

Pardon for the Greatest Guilt

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon powerfully illustrates through the story of Manasseh that no sinner is beyond the reach of God's sovereign and abundant mercy when they truly repent and seek pardon.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 33:2,12,13, 2 Kings 21, Psalm 51:13, Isaiah 53, John 3:16, Romans 10:13

Topics: "Divine Mercy", "Repentance", "Forgiveness of Sin"

Description

In this compelling sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the dramatic story of King Manasseh, a man deeply entrenched in sin yet profoundly forgiven by God's sovereign grace. Spurgeon highlights the power of repentance, humility, and prayer as the pathway to pardon, encouraging even the greatest sinners to seek mercy. Through this narrative, Spurgeon offers hope and assurance that God's mercy is abundant and available to all who turn to Him in faith. The sermon challenges listeners to embrace transformation and live lives marked by genuine repentance and renewed devotion.

Transcript

"Manasseh 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. And when he was in affliction, he asked 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 Chronicles 33:2,12,13.

THIS story of Manasseh is a very valuable one. I feel sure of this because you meet with it twice in the Word of God. It is a dreary story—a very dreary story—and the sad part of it is given twice in the Bible, while the consoling part of it is only recorded once. The Holy Spirit has some motive and reason for this, we may be sure. If you look in the Second Book of Kings, in the 21st Chapter, you will find, with some little alteration, the very same story that we have been reading, so far as the deplorable part of it is concerned. I take it that this is because God would have us pay great attention to this narrative. He would have us, again and again, dwell upon such wonders of Sovereign Grace as Manasseh presents to us.

Dear Friends, you have, here, the history of a great sinner, saved—I might say, a very great sinner, saved—and this is narrated in the Word of God that other great sinners, seeing it, may be encouraged to seek mercy as Manasseh sought and found it! No man, I trust, will be so base as to turn the mercy of God into an excuse for sin. He would deserve the deepest Hell, who would take encouragement to sin from the greatness of pardoning love! I will not suppose that anyone here is so driven by the devil as to do that, but

I will trust that some great sinner, in whom despair has fixed itself, who has said, "Because there is no hope for me, therefore I will go farther into sin," will be stopped in his evil course as he hears of the amazing, the immeasurable mercy of God to the greatest and most diabolical form of sinner!

This case of Manasseh is put in Scripture that it may breed its like, not in its sinfulness, but in its faith, its prayer, its humiliation, its seeking and its finding mercy. How many souls have been converted by reading the story of John Bunyan as he has written it in his, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*! I doubt not that many a swearing tinker has said, "There is mercy for me as well as for John of Elstow." Who, that has read the first part of the, "Life of John Newton," has not felt encouraged to seek and find the Savior? The story of Colonel Gardiner and how the Lord met with him has been blessed to many a soldier, and he has had hope against hope that there may be mercy even for him in the depth of his sin.

I can well remember the time when I carefully treasured up every instance of God's mercy to sinners, as a man might store up pearls, for it seemed to me, then, that if I could find a soul like myself—equally sinful and equally convicted of sin, who, nevertheless, found mercy—then I, also, might find mercy, for I believed that God acted upon a certain style and scale and that He would do for me what He had done for others. "Then will I teach transgressors Your ways," said David, as much as if he had said, "If You save me, then I shall know that it is Your way to save great sinners, and I will go and tell other sinners what Your ways are, and my case shall be a proof of how You will act towards them."

I pray that while the door of Divine Mercy is open, some of you may come in. When the door of Noah's Ark was open, you know that it was wide enough to let in the elephant and, consequently, there was plenty of room for the mouse, and where the camel could enter, you may be sure that the sheep could go. If you should not feel that you have sinned after the terrible fashion of Manasseh, yet, if there is room in God's love for such as he, there is room enough for you! And the silver trumpet is ringing out the joyous invitation that we have often sung—

"Come, and welcome, to the Savior, He in mercy bids you come! Come be happy in His favor, Longer from Him do not roam. Come, and welcome, Come to Jesus, sinner, come!"

The good Brother who prayed, just now, pleaded that God would give us an unusual blessing and your hearts, as well as mine, said, "Amen!" May it come to some of you who did not pray for it! May the Lord be found of them that sought Him not, according to His ancient promise! May He now say, "Behold Me, behold Me," to those who were not His people! And may some be found of Him who never could have been found of Him if His Grace were not most sovereign, most rich, and most free!

Now, in coming close to our subject, we are going to do two things. First, let us examine the case before us. And, secondly, let us consider why there should be others like it.

