

MANASSEH, THE SON WHO BROKE HIS MOTHER'S HEART
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"Manosseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hephzibah. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings 21:1-2).

It has often been claimed that behind every successful man stands a dedicated woman. Paul was probably the greatest evangelist ever to serve the church, but he might not have known the Savior had not his devoted sister prayed him into the kingdom of Christ. When he was a student in the seminary of Gamaliel, Paul stayed with that woman who ultimately became a Christian. Her grief must have been enormous when her brother began persecuting the followers of the Savior. Later when the apostle wrote to the church in Rome, he mentioned her and said she "was in Christ before me" (Rom. 16:7).

Manasseh was the Old Testament equivalent of Saul of Tarsus. He was the son of Hezekiah and Hephzibah, the king and queen of Judah but, unlike them, was a terrible person who slaughtered God's people and filled Jerusalem with the blood of innocent people. Yet before he died, this abominable man repented of his sin and returned to the God of his parents. His mother's name was Hephzibah, which means "My delight is in her." When she was born her mother's eyes possibly shone with delight, and the baby was given an illustrious name. The parents sincerely believed that God had special pleasure in the child who eventually became the queen of Israel. It is significant that she became the wife of Hezekiah, the royal reformer who spread out a threatening letter before the Lord so that Jehovah could read for Himself what the insulting king of Babylon had said. There can be no doubt that Queen Hephzibah helped her husband in all the major decisions which were made; her influence was known throughout the nation. When her child was born, she had great hopes for the future, but unfortunately, her heart filled with pain when she saw him destroying everything of value within the kingdom. She could do little but pray, and it is possible the happy ending to the tragic history of Manasseh was the result of her continuing intercession.

Rejecting an Old Faith... Rebellion

This is the account of a teenage boy who believed he knew everything! He was self-assured, and the opinion of his parents

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meant nothing. Manasseh decided to please himself in everything he did. The young upstart destroyed all the good accomplished by his deceased father and installed his own idol within the tabernacle. He violated the commands of God and turned the Holy City into a cesspool of iniquity. The man was like the prodigal son who despised his home, rejected his father's love, and departed to live a shameful life. It is difficult to explain why some of the most devoted parents have rebellious children.

When God addressed His decadent nation, He said, "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). Those words could have been spoken to the wayward son of Hezekiah. Manasseh completely rejected the teaching and example of his parents and forsook the source of all spiritual refreshment. A fountain of living water was an invaluable asset in a land where water was hard to find. It quenched the thirst of travelers and maintained the life of people, who, without it, would have died. The words of the Savior have been fulfilled in all ages, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink" (John 7:37).

When a man is deprived of living water, he searches elsewhere

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to find what his soul needs, but the substitute can never equal the original. The cisterns created by man develop cracks and hold no water. The prophet, Haggai, expressed this fact when he said, "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes" (Hag. 1:6). The poet wrote:

I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,
But, ah, the waters failed;
E'en as I stopped to drink, they fled,
And mocked me as I wailed.

Manasseh, the king of Judah, had a great deal to learn, but like many other people, he learned the hard way!

Repeating an Old Folly... Ruinous

"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

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wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger. And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God" (2 Chron. 33:6-7). The man was driven by an irrepressible urge; he was at war with himself. Each act of defiance was followed by a greater atrocity. He began by emulating the example supplied by adjacent nations; he made his children the victims of fiery sacrifices. Then he associated with wizards and endeavored to commune with the dead—perhaps his own children. These deeds were forbidden by God, but the arrogant king did what he desired. He was on a course of self-destruction, the end of which was never in doubt. His cisterns began to crack, and finally he was destitute.

"And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken. 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 Chron. 33:10-11). The statement that says Manasseh was taken among the thorns is interesting. The same word is translated in 2 Kings 19:28 as hook, "Therefore I will put my hook in thy nose." The captive was bound with chains of brass and pulled by a hook inserted into the nose. This indignity reduced the king to the level of a common slave. The prayers of his godly parents were answered even though they had died. "God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform," says the poet Cowper. Sometimes, the Lord has to punish a man to restore his sanity. It is better to hurt a person than to lose him forever. If Manasseh were taken among the thorns, it would be a perfect indication of the folly of forsaking the Lord. With all his wealth and popularity, the best resting place available was a bed of thorns! It would be impossible to sleep peacefully with pointed reminders of his irreligious stupidity.

