

CHAPTER 21

In this chapter we have a short but sad account of the reigns of two of the kings of Judah, Manasseh and Amon.

- I.** Concerning Manasseh, all the account we have of him here is,
- 1.** That he devoted himself to sin, to all manner of wickedness, idolatry, and murder (v. 1-9 and 16).
 - 2.** That therefore God devoted him, and Jerusalem for his sake, to ruin (v. 10-18). In the book of Chronicles we have an account of his troubles, and his repentance.
- II.** Concerning Amon we are only told that he lived in sin (v. 19-22), died quickly by the sword, and left good Josiah his successor (v. 23-26). By these two reigns Jerusalem was much debauched and much weakened, and so hastened apace towards its destruction, which slumbered not.

2 KINGS 21:1-9

MANASSEH'S IMPIOUS REIGN

How delightful were our meditations on the last reign! How many pleasing views had we of Sion in its glory (that is, in its purity and in its triumphs), of the king in his beauty! (for ^{<2317>}Isaiah 33:17 refers to Hezekiah), and (as it follows there, v. 20) Jerusalem was *a quiet habitation* because *a city of righteousness*, ^{<23126>}Isaiah 1:26. But now we have melancholy work upon our hands, unpleasant ground to travel, and cannot but drive heavily. *How has the gold become dim and the most fine gold changed!* The beauty of Jerusalem is stained, and all her glory, all her joy, sunk and gone. These verses give such an account of this reign as make it, in all respects, the reverse of the last, and, in a manner, the ruin of it.

I. Manasseh began young. He was but *twelve years old when he began to reign* (v. 1), born when his father was about forty-two years old, three years after his sickness. If he had sons before, either they were dead, or set by as unpromising. As yet they knew of nothing bad in *him*, and they hoped he would prove good; but he proved very bad, and perhaps his coming to

the crown so young might help to make it so, which yet will by no means excuse him, for his grandson Josiah came to it younger than he and yet acted well. But being young,

1. He was puffed up with his honour and proud of it; and thinking himself very wise, because he was very great, valued himself upon his undoing what his father had done. It is too common for novices to be lifted up with pride, and so *fall into the condemnation of the devil*.

2. He was easily wrought upon and drawn aside by seducers, that lay in wait to deceive. Those that were enemies to Hezekiah's reformation, and retained an affection for the old idolatries, flattered him, and so gained his ear, and used his power at their pleasure. Many have been undone by coming too soon to their honours and estates.

II. He reigned long, longest of any of the kings of Judah, fifty-five years. This was the only very bad reign that was a long one; Joram's was but eight years, and Ahaz's sixteen; as for Manasseh's, we hope that in the beginning of his reign for some time affairs continued to move in the course that his father left them in, and that in the latter end of his reign, after his repentance, religion got head again; and, no doubt, when things were at the worst God had his remnant that kept their integrity. Though he reigned long, yet some of this time he was a prisoner in Babylon, which may well be looked upon as a drawback from these years, though they are reckoned in the number because then he repented and began to reform.

III. He reigned very ill.

1. In general,

(1.) *He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord*, and which, having been well educated, he could not but know was so (v. 2): *He wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord*, as if on purpose to provoke him to anger, v. 6.

(2.) *He did after the abominations of the heathen* (v. 2) and as did Ahab (v. 3), not taking warning by the destruction both of the nations of Canaan and the house of Ahab for their idolatry; nay (v. 9), *he did more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed*. When the holy seed degenerate, they are commonly worse than the worst of the profane.

2. More particularly,

(1.) He *rebuilt the high places which his father had destroyed*, v. 3. Thus did he trample upon the dust, and affront the memory, of his worthy father, though he knew how much he was favoured of God and honoured of men. He concurred, it is probable, with Rabshakeh's sentiments (~~2~~¹⁸⁸² 2 Kings 18:22), that Hezekiah had done ill in destroying those high places, and pretended the honour of God, and the edification and convenience of the people, in rebuilding them. This he began with, but proceeded to that which was much worse; for,

(2.) He set up other gods, *Baal* and *Ashtaroth* (which we translate *a grove*), and all the host of heaven, the sun and moon, the other planets, and the constellations; these he worshipped and served (v. 3), gave their names to the images he made, and then did homage to them and prayed for help from them. To these he built altars (v. 5), and offered sacrifices, no doubt, on these altars.

(3.) He *made his son pass through the fire*, by which he dedicated him a votary to Moloch, in contempt of the seal of circumcision by which he had been dedicated to God.

