

In the book of Kings, Manasseh is described, in the words of Peter Leithart, as  
“an idolatrous Solomon on steroids.”

If Hezekiah is the greatest king since David,  
one would expect his son to be like Solomon.  
And indeed Manasseh was a great temple builder—  
but his building projects were all idolatrous!

Manasseh reigns for 55 years – the longest reign of any king in Israel or Judah.  
Manasseh, of course, is also the name of one of Joseph’s sons—  
and so there is a whole tribe of Manasseh.  
The name “Manasseh” comes from a root which means to forget or to fail.  
Joseph named his son Manasseh  
because God had caused him to forget all his hardship and all his father’s house.

Hezekiah may well have named his son Manasseh for a similar reason.  
Hezekiah’s father, Ahaz, had been a terrible idolater.  
Ahaz had built an altar in the temple on the Assyrian model.  
But Hezekiah had forgotten the ways of his father,  
and had walked in the ways of David.

So he named his son, “he causes to forget.”  
But Hezekiah named his son too well!  
Because Manasseh did indeed cause his people to forget!

The language of remembering and forgetting is the language of worship.  
In Deuteronomy 6-12,  
the key to prosperity in the land is “remembering” the LORD your God;  
because if you “forget” him, then he will destroy you.

Manasseh causes Judah to forget the LORD—  
and he does this liturgically—  
by rebuilding the high places, erecting new altars and Asherahs.  
Even as memory is nourished by liturgy—  
forgetfulness results from liturgical perversion.

When you think about the perversion of worship today,  
you can see the same sort of thing.  
A church that thinks of worship as entertainment is a forgetful church,  
and will lose sight of the glory of Christ.  
A church that thinks of worship as a place strictly for gaining knowledge about the Bible  
will also forget the LORD -- often expressed in their lack of love.

Worship is first and foremost a meeting of the Triune God with his covenant people.

Worship is designed to nourish memory –  
to remind us of who God is and of who we are in Christ.  
We are always in danger of Manasseh – of forgetfulness!

### **1. The Abominable Idolatry of Manasseh (33:1-9)**

*33 Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel.*

Verse 2 summarizes the evil practices of Manasseh.

There are two parts:

first, he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD –  
this is the standard opening for a bad king!  
It dates back to the time of the judges –  
when Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.  
In those days, there was no king in Israel –  
everyone did what was right in his own eyes.  
The whole point of having a king was that Israel needed someone  
who would lead them to do what is *right* in the eyes of the LORD.

This rubs us the wrong way.

We want to think that we don't need anyone.  
And we like to appeal to the NT.  
After all, John says, "you have no need that anyone should teach you"  
because God's anointing teaches you (1 John 2:27).  
Of course, we conveniently ignore the context –  
as John has just spoken of the "antichrists"  
who have departed from the church  
because they wouldn't listen to John!

John's point is that the one who has the anointing of God will listen to God,  
and so therefore you don't need to worry about those who run off –  
because the fact that they have believed lies and denied the Son  
means that they were not "of the truth."

Manasseh is just such an antichrist.

He does what is evil in the sight of the LORD –  
and he leads others to do the same.

And to give substance to that evil,

it was "according to the abominations of the nations  
whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel."

This also highlights the connection to the days of the Judges.

It's not just that Manasseh sins.

It's that he sins by turning precisely to the practices  
of those whom God had already condemned.

The Chronicler then lists some of the abominations of Manasseh:

<sup>3</sup> *For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had broken down,*

When it says that Manasseh “rebuilt” the high places,  
literally it says that “he *returned* and rebuilt” the high places.

This word “return” is a very common word.

It means to “return or come back” –

it is the word used for “repentance” in Solomon’s prayer;

it is also the word for “turn away” from the LORD –

but also it is the word for “return” *to* the LORD.

Every major event is a “turning point” in one direction or another!

Either you are either turning away from the living God,

or else you are turning back.

Manasseh is returning to the high places that his father destroyed.

He probably was very popular for doing this.

Hezekiah had broken with centuries of tradition

by insisting that everyone worship in Jerusalem.

At first it would have appeared that Manasseh is simply restoring the worship of Yahweh  
the way it had always been done!

Israel had always worshiped Yahweh at the high places!

“We’ve always done it that way!”

That’s the cry of the traditionalist.

They are not really concerned with what God says.

They just assume that God must be pleased with the way we’ve always done it!

Right now the PCA is debating the question of “intinction” –

is it permitted to dip the bread in the cup, and thus partake of both elements together?

Those who oppose the practice usually point out that it is an innovation.

(For some reason they accepted the innovations of grape juice and thimbles,

but are now drawing the line here).

But since Manasseh was not interested in worshiping the LORD

according to the *word* of God,

he wound up adding more and more innovations.

Indeed, verses 3-6 demonstrate a downward spiral of idolatry:

*and he erected altars to the Baals, and made Asheroth, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.* <sup>4</sup> *And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, “In Jerusalem shall my name be forever.”* <sup>5</sup> *And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.* <sup>6</sup> *And he burned his sons as an offering in the Valley of the Son*

*of Hinnom, and used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger.*

Ahab has been dead now for nearly 200 years.

God had utterly destroyed the house of Ahab.

The blood of Ahab was destroyed from the face of the earth—  
except for one!

Because Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, had married the son of David,  
and so Joash, the good king—the first great reformer, was Ahab’s great-grandson.

The last remnant of Ahab’s blood flows in the house of David,  
and it returns with a vengeance in the person of Manasseh.

As we’ve seen, Ahab was a parody of Solomon,  
and Manasseh is the southern version of Ahab.

So not surprisingly we see Manasseh engaged in temple building (like Solomon and Ahab),  
and also he sheds much innocent blood (like Ahab).

Manasseh introduces Baal worship in verse 3.

*And he built altars in the house of the LORD (verse 4)*

*of which the LORD had said, In Jerusalem will I put my name.*

*And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.*

Not only that but he also *burned his son as an offering and used fortune-telling and omens and dealt with mediums and wizards.*

These are things that are expressly forbidden in Deuteronomy.

Earlier kings of Judah had done evil in the sight of the LORD,  
but Manasseh surpasses them all.

*He did **much** evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger.*

These sins move from violations of the first commandment (no other gods)  
to the second commandment (no graven images),  
to the third commandment (the violation of God’s holy name).

<sup>7</sup> *And 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 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,<sup>8</sup> and I will no more remove the foot of Israel from the land that I appointed for your fathers, if only they will be careful to do all that I have commanded them, all the law, the statutes, and the rules given through Moses.”*

Verses 7-8 focus on this violation of God’s holy name.

God had said that he would put his name in Solomon’s temple.

And he had said that Israel would never wander in exile again –  
if only they would keep his commandments.

When you look back at the second and third commandments,  
they each have threats attached:  
*for I the LORD your God am a jealous God,  
visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children  
to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,  
but showing steadfast love  
to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.  
You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain,  
for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.*

You see, God's covenant with Israel had conditions:  
God promised Israel that they would dwell in the land forever – if they would obey him.  
This was not a covenant of works.  
This was not a demand of perfect, perpetual obedience.  
Rather, God's blessing depended on Israel worshiping him.  
If you worship me, we can deal with sin properly!  
That's why the Mosaic law had all sorts of provisions for dealing with sin!  
If you worship me – and only me – then we can deal with your failings.

The same was true with God's covenant with David.  
God laid out very clear conditions:  
I will be a Father to David's sons;  
if your sons rebel against me, then I will discipline them.

That is why Kings now says that God had promised that Israel would remain the land forever–  
*if* they will be careful to do what I said.

And of course, the new covenant in Christ has the same conditions.  
Jesus says that the two great commandments are still in force.  
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength,  
and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.  
Idolatry is no more acceptable to God today than it was for Manasseh!  
And Paul tells us that no idolater or murderer or drunkard, or swindler  
will inherit the kingdom of God.

The difference is found in the difference between Manasseh and Jesus.  
Judah's problem is that even when they have good kings (like Hezekiah),  
the good king dies and his son not only forgets God,  
but causes Judah to forget as well.

