah that he had made he set in the temple. Asherah was the Canaanite goddess of fertility, and worshipped through ritual prostitution. This means that Manasseh made the temple into an idolatrous brothel, dedicated to Asherah.

A decorative pitcher found at the site of Lachish dates to the 13<sup>th</sup> Century BC. On the shoulder of the vessel is a stylised tree, representing the Canaanite goddess Asherah. An inscription above the tree refers to an offering to Elat, another name for the goddess. Israel is told not to worship trees as an Asherah; refer to Deuteronomy 16:21, Judges 6:25-30, 1 Kings 14:15 and 15:13, 2 Kings 18:4, Micah 5:13-15 and the associated comments made on each.

In this house, and in Jerusalem, I will put my name for ever. The Lord had made a promise to his people that he would dwell with them in the Jerusalem temple for all time. However, it was a conditional promise. It was not conditional on God, who remains faithful throughout all time, but conditional on his people following his laws and statutes and, in particular, worshipping only him as God: <<*I am the*

***Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me>>*** (Exodus 20:2-3). This they failed to do time and time again so the judgement that was to come was not the fault of God but was their own.

**I will not cause the feet of Israel to wander any more out of the land that I gave to their ancestors, if only they will be careful to do according to all that I have commanded them.** The promise is reiterated that, unlike their northern brethren, they will not be exiled if they return to following the law given to them through Moses. The biblical authors make it clear that the exile of Judah was due to moral reasons, i.e. Judah's unfaithfulness, rather than to any weakness in God. It was not too late to repent; the choice was theirs alone.

**But they did not listen; Manasseh misled them to do more evil than the nations had done that the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel.** This describes 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.

He was indeed a wicked king, but perhaps the greater sin was on behalf of the people who accepted this seduction willingly. The Chronicler states: <<***The Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they gave no heed>>*** (2 Chronicles 33:10). God spoke to both the people and the leader through his prophets but they rejected his word. King Manasseh did all he could to pervert the national character and totally destroy the worship of the true God; and he succeeded in doing just that.

This account shows just how superficial had been the nation's compliance with Hezekiah's reforms! Without a strong spiritual leader, the sinful people quickly turned to their own evil machinations: <<***The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually>>*** (Genesis 6:5). The judgement of God could not be far away. This was a transformation of the culture from something that was 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.

<sup>10</sup> The Lord said by his servants the prophets, <sup>11</sup> 'Because King Manasseh of Judah has committed these abominations, has done things more wicked than all that the Amorites did, who were before him, and has caused Judah also to sin with his idols; <sup>12</sup> therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such evil that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. <sup>13</sup> I will

stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line for Samaria, and the plummet for the house of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.<sup>14</sup> I will cast off the remnant of my heritage, and give them into the hand of their enemies; they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies,<sup>15</sup> because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their ancestors came out of Egypt, even to this day.'

### 2 Kings 21:10-15

The Lord said by his servants the prophets. When the leaders and the popular culture had abandoned God, the Lord still had a voice to Judah. He spoke by the prophets to his disobedient people: <<***Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets***>> (Amos 3:7). The prophets were Hosea, Joel, Nahum, Habakkuk and Isaiah. These five following verses contain the sum of what these prophets spoke.

Because King Manasseh of Judah has committed these abominations, has done things more wicked than all that the Amorites did, who were before him, and has caused Judah also to sin with his idols. This was a remarkable achievement of evil. The Amorites were among the Canaanite tribes who populated the Promised Land before Israel captured it, and they were infamous for their violent, immoral, and depraved culture.

I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such evil that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. The disaster now to befall Jerusalem and Judah will cause a reaction in people who hear of it – perhaps a sensation in the ears, or more likely a shaking in terror as the news enters the body through the ears; refer to Exodus 15:14, Deuteronomy 2:25, Isaiah 32:11 and 64:2. In other places in the OT, tingling ears are a sign that an especially severe judgement was coming: <<***Then the Lord said to Samuel, 'See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle'***>> (1 Samuel 3:11), and: <<***You shall say: Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to bring such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle***>> (Jeremiah 19:3).

I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line for Samaria, and the plummet for the house of Ahab. God's logic is simple. If Judah insisted on imitating the sins of the northern kingdom, then God would answer their similar sins with a similar judgement. God would cleanse Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down, subjecting them to their enemies: <<***Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has devoured me and crushed me, He has set me down like an empty vessel; He has swallowed me like a monster, He has filled his stomach***>>

*with my delicacies; He has washed me away>>* (Jeremiah 51:34 NASB). The city will be assessed by the divine architect by the use of the measuring line: <<*But the hawk and the hedgehog shall possess it; the owl and the raven shall live in it. He shall stretch the line of confusion over it, and the plummet of chaos over its nobles>>* (Isaiah 34:11), and: <<*The Lord determined to lay in ruins the wall of daughter Zion; he stretched the line; he did not withhold his hand from destroying; he caused rampart and wall to lament; they languish together>>* (Lamentations 2:8), and, like a dangerous building, it will be condemned.

I will cast off the remnant of my heritage. Cast off is a strong, forceful word often translated as forsake. It is also used to describe the skinning of an animal.

<sup>16</sup> 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

Manasseh shed very much innocent blood. This puts Manasseh, King of Judah, in the same spiritual family as Ahab, King of Israel. Under both of these kings - among others - the people of God were persecuted by the religion of state-sponsored idolatry. The extent of it was so great that it could be metaphorically said, he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another with the blood of his victims.