(4.) He made the devil his oracle, and, in contempt both of urim and prophecy, he *used enchantments and dealt with familiar spirits* (v. 6) like Saul. Conjurers and fortune-tellers (who pretended, by the stars or the clouds, lucky and unlucky days, good and bad omens, the flight of birds, or the entrails of beasts, to foretel things to come) were great men with him, his intimates, his confidants; their arts pleased his fancy, and gained his belief, and his counsels were under their direction.

(5.) We find afterwards (v. 16) that he shed innocent blood very much in gratification of his own passion and revenge; some perhaps were secretly murdered, others taken off by colour of law. Probably much of the blood he shed was theirs that opposed idolatry and witnessed against it, that would not bow the knee to Baal. The *blood of the prophets* is, in a particular manner, charged upon Jerusalem, and it is probable that he put to death many of them. The tradition of the Jews is that he caused the prophet Isaiah to be sawn asunder; and many think the apostle refers to this in ~~8157~~ Hebrews 11:37, where he speaks of those that had so suffered.

3. Three things are here mentioned as aggravations of Manasseh's idolatry:

(1.) That he set up his images and altars *in the house of the Lord* (v. 4), in the two courts of the temple (v. 5), in the very house of which God had said to Solomon, *Here will I put my name*, v. 7. Thus he defied God to his face, and impudently affronted him with his rivals immediately under his eye, as one that was neither afraid of God's wrath nor ashamed of his own folly and wickedness. Thus he desecrated what had been consecrated to God, and did, in effect, turn God out of his own house and put the rebels in possession of it. Thus, when the faithful worshippers of God came to the place he had appointed for the performance of their duty to him, they found, to their great grief and terror, other gods ready to receive their offerings. God had said that here he would record his name, here he would put it for ever, and here it was accordingly preserved, while the idolatrous altars were kept at a distance; but Manasseh, by bringing them into God's house, did what he could to alter the property, and to make the name of the God of Israel to be no more in remembrance.

(2.) That hereby he put a great slight upon the word of God, and his covenant with Israel. Observe the favour he had shown to that people in putting his name among them, — the kindness he intended them, never to *make them move out of that good land*, — and the reasonableness of his expectations from them, *only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them*, v. 7, 8. Upon these good terms did Israel stand with God, and had as fair a prospect of being happy as any people could have; but *they hearkened not*, v. 9. They would not be kept close to God either by his precepts or by his promises; both were cast behind their back.

(3.) That hereby he seduced the people of God, debauched them, and drew them into idolatry, v. 9. He caused Judah to sin (v. 11), as Jeroboam had caused *Israel to sin*. His very example was enough to corrupt the generality of unthinking people, who would do as their king did, right or wrong. All that aimed at preferment would do as the court did; and others thought it safest to comply, for fear of making their king their enemy. Thus, one way or other, the holy city became a harlot, and Manasseh made her so. Those will have a great deal to answer for that not only are wicked themselves, but help to make others so.

~~1210~~ 2 KINGS 21:10-18

MANASSEH'S RUIN FORETOLD

Here is the doom of Judah and Jerusalem read, and it is heavy doom. The prophets were sent, in the first place, to teach them the knowledge of God, to remind them of their duty and direct them in it. If they succeeded not in that, their next work was to reprove them for their sins, and to set them in view before them, that they might repent and reform, and return to their duty. If in this they prevailed not, but sinners went on frowardly, their next work was to foretel the judgments of God, that the terror of them might awaken those to repentance who would not be made sensible of the obligations of his love, or else that the execution of them, in their season, might be a demonstration of the divine mission of the prophets that foretold them. The prophets were deputed judges to those that would not hear and receive them as teachers. We have here,

I. A recital of the crime. The indictment is read upon which the judgment is grounded, v. 11. Manasseh had done wickedly himself, though he knew better things, had even justified the Amorites, whose copy he wrote after, by outdoing them in impieties, and debauched the people of God, whom he had taught to sin and forced to sin; and besides that (though that was bad enough) *he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood* (v. 16), had multiplied his murders in every corner of the city, and filled the measure of Jerusalem's blood-guiltiness (~~1210~~ Matthew 23:32) up to the brim, and all this against the crown and dignity of the King of kings, the peace of his kingdom, and the statutes in these cases made and provided.

II. A prediction of the judgment God would bring upon them for this: *They have done that which was evil, and therefore I am bringing evil upon them* (v. 12); it will come and it is not far off. The judgment should be,

1. Very terrible and amazing; the very report of it should *make men's ears to tingle* (v. 12), that is, their hearts to tremble. It should make a great noise in the world and occasion many speculations.