And verse 9 describes the problem:  
<sup>9</sup>*Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, to do more evil than the nations  
whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel.*

Manasseh lived up to his name.  
He caused Judah to forget the LORD their God.  
Three times in these 9 verses, he is said to have done evil:

v2 – “he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD,  
according to the abominations of the nations”  
v6 – “he did much evil in the sight of the LORD,  
provoking him to anger”  
v9 – “he led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray,  
to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed  
before the people of Israel”

So not only did Manasseh *do* evil –  
he led Judah to do evil.  
Truly Manasseh is the antichrist! (the opposite of a Messiah)

In the book of Kings, the idolatry of Manasseh is the only story.  
There are no invasions, no political wrangling.  
The only theme of the reign of Manasseh is idolatry.  
55 years of idolatry.

But whereas the book of Kings simply relates a narrative of pure [impure?] idolatry,  
Chronicles reports that there was more to the story.  
Where Kings provides a prophetic denunciation of Manasseh,  
Chronicles mentions this in a single verse:  
*The LORD spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they paid no attention.*  
and then promptly tells the story of Manasseh’s repentance!

## **2. The Humility and Repentance of Manasseh (v10-20)**

### **a. The Captivity of Manasseh (v10-13)**

<sup>10</sup> *The LORD spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they paid no attention.* <sup>11</sup> *Therefore the LORD brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who captured Manasseh with hooks and bound him with chains of bronze and brought him to Babylon.* <sup>12</sup> *And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.* <sup>13</sup> *He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.*

Manasseh is mentioned several times in Assyrian records as being their vassal.  
There is no specific rebellion recorded there –  
but there are several instances of rebellions led by area rulers  
(especially Tyre and Egypt),  
and we know that Judah frequently sided with Tyre and Egypt  
against their overlords.

Of course, it is worth noting that the Chronicler does not say that Manasseh rebelled!  
All it says is that the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria  
*captured* Manasseh with hooks... and brought him to Babylon.  
This would normally presuppose rebellion –

but the Chronicler does not explain the context.

All we know (and indeed, all that matters) is that Manasseh was captured, bound and brought to Babylon.

But when he was in distress, he cried out the LORD and entreated his favor.

Remember Solomon's prayer?

When God's people are in exile in a foreign land,  
and they cry out to the LORD,  
the LORD will hear the prayer of his servant (the king)  
and of his people (Israel)  
and will restore them to their land.

You might wonder:

even a king as bad as Manasseh?  
even a king who makes Ahab look like a boy scout?

God is faithful to his promises.

When he says that he will hear the prayers of his people when they cry to him –  
he includes *even Manasseh!*

And so, in verse 13, it says that God “brought him again” to Jerusalem –  
and once again we hear the word “return” (shub).

And when Manasseh is restored to the land,  
he bears fruit in keeping with repentance.

This is important because the Israel of the Chronicler's day had been restored to the land.

God has been faithful.

He has done what he has promised in delivering his people from their enemies.

Now *you* are called to love and serve the LORD your God.

But look at Manasseh's repentance in verses 14-17:

#### **b. The Fruit of Repentance (v14-17)**

<sup>14</sup> *Afterward he built an outer wall for the city of David west of Gihon, in the valley, and for the entrance into the Fish Gate, and 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.* <sup>15</sup> *And 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 outside of the city.* <sup>16</sup> *He also restored the altar of the LORD and offered on it sacrifices of peace offerings and of thanksgiving, and he commanded Judah to serve the LORD, the God of Israel.* <sup>17</sup> *Nevertheless, the people still sacrificed at the high places, but only to the LORD their God.*

Manasseh removes the idols and the altars –

he restores the worship of Yahweh and offers sacrifices of peace offerings;

and he calls Judah to serve Yahweh –

but the people only go halfway.

They serve the LORD only – but they retain their high places.

It is also worth noting where the idols end up:

“he threw them outside of the city.”

There is no suggestion that the idols were destroyed!

Jeremiah tells us that Josiah had to remove the idols that Manasseh had made.

That suggests that Manasseh’s repentance may not have lasted very long.

The Chronicler is a careful writer.