I. First, LET US EXAMINE THE CASE BEFORE US.

We begin by noticing that Manasseh was the son of a good father. I think that it always aggravates sin in any man when he comes of a holy stock. You who were nursed amid a godly mother's prayers and trained by a faithful father's earnest teachings cannot sin as cheaply as others. You know that in doing evil you have to go against all your home influences—some of you would have to go over hedge and ditch to get to Hell, after having such parents as you have had. Mr. Whitefield tells us of a young man who said that he could not live in the house that his father had left him, for, as he coarsely put it, "Every chair and table in it stinks of piety." He could not be happy in it, he said, living as he lived, while he remembered what his

father used to do there. If I am addressing any men or women who have sinned against early training, I remind them most solemnly that their guilt has an extraordinary blackness about it! I am sure that Absalom was a greater sinner because he rebelled against a loving father, who cried over him, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Often times, in my youth, I felt that I could not live without Christ, for my mother's sake, for my father's sake, for my grandfather's sake whom I revered so much. It was a great inducement to me to keep from the ways of sin and to seek after their God and Savior. And it should be to every right-minded young man, to every right-minded boy or girl, a sweet inducement to seek the Lord because He is your father's God. But if you throw this all away. If you are determined that you will not know the God of your fathers, then on your head shall rest the greater sin!

In the next place, this young man undid all his father's actions. He repaired the altars that his father had thrown down and he threw down the altars which his father had built up. Do I address one who is trying to do that—seeking to change all that was done by those who went before you? You have turned the house upside down. You have altered the character of your father's business. You have discharged his godly servants. Everything that used to be is changed—people hardly know the place, now, after the alterations which you have made—and you have gloried in them! You said to yourself, as you came in here, tonight, that if you lived, you would turn the thing upside down worse than ever! Oh, is it so, that you think it is such a desirable thing to be undoing all that was done by your godly ancestors and predecessors?

Then, this Manasseh served false gods. You say that you do not so. Oh, but if I speak, and your conscience speaks, will not the still small voice whisper to you that you have been doing just that? Your lusts, are they not your god, young man? Are you not giving your very body to the commission of sin? And strong drink—do you not worship that vile thing? Or have you even taken to gambling? There are many ways in which men ruin themselves and this is one of the chief of them, just now, in this city. What is the sin of which you are most fond? That is your god and, oh, I fear that I am not talking to the wind! I fear that I am speaking distinctly into the ears of men and women who have forsaken the living God and given Him no thought, whatever, much less the love of their hearts. They are living for self, for vanity, for pleasure, for iniquity in some form or other! Are there not some whose god is their belly and others whose god is Mammon, all of them minding earthly things? I only speak in a quiet style to you, but, were I to address you as I might, I think that I could speak as with thunder and lightning on such a subject as this, for the multitudes of this city are not the worshippers of the one living and true God, but of other gods—many of them diabolical gods, for they are demons, and not God!

This man, Manasseh, had gone farther, even, than that, for he had desecrated the Lord's courts. He had set up Baal and Ashteroth in the courts of the Temple at Jerusalem! Well now, there are some, today, who do this, for they make even their attendance at the House of God to be an occasion for evil! I have been shocked, sometimes, when I have found persons going out from worship across to the nearest gin palace, or coming up to the place of prayer, not with any idea of hearing to profit, but to meet some friend and that for an evil, rather than a commendable design! O God, how is Your House defiled, even tonight! Some sit here who have come with the worst of motives—they are rather grieving the Holy Spirit by being in the assembly of God's people than bringing any blessing upon themselves!

Manasseh had gone still farther in the way of evil, for he had dedicated his children to the devil by passing them through the fire unto Moloch. After they had been set apart unto God by circumcision, he tried, as it were, by giving them a baptism of fire, to dedicate them more fully to the false god. Nobody here will

dedicate his children to the devil, surely, yet many do. Have I not seen a father dedicate his boy to the devil, as he has encouraged him to drink? I heard one say, the other day, "Take a pull at it, boy. Open your shoulders." He wanted him to drink like a man! And do not many in this great city dedicate their children to the devil by allowing them to go into all kinds of licentiousness until they become the victims of vice? Do I speak to any here who have brought up their children after a "fashionable" style? Well, there is not much difference between passing your girls and boys through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom and bringing them up very "fashionably!" I have known parents grow rich and then they have hardly cared to take their children to the humble place of worship where they used to go—they must devote them to the world and bring them up in such a way that if they do not go to Hell, it will be ten thousand miracles! Mind what you do with your children. If you are determined to perish, yourselves, yet add not to your other transgressions the great sin of passing your children through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom!

Still, even this abomination did not satisfy Manasseh. He was a very glutton for iniquity, so he fraternized with the devil by seeking after all kinds of supernatural witcheries and wizardries. It seemed as if he could not get far enough away from God! Everything that was forbidden appeared just suited to his depraved taste and if he must not do it, why, then he resolved that he would do it! I am drawing my bