



Manasseh and Amon: Too Far Gone?

Lesson 19

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

Luke 23:42

How far do you have to go before you are too far gone? How many times do you have to mess up before God quits? How many sins does it take to put yourself out of earshot of God's help? This lesson gives us an answer to that question: we are never too far gone. No one ever comes to the point where they cry out to God in true repentance and humility and are turned away.¹ In this lesson we see the most wicked king in all of Israel and Judah repent and we see God show mercy.

Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh and was one of the godliest kings that Judah had. His son turned out to be the most wicked that Judah had. After watching his father trust God with an impossible situation and then see God come through, Manasseh made the exact opposite choice, choosing instead to rebel and facing the heavy consequences of his decision. His wickedness seemed to know no bounds, and in nine short verses the authors of Kings and Chronicles paint a picture of a king of unimaginable wickedness. Yet we see Manasseh repent, and we see God show mercy to him.

At the same time, we are reminded in this lesson never to take God's grace for granted. Manasseh had over fifty years to repent and was given one last chance while sitting in a prison cell. His son Amon was not so lucky. Amon reigned for two years before the swift judgment of God came upon him. When it comes to repentance, tomorrow may be too late. Today is always a good idea.

¹ Some might perhaps argue that it is possible to get to such a point of no return on the basis of passages such as Romans 1, which speaks of God giving people over to a reprobate mind, or Romans 9 where God hardens Pharaoh's heart. Regarding the first passage, it is questionable whether God's handing someone over for judgment is always final. The passage goes on to describe homosexuality as the classical example of someone being handed over, and yet homosexuals turn from their sin and get saved. As for Romans 9, even if you do hold a view that God hardens someone in their sin so that they will not accept the gospel, it would be incredibly foolish to try and decide who that had happened to. Some pretty awful people by our standards have been saved (see, for example, Paul). From a human perspective, then, it is always right to encourage someone that they are not too far gone to return to God, and it is certainly accurate to say that any who repent in humility will be accepted by God.

Why do people put off repenting if they know that they should?

Why do we tend to write people as being too far gone and not having hope that they can change?

Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1-18; 2 Chronicles 33:1-20)

When it comes to wicked kings of the northern kingdom, Ahab stands out as the worst. When it comes to the kings of the southern kingdom, Manasseh stands out. Yet in many ways what Manasseh did was far worse than what Ahab had done. Ahab was king of the already apostate northern kingdom and had the ungodly Omri as his father. Manasseh was king of the southern kingdom and followed the godly rule of his father Hezekiah.

I. Manasseh's Wickedness (2 Kings 21:1-9, 2 Chr 33:1-9).

A. Overview of Manasseh's reign (2 Kings 21:1-2, 9).

Like other kings, we are given a brief synopsis of the Manasseh's reign at the very beginning. Not surprisingly, we find that Scripture views him as a king who did "that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." What is surprising is the length of his reign. Manasseh reigned for 55 years, longer than any other king of Israel or Judah.

B. Manasseh rebuilds the high places (2 Kings 21:3a).

Once again, we hear about the high places. Whereas Hezekiah had torn down the high places after generations of godly kings who were too afraid to touch them, Manasseh undoes the good his father did by rebuilding them.

Why do you think these high places keep coming back? What was their appeal? What was so wrong with them if the people were worshipping the Lord there?

C. Manasseh established Baal worship (2 Kings 21:3b).

Manasseh follows the pattern of Ahab, the most wicked king of the north, by setting up altars for Baal. But Manasseh was not content to simply stop with Baal, he also began worshipping astral deities, i.e. the "host of heaven."

D. Manasseh corrupts the temple (2 Kings 21:4-5, 7-8).

Ahaz had defiled the temple so badly that it took Hezekiah two weeks to clean it out (2 Chronicles 29:17). Now Manasseh comes and behaves just like his grandfather in defiling the temple. Not only did he build altars for all kinds of pagan gods, he set them up inside the temple itself! In fact, this such a serious offense that God comes back to it at the end, and in both sections he reminds the reader that God had said He would put His name in

the temple. In response to God's incredible kindness and gracious condescension, Judah set up His rivals right in front of His face.

Why does God allow this kind of behavior? Why does he not wipe Manasseh out on the spot, especially after situations like Nadab and Abihu (cf Leviticus 10)?

E. Manasseh burns his son (2 Kings 21:6a).

In this act of despicable paganism, Manasseh sacrificed his own son to a pagan deity. What Scripture describes as "passing through the fire" was likely the superheating of an idol's hands until they were molten, and then live infants would be placed in them.