The tragic progression in Manasseh's sin can be clearly seen:

- First, idolatry is tolerated among God's people.
- Then idolatry is promoted.
- Then idolatry is supported and funded.
- Then the worship of the true God is undermined.
- Then the worshippers of the true God are persecuted and murdered.
- Then the judgement of God soon comes.

He caused Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. A leader is responsible for ensuring the people in his charge follow God's ways. To fail in this is a bad thing in the eyes of God but to deliberately turn them onto the opposite path of evil and idolatry cannot be tolerated by a Holy God: <<*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).

By tradition, in the uncorroborated Jewish tradition 'The Ascension of Isaiah', one of the evils done by Manasseh was the murder of Isaiah the prophet. Many

think that <<*they were sawn in two*>> (Hebrews 11:37a) is a reference to the martyrdom of Isaiah.

<sup>17</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, all that he did, and the sin that he committed, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? <sup>18</sup> Manasseh slept with his ancestors, and was buried in the garden of his house, in the garden of Uzza. His son Amon succeeded him.

### 2 Kings 21:17-18

All that he did, and the sin that he committed. This was the terrible legacy of Manasseh, who was born of one of the better kings of Judah, his father Hezekiah.

Manasseh slept with his ancestors. Manasseh's burial site lay outside the City of David, i.e. the original settled area of Jerusalem on the southern hill that is noted as the resting place of preceding kings, e.g. Ahaz in 2 Kings 16:20.

The garden of Uzza was perhaps an enclosure on the Temple Mount dedicated to the Arabian goddess al-Uzza, who was identified with Venus (notice Manasseh's worship of astral deities in v.3), or an enclosure at the southern end of the Kidron Valley, just outside the city walls, where there was a king's garden: <<*Then a breach was made in the city wall; the king with all the soldiers fled by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all round the city. They went in the direction of the Arabah*>> (2 Kings 25:4), <<*And Shallum son of Col-hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the Fountain Gate; he rebuilt it and covered it and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars; and he built the wall of the Pool of Shelah of the king's garden, as far as the stairs that go down from the City of David*>> (Nehemiah 3:15). Already in Solomon's day, the eastern slopes of the Kidron Valley were associated with idolatrous worship: <<*Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem*>> (1 Kings 11:7).

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

Second Chronicles 33:11-19 describes a remarkable repentance on the part of Manasseh which is not recorded in this chapter. Because he and his people would not listen to the warnings of God, the Lord allowed the Babylonians to bind King Manasseh and take him as a captive to Babylon: <<*While he was in distress he entreated the favour of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors*>> (2 Chronicles 33:12), and God answered his prayer and restored him to the throne. Manasseh then proved

that his repentance was genuine: <<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>> (2 Chronicles 33:16). This is a wonderful 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. In this way, it can be said that it was true that Manasseh rested with his fathers. Yet, his repentance was too late to 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 reforms apparently came far too late to have much of an impact on the obdurately backslidden people.

Despite his repentance Manasseh would still be held up as one of the main reasons why the nation was taken away into Babylonian exile: <<Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the Lord, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, for all that he had committed, and also for the innocent blood that he had shed; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the Lord was not willing to pardon>> (2 Kings 24:3-4).

#### X.b 2 Kings 21:19-26 - Amon Reigns over Judah

Amon succeeded his father Manasseh and continued the evil by abandoning the Lord completely. After just two years as king he was assassinated by his own servants who in turn were killed by the people, who then made Josiah their king.

<sup>19</sup> Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned for two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Meshullemeth daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. <sup>20</sup> He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done. <sup>21</sup> He walked in all the way in which his father walked, served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them; <sup>22</sup> he abandoned the Lord, the God of his ancestors, and did not walk in the way of the Lord.

#### 2 Kings 21:19-22

Amon reigned for two years in Jerusalem between 642-640 BC. This unusually short reign is an indication that the blessing of God was not upon the reign of Amon. It is not the length of life that a person has that is the blessing of God, it is the opportunities they take to serve God that is the true blessing.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh had done. 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 son and others who were influenced by his sin did not also repent: <<*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 33:23).

<sup>23</sup> The servants of Amon conspired against him, and killed the king in his house. <sup>24</sup> 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 in place of him. <sup>25</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Amon that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? <sup>26</sup> He was buried in his tomb in the garden of Uzza; then his son Josiah succeeded him.

### 2 Kings 21:23-26

The servants of Amon conspired against him, and killed the king 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.

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. Amnon'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 who ruled between 664-609 BC over Egypt's Twenty Sixth Dynasty.

The Chronicler in 2 Chronicles 33:21-25 has added to the account of Amon's brief reign 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: <<*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*>> (2 Chronicles 33:22) contributed to God's wrath against Judah (2 Chronicles 19:10, 24:18, 28:25 and 36:16), as well as serving as a prelude to Josiah's reform.

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:

*<<But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, 'No! but we are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles'>>* (1 Samuel 8:19-20). 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, arguably the best since David.

The people of the land made his son Josiah king in place of 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.

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

He was buried in his tomb in the garden of Uzza and was therefore not far from his father in death, just as he had followed his evil ways in life. Refer also to the comments of vv.17-18 above.