Relying on an Old Fact... Repentance

"And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, 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 Chron. 33:12-13). This is one of the brightest stars shining in the darkness of Israel's history. During an age when Jehovah was feared more than loved, it

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was astonishing to discover this revelation of the matchless grace of God. Manasseh, whose sinful deeds were unequalled by any contemporary, would have appreciated the words of John Wesley:

Depth of Mercy! can there be
Mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God His wrath forbear
MeÄthe chief of sinners spare?

I have long withstood His grace,
Long provoked Him to His face,
Would not hearken to His calls,
Grieved Him by a thousand falls.

If I rightly read Thy heart,
If Thou all compassion art,
Bow Thine ear, in mercy bow,
Pardon and accept me now.

This section of the story may best be considered under three headings: God was wise, willing, and wonderful.

(1) God was Wise. Solomon said, "The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens" (Prov. 3:19). Many other things were brought into being by the omniscience of the Almighty. Queen Hephzibah might have asked many things for her stubborn child, but it is extremely doubtful whether she would have asked that he be humiliated and taken to an alien land. Sometimes it is difficult to understand the actions of God, but He is too wise to make a mistake and too loving to be unkind. Occasionally, the Lord chastens rebellious people, but the hand that holds the rod is always called love. Jehovah permitted Manasseh to become a captive because more could be done for his soul in Babylon than could be accomplished in Jerusalem.

(2) God was Willing. "And God heard his supplication and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom." It is not known how this was done, for few monarchs were ever restored to their kingdom by enemies. The Lord not only heard the prayer of the repentant sinner, He influenced the king of Babylon to show kindness to his infamous prisoner. That this mercy was entirely undeserved was apparent, but "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20).

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(3) God was Wonderful. It appeared to be incomprehensible that the Lord should be merciful when Manasseh had done so much to desecrate His name. It had always been taught that a sinner reaped what he sowed, and the terrible deeds of this king deserved retribution of the greatest kind. Paul, who never forgot his past, would have understood why the grace of God was extended to Manasseh. The Lord always delighted in kindness, but what then was only a glimpse of the divine attribute was destined to become an enthralling vision. It is refreshing to know that from everlasting to everlasting, Jehovah remains changeless. "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him" (Ps. 103:11).

Rejoicing in an Old Fellowship.. . Responsibility

"Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and his prayer unto his

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God, and the words of the seers that spake to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel" (2 Chron. 33:18). It is significant that when Manasseh began his new life, he endeavored to remove the evil things that had been introduced when he was defiant and arrogant. The historian describes how he removed the idol that had been installed in the house of God, and throughout the nation, people were encouraged to worship Jehovah. Conversion without contrition leaves much to be desired. Even Zacchaeus understood that necessity when he said, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold" (Luke 19:8).

Manasseh restored what had been lost, and that should be an example all Christians should emulate. To love God means to please Him. So many people rejoice in His forgiveness but forget they might owe much to people who were previously hurt. To avoid offending the tax gatherers, Christ sent Peter to catch a fish, find a coin in its mouth, and use the money to pay the taxes. Christians should be willing to do anything to destroy an evil influence which still lingers in the minds of former associates. The reference to "the seers" who spoke to Manasseh stimulates thought. Did they speak words of warning during his unregenerate days or encouragement after his return from Babylon? Perhaps they ministered on both occasions, and when the king submitted himself to God, the advice of the prophets became invaluable. Under

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their direction, idols were destroyed, and the altar of God was restored to its proper place in the tabernacle. The monarch valued the company of men previously ignored. The transformation within his heart and country beggared description. It is not known if the saints in heaven are permitted to see the people remaining on earth, but if they are, it would be safe to conclude that Hephzibah, the mother of Manasseh, looked upon her boy and smiled. Her prayers had been answered.

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