

Research: Manasseh's Excessive Idolatries and Reformation

II Chronicles 33:1-3, 10-13, 15

Hezekiah was Manasseh's father:

Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign—He must have been born three years after his father's recovery; and his minority, spent under the influence of guardians who were hostile to the religious principles and reforming policy of his father, may account in part for the anti-theocratic principles of his reign. The work of religious reformation which Hezekiah had zealously carried on was but partially accomplished. There was little appearance of its influence on the heart and manners of the people at large. On the contrary, the true fear of God had vanished from the mass of the people; corruption and vice increased, and were openly practiced (Isa 28:7, &c.) by the degenerate leaders, who, having got the young prince Manasseh into their power, directed his education, trained him up in their views, and seduced him into the open patronage of idolatry. Hence, when he became sovereign, he introduced the worship of idols, the restoration of high places, and the erection of altars or pillars to Baal, and the placing, in the temple of God itself, a graven image of Asherah, the sacred or symbolic tree, which represented "all the host of heaven." The sun, as among the Persians, had chariots and horses consecrated to it (2Ki 23:11); and incense was offered to the stars on the housetops (2Ki 23:12; 2Ch 33:5; Jer 19:13; Zep 1:5), and in the temple area with the face turned toward the sunrise (Eze 8:16). Manasseh's idolatry, 2 Kings 21:1-9" (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown).

"fifty and five years] A reign longer than his father's whole life, in spite of the addition of fifteen years; and longer than the reign of any other king of Judah or Israel" (Cambridge Bible).

"In the time from Manasseh onwards, Moloch-worship and worship of the Queen of Heaven appear as prominent new features of Judah's idolatry. It is also probable that the local high places took on their restoration a more markedly heathenish character than before" (Ellicott's Commentary).

1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem: **2** But did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.

"Twelve years old.—This early accession to power may help to explain his deviation from the religious policy of his father. It is not necessary to assume that the queen-mother swayed the government until he reached a riper age. Manasseh may have been older than his years. According to the datum of the text, he was born a year or two after the Assyrian invasion. Whether he was Hezekiah's firstborn son or not cannot be ascertained" (Ellicott's Commentary).

2 But did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.

3For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.

“Baalim.—The Baals—i.e., the different images of Baal. “ (Ellicott’s Commentary).

“The parallel gives prominence to the one Asherah, ten times offensive, as set up in the house of the Lord (ver. 7 there). The mention of his pantheon of the host of heaven is an addition to the wickedness of former wicked kings” (Pulpit Commentary).

Sacrifice of children:

6 And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards:

“And he made his son pass through the fire,.... To Molech, after the manner of the old Canaanites and Phoenicians; his son Amon, that succeeded him, and other children, as appears from II Chronicles 33:6, where mention is made of the place where it was done, the valley of the son of Hinnom” (Gill’s Exposition).

“The valley of the son of Hinnom’ mentioned by the Chronicler was a ravine on the south and west of Jerusalem, the south-east extremity of which had the name of *Tophet*. Because of the horrors which had been perpetrated there, the place was defiled, and converted into a receptacle of all that was foul and offensive, for the destruction of which constant fires were kept burning” (Cambridge Bible Commentary).

“It was usually the eldest son, who, as the most precious possible offering, was sacrificed to Moloch. **And observed times**. If this translation is right, the reference would be to a superstitious regard for lucky and unlucky days,

“**And used enchantments**. A use of spoils is perhaps intended, such as those by which serpents were charmed. **And dealt with familiar spirits and wizards** - rather, **he placed in office necromancers** (literally, a **necromancer**) **and wizards**; i.e. he gave such persons official positions at his court, instead of putting them to death, as the Law (Leviticus 20:27) required

7 And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever:

“*He set an image of the grove*, — The image of that Baal which was worshipped in the grove, or of some other of his idols. The word Asherah, here rendered grove, is nearly the same with Ashtaroth, or Astarte, the imaginary female deities, which were worshipped along with Baalim. This image seems to have been set up in the very temple itself, probably in the holy place; as if designed purposely to affront the Lord to his face, and set him at defiance: “desecrating,” says

Henry, “what had been consecrated to God, and, in effect, turning him out of his own house, and putting the rebels in possession of it.” (Benson Commentary).

