

When Wicked Men Turn Good

By Al Felder

“²¹But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. ²²All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. ²³Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? Saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? (Ezekiel 18:21-23)

The idea of forgiveness can be very perplexing to us at times. The very fact that regardless of what a person has done he can be forgiven when he seeks God, is taught throughout the Bible. The problem is that some people fail to believe this truth. There are some individuals who find it hard to believe that they can be forgiven because they can't forgive themselves. They see their sins as being too numerous and too great for God to forgive. Well, there is a man whom we are going to read about in the Bible who had committed great sins, yet he found forgiveness from God when he sought it. For just a little while we would like to consider the subject “When Wicked Men Turn Good.”

“¹Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem: ²But 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. ⁴Also he built altars in the house of the Lord, whereof the Lord had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be forever. ⁵And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. ⁶And 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: he wrought much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger. ⁷And 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 forever. ⁸Neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel from out of the land which I have appointed for your fathers; so that they will take heed to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses. ⁹So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.” (2 Chronicles 33:1-9)

Manasseh was the son of Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a good king. He destroyed idolatry within the land of Judah, and caused the people to seek God. His son, however, did not follow in his ways. Manasseh, the Bible tells us, was wicked.

At the tender age of twelve, Manasseh became king of Judah. In reality, Manasseh ruled for ten years as co-regent with his father. When Hezekiah died, Manasseh took complete control of the government of Judah. Once he had full control, the Bible teaches us that Manasseh led Judah down a deep dark path. In fact, it was because of the wicked reign of Manasseh that God determined to bring judgment upon Judah through the Babylonians.

Manasseh was so wicked that the Bible clearly states that the condition of Judah under his reign was worse than the heathen nations God destroyed when he led Israel into the land after the exodus. After the death of his father, Manasseh reigned for thirteen consecutive years of pure wickedness. God sent his prophets unto him to warn him to turn from his wicked ways, but he killed them. In fact, Jewish tradition states that Manasseh had Isaiah the prophet sawn in half.

Manasseh rebuilt all of the high places that had been destroyed by his father. These high places were for the purpose of worshipping false gods. He caused the people to worship Baal and many other false gods. Fornication was a chief act involved in the worship of these false gods.

The Bible also states that Manasseh was given over to astrology. He worshipped the sun, moon, and stars. He erected altars in the outer court of the temple, and in the Holy Place where the priests worshipped. Such wickedness as this had not been seen in Judah before this time.

The Bible also says that Manasseh revived the worship of Molech. He sacrificed his own children to this false god in the valley of the son of Hinnom. Horrible atrocities were committed here, and this valley became a desolate place. During his earthly ministry, Jesus used this very valley as an example of hell.

Manasseh was also heavily involved with the occult. He practiced witchcraft and consulted with mediums. In fact, history states that he took people who engaged in such things and placed them in positions of leadership. There wasn't much that Manasseh didn't do.

When you read the Bible and consider of all the acts of Manasseh, he truly was wicked. He was in to any and everything. There apparently was nothing that he was unwilling to worship. Nothing that is, except for God. In all of his actions and all of his deeds, Manasseh had absolutely no consideration for God.

The whole time that Manasseh engaged in wickedness, God sent his prophets unto him in order to cause him to turn from his wickedness, but he would not repent. As we consider the account of his life something becomes clear. Sometimes a person has to hick rock bottom in order to be able to repent.

God brought Manasseh to his knees. *"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."* (2 Chronicles 33:11) God allowed the Assyrians

to enter into Judah, and take Manasseh captive. The Assyrians were known for their brutality, and Manasseh's experience was harsh. His hands and feet were bound with chains, and a ring was placed in his nose. The ring was for the purpose of leading him around, and it was by that ring that he was led out of Judah.

For twelve long years Manasseh remained a prisoner of his captors. Finally, all of his pride, vanity, and lust left a bitter taste in his mouth. None of the false gods he served could help him. ¹²*And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,* 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.”* (2 Chronicles 33:12, 13) He humbled himself before the Lord and repented of his wickedness. God heard Manasseh and He forgave him. Manasseh was returned to Judah where he reigned for another twenty years.

Manasseh's repentance was genuine, and the change in his life was evident to all. The Bible informs us of the steps that Manasseh took once he returned to Judah, and they are steps that all people should take when they truly repent of their wickedness. There are six steps that he took to ensure that he did not follow his previous path, and we would like to consider them briefly.

The Bible states that upon his return to Jerusalem, Manasseh rebuilt the sections of the wall surrounding Jerusalem where the Assyrians had entered. Any person who truly repents will recognize those areas of weakness in their life, those areas wherein they have fallen before, and strengthen them. *“Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”* (Ephesian 6:13) God has given us two great and powerful weapons that we can use to defend ourselves from the enemy. They are His word and prayer. If we have truly repented of the evil in our life, and we want to serve the Lord, we will spend time studying His word and in prayer.

Second, Manasseh also set guards out beyond the wall of Jerusalem so that he would not be surprised by an attack. If we want to be successful, we will set up defenses beyond our points of weakness. *“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provisions for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.”* (Romans 13:14) Whatever our weakness are, we should take steps to ensure that we do not place ourselves in danger. This may very well mean that there are some places I cannot go, some people I cannot associate with, or some forms of entertainment from which I should abstain. The reason why is because these things make me more susceptible to sin. I need to set my guards out further beyond the wall, and spare myself as much temptation as possible.

Third, Manasseh removed all of the foreign gods and idols from the house of the Lord. God does not dwell in buildings of stone and mortar today. *“What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”* (1 Corinthians 6:19) Our bodies are the temple of God, and as such, we must remove any idols

from our heart. Our allegiance must be pure and absolutely nothing can come before God in our life.

Fourth, Manasseh set up an altar to the Lord. It is not simply enough to remove wickedness from our life, we must replace with righteousness. *“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge.”* (2 Peter 1:5) Once we remove the idol we must replace it with something, otherwise, the wickedness will come back even stronger than before. When we remove sinful habits from our life we should replace them with good works.

Fifth, Manasseh sacrificed peace offerings and thanks offerings to God. A person who is truly repentant will live a life that displays gratitude and love for the Lord. *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”* (Romans 12:1) Do you truly thank God every day for His grace and mercy without which you would be eternally damned? Are you willing to be used for His glory? Would you allow yourself to be used for the glory of God?

Sixth, Manasseh ordered Judah to serve God. We have an obligation to tell others about the great love of God. *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”* (Matthew 28:19) If we have truly changed from our wickedness, we will seek to warn others and tell them about God’s plan of salvation.

Would you like Manasseh turn from the wickedness of your sins. If so, then bring forth fruits meet for repentance. Have assurance that no matter what you have done, God is always willing to forgive those who seek Him. *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”* (2 Peter 3:9)