What are the parallels between this activity and abortion? How are the two similar? How are they different?

F. Manasseh engages in sorcery (2 Kings 21:6b).

God had expressly forbidden his people from engaging in the dark arts like sorcery, necromancy, and other such occultic practices (Leviticus 19:31). This behavior hearkens back to Saul's consulting a witch in Endor (1 Samuel 24). This behavior showed a lack of trust in God, specifically in His prophets who worked as His spokesman. If you didn't like what the prophet said, you could always go ask someone else.

One commentator observes that Manasseh followed all the wrong examples! "He imitates the detestable Canaanites, Jeroboam I the builder of high places, Ahab the advocate of Baal worship, Ahaz the proponent of child sacrifice, and Saul the visitor of mediums." Manasseh is really a combination of all the worst possible traits of those who have gone before him.² If you were going to build a king to be the worst possible king, he would do all of the things that Manasseh did.

II. Manasseh's Chastening (2 Kings 21:10-18, 2 Chr 33:10-11).

We aren't given many details in this account. It's likely that Manasseh had been serving Assyria as a vassal, and at some point rebelled, though we can't know that for sure. We don't know why Manasseh was taken to Babylon rather than Assyria. But we do know that God brought this situation into his life as a result of his rebellious ways.

² Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, vol. 8, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 378.

A. God warns Manasseh to forsake his ways (2 K 21:10-15).

This is a pattern that we see over and over. God sends warnings to His rebellious people, giving them an opportunity to repent. God's words here are pretty strong, and will ultimately be fulfilled when Judah is taken captive to Babylon.

B. Manasseh ignored God's warnings (2 K 21:16, 2 Chr 33:10).

Another sad pattern we see is the king ignoring the prophet. Manasseh continued in his violent, ungodly ways. Kings describes him as filling Jerusalem with his sin.

What kind of a long-term impact would Manasseh's choices have? How does the character of a leader impact the people?

C. God sent Assyria to judge Manasseh (2 C 33:11).

Chronicles includes an interesting story that is left out of Kings. At some point, Manasseh was captured, humiliated, and carried away by Assyria to Babylon. Yet even in this God was showing mercy. This gave Manasseh the opportunity to get see the wrong of his choices and get right with God.

III. Manasseh's Repentance (2 Chr 33:12-20).

Chronicles includes a shocking twist in this story. We see the wicked, hardened king Manasseh repent and turn from his evil ways. This story should give all of us hope that there is no such thing as too far gone with God.

A. Manasseh repented and prayed to God (v 12-13).

God brought Manasseh to a very low point. Captured by the king of Assyria and carried to the land of Babylon, Manasseh turned to God in a moment of desperation. God responded by rescuing him and giving him a second chance.

Why do some people turn to God in moments of desperation, while others continue to refuse him?

B. Manasseh rebuilt Judah (v 14).

After his humility and repentance, we see God slowly begin to bless Manasseh. As we've said before, building projects and military strength are signs of prosperity for kings. After turning to God, God blesses. God is so good and so merciful, that even an evil man who has spent most of his life rebelling against God is given a second chance

C. Manasseh reestablished the worship of God (vv 15-17).

Manasseh attempts to reverse course. He seeks to uproot the idolatry that he has started and to reestablish the worship of God. This return was partial, however, as the high places were still left up.

Why do you think Manasseh left the high places up? What kept him from total commitment?

In many ways this serves as a miniature picture of what is going to happen to the nation as a whole. God will bring them to the nation of Babylon, where they will realize their sin and turn to the God of their fathers. Afterwards, God will allow them to return from their exile and will bless them once again.

What can believers learn from the example of Manasseh's repentance and restoration?

Amon (2 Kings 21:19-26; 2 Chronicles 33:21-25)

I. Amon returned to his father's former ways (2 Kings 21:19-22).

Despite the dramatic turn around experienced at the end of Manasseh's reign, his son Amon did not learn from his conversion. Rather, he ruled wickedly upon coming to the throne at 20 years old.

Why do you think Manasseh's conversion had so little an effect on his son?

II. God brought swift judgment on Amon (2 Kings 21:23-26).

Manasseh was given fifty-five years to get his act together. Amon was given two. The fact that God will show mercy no matter how far down we might sink is no reason to keep sinning, because we don't know how long we have.

God's mercy truly knows no bound. It's not by accident that the most wicked king of the north (Ahab) and the most wicked king of the south (Manasseh) both humbled themselves before God and both received mercy. No matter how far you've gone, no matter what you've done, you stand within reach of God's mercy and grace.