He wants to make Manasseh look good –

but he won’t lie.

Kings shows us that Manasseh’s sin resulted in the exile of God’s people.

Chronicles shows us that Manasseh’s repentance symbolized the hope of God’s people.

Because it is precisely the *worst* of kings – the chief of sinners – who repents.

If God heard Manasseh and delivered him,

then you can be assured that God will hear and deliver you!

### c. The Death of Manasseh (v18-20)

<sup>18</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the LORD, the God of Israel, behold, they are in the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. <sup>19</sup> And his prayer, and how God was moved by his entreaty, and all his sin and his faithlessness, and the sites on which he built high places and set up the Asherim and the images, before he humbled himself, behold, they are written in the Chronicles of the Seers.<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>20</sup> So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his house, and Amon his son reigned in his place.

Kings tells us about the prophets who warned Manasseh of the coming destruction.

Kings even tells us that Judah was sent into exile *because* of the sins of Manasseh.

The Chronicler doesn’t mention this part –

he only suggests that if you want to know what God said to Manasseh,

read the book of Kings!

For the book of Kings, the coming judgment is inevitable.

Nothing can prevent the death of Jerusalem.

But the Chronicler wants to show that repentance is always possible.

Even this conclusion highlights both the *sin* of Manasseh and his repentance.

There is always hope – even for the chief of sinners!



### 3. The Evil Reign of Amon (v21-25)

<sup>21</sup> *Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem.* <sup>22</sup> *And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as Manasseh his father had done. Amon sacrificed to all the images that Manasseh his father had made, and served them.* <sup>23</sup> *And he did not humble himself before the LORD, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself, but this Amon incurred guilt more and more.* <sup>24</sup> *And his servants conspired against him and put him to death in his house.* <sup>25</sup> *But the people of the land struck down all those who had conspired against King Amon. And the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his place.*

But only if you repent!

Amon, after all, was like his father,

and he *served the idols that his father made.*

But in one respect he was worse than Manasseh:

*He did not humble himself before the LORD...but...incurred guilt more and more.*

Manasseh did what was evil – and led Judah to do what was evil –  
but Manasseh humbled himself.

Amon, on the other hand, only got worse.

He restored the images of Manasseh and abandoned the LORD entirely.

*And the servants of Amon conspired against him and put him to death in his house.*

We do not know why.

Maybe they thought that Amon had gone too far in rejecting Yahweh.

But the people of the land did not agree.

Truly the people of Judah were following their king.

*They struck down all those who had conspired against King Amon.*

For better or for worse, the people of the land recognize  
that their fate is tied to the house of David.

So rather than enthrone the regicides,

they put them to death and turn to Josiah – the young son of Amon.

[In Kings we saw that Judah's hope is not in reformation.

Reforming kings (like Hezekiah) die, and their sons are like Manasseh!

Judah's hope is not in the temple.

It will be destroyed.

Judah's hope is not that God will save them from death.

Judah's hope is that God will raise them from the dead!

Before Judah can be restored, Judah must die.

And not just the death of apostasy.

Judgment must fall upon the people of God.

Without the exile, there will be no restoration.

Without the cross, there will be no resurrection.

And this comes to fullest expression in the cross of Christ.

Judgment must fall upon the Son of God.  
You cannot have glory without the cross.  
    Jesus must be exiled from the Father.  
    He must descend into hell–  
        taking upon himself the judgment that we deserved–  
        or else there will be no ascension to the right hand of God.

That is why the Christian life so emphasizes the cross.  
Because we are called to follow Jesus.  
We are elect exiles,  
    called to walk by the Spirit in the same path that our Lord has walked.  
Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me.]

Chronicles does not reject this narrative.  
But Chronicles wants to make a more immediate point.  
    Repent now!!  
Yes, God has his purposes for history which he will fulfill.  
    But repent now!!  
It's true that Jerusalem will have to go through exile to glory...  
    But repent now!!

Don't wait for God's macro-level purposes for history!  
    Repent now – while it is called today!

Turn away from sin – and turn to Jesus!  
He is able and willing to forgive!  
He forgave Manasseh – and he will forgive all those who cry to him for help.