“And he set a graven image—The placing of the Asherah within the precincts of the temple, which was dedicated to the worship of the true God, is dwelt upon as the most aggravated outrage of the royal idolater” (Jamieson-FaussetBrown).

10 And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken.

“**But they hearkened not.** The people, and not Manasseh alone, were disobedient. Had they remained faithful, Manasseh's sin would not have affected their future. **And Manasseh seduced them.** The influence of a young and gay king, always great, is in the East immense. When such a king succeeds one of strict principles, he easily carries away the multitude with him, and leads them on to any excess of profligacy and irreligion. The beginnings of sin are delightful, and the votaries of pleasure, readily beguiled into evil courses, know not where to stop. Manasseh seduced them, we are told, **to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel;** that is, than the Hivites, Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Gergashites, and Jebusites (Deuteronomy 7:1, etc.). The sin of Israel exceeded that of the Canaanitish nations, not so much in any outward and tangible features, as in the fact that it was committed against light, in spite of the Law, and against all the warnings and denunciations of the prophets (comp. 2 Kings 17:13, 14).” (Pupit Commentary).

11 Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.

“among the thorns] R.V., in chains, but better, with hooks (as R.V. mg.); Assyrian kings sometimes thrust a hook into the nostrils of their captives and so led them about” (Cambridge Bible).

“Which took Manasseh among the thorns.—And they took Manasseh prisoner with the hooks (ba-ḥôḥîm). The hooks might be such as the Assyrian kings were wont to pass through the nostrils and lips of their more distinguished prisoners. Comp. Isaiah 37:29, “I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips;” and comp. Amos 4:2, “He will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fish-hooks.”

“And bound him with fetters.—With the double chain of bronze” (Ellicott's Commentary).

“Others think it more probable that the king of Babylon is here called the king of Assyria, because he had added Assyria to his empire, and that having been informed by his ambassadors of the great riches which were in Hezekiah's treasures at Jerusalem, and being assured of Manasseh's degeneracy from the piety of his father, and from that God whose power alone made Hezekiah formidable, he thought this a fit season to invade Manasseh's kingdom, which the Jews say he did, in the twenty- second year of his reign” (Benson Commentary).

12 And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,

“Being “deprived of his authority and liberty, and secluded from his evil counsellors and companions, and from all his pleasures, in chains, and in a prison, without any other prospect than of ending his days in that wretched situation, he had leisure to reflect on what had passed. He then, no doubt, recollected the honour, prosperity, and deliverances with which his father had been favoured; his own good education, with the instruction and warnings of the prophets; and his atrocious, multiplied, and daring crimes: and he remembered that his miseries had been foretold by his faithful monitors. Thus, by the special grace of God, his solitude and affliction brought him to view his own conduct and character in another light than before, and he began to cry for mercy and deliverance, *humbling himself greatly before the God of his fathers.*” (Benson Commentary).

“when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God—In the solitude of exile or imprisonment, Manasseh had leisure for reflection. The calamities forced upon him a review of his past life, under a conviction that the miseries of his dethronement and captive condition were owing to his awful and unprecedented apostasy (2Ch 33:7) from the God of his fathers. He humbled himself, repented, and prayed for an opportunity of bringing forth the fruits of repentance” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown).

13 And prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.

“His prayer was heard; for his conqueror not only released him, but, after two years' exile, restored him, with honor and the full exercise of royal power, to a tributary and dependent kingdom. (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown).

15 And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of 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 cast them out of the city.

“The idol.—That is, the Asherah; This was the name of a sensual Canaanitish goddess Astarte, the feminine of the Assyrian Ishtar. Its symbol was the stem of a tree deprived of its boughs,

“In the mount of the house.—The temple hill.

“and cast them out of the city; perhaps into the brook Kidron; all this he did to show the sincerity of his repentance for his idolatry, and his abhorrence of it” (Gill’s Exposition).