2. It should be copied out (as the sins of Jerusalem had been) from Samaria and the house of Ahab, v. 13. When God lays righteousness to the line it shall be the line of Samaria, measuring out to Jerusalem that which had been the lot of Samaria; when he lays judgment to the plummet it shall be

the plummet of the house of Ahab, marking out for the same ruin to which that wretched family was devoted. See ^{<387>}Isaiah 28:17. Note, Those who resemble and imitate others in their sins must expect to fare as they fared.

3. That it should be an utter destruction: *I will wipe it as a man wipes a dish*. This intimates,

(1.) That every thing should be put into disorder, and their state subverted; they should be turned upside down, and all their foundations put out of course.

(2.) That the city should be emptied of its inhabitants, which had been the filth of it, as a dish is emptied when it is wiped: “They shall all be carried captive, the *land shall enjoy her sabbaths*, and be laid by as a dish when it is wiped.” See the comparison of the boiled pot, not much unlike this, ^{<388>}Ezekiel 24:1-14.

(3.) That yet this should be in order to the purifying, not the destroying, of Jerusalem. The dish shall not be dropped, not broken to pieces, or melted down, but only wiped. This shall be the fruit, the taking away of the sinners first, and then of the sin.

4. That *therefore* they should be destroyed, because they should be deserted (v. 14): *I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance*. Justly are those that forsake God forsaken of him; nor does he ever leave any till they have first left him: but, when God has forsaken a people, their defence has departed, and they become a prey, an easy prey, to all their enemies. Sin is spoken of here as the alpha and omega of their miseries.

(1.) Old guilt came in remembrance, as that which began to fill the measure (v. 15): “*They have provoked me to anger from their conception and birth as a people, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt.*” The men of this generation, treading in their fathers' steps, are justly reckoned with for their fathers' sins.

(2.) The guilt of blood was that which filled the measure, v. 16. Nothing has a louder cry, nor brings a sorer vengeance, than that.

This is all we have here of Manasseh; he stands convicted and condemned; but we hope in the book of Chronicles to hear of his repentance, and acceptance with God. Meantime, we must be content, in this place, to have only one intimation of his repentance (for so we are willing to take it), that

he was buried, it is likely by his own order, *in the garden of his own house* (v. 18); for, being truly humbled for his sins, he judged himself *no more worthy to be called a son*, a son of David, and therefore not worthy to have even his dead body buried *in the sepulchres of his fathers*. True penitents take shame to themselves, not honour; yet, having lost the credit of an innocent, the credit of a penitent was the next best he was capable of. And better it is, and more honourable, for a sinner to die repenting, and be buried in a garden, than to die impenitent, and be buried in the abbey.

◀1218▶ 2 KINGS 21:19-26

AMON'S REIGN AND DEATH

Here is a short account of the short and inglorious reign of Amon, the son of Manasseh. Whether Manasseh, in his blind and brutish zeal for his idols, had sacrificed his other sons — or whether, having been dedicated to his idols, they were refused by the people — so it was that his successor was a son not born till he was forty-five years old. And of him we are here told,

1. That his reign was very wicked: *He forsook the God of his fathers* (v. 22), disobeyed the commands given to his fathers, and disclaimed the covenant made with his fathers, *and walked not in the way of the Lord*, but *in all the way which his father walked in*, v. 20, 21. He trod in the steps of his father's idolatry, and revived that which he, in the latter end of his days, had put down. Note, Those who set bad examples, though they may repent themselves, yet cannot be sure that those whom they have drawn into sin by their example will repent; it is often otherwise.

2. That his end was very tragical. He having rebelled against God, his own servants *conspired against him and slew him*, probably upon some personal disgust, when he had reigned but two years, v. 23. His servants, who should have guarded him, murdered him; his own house, that should have been his castle of defence, was the place of his execution. He had profaned God's house with his idols, and now God suffered his own house to be polluted with his blood. How unrighteous soever those were that did it, God was righteous who suffered it to be done. Two things the people of the land did, by their representatives, hereupon: —

(1.) They did justice on the traitors that had slain the king, and put them to death; for, though he was a *bad* king, he was *their* king, and it was a part of their allegiance to him to avenge his death. Thus they cleared themselves from having any hand in the crime, and did what was incumbent on them to deter others from the like villainous practices.

(2.) They did a kindness to themselves in *making Josiah his son king in his stead*, whom probably the conspirators had a design to put by, but the people stood by him and settled him in the throne, encouraged, it may be, by the indications he gave, even in his early days, of a good disposition. Now they made a happy change from one of the worst to one of the best of all the kings of Judah. “Once more,” says God, “they shall be tried with a reformation; and, if that succeed, well; if not, then after that I will cut them down.” Amon was buried in the same garden where his father was, v. 26. If his father put himself under that humiliation, the people will put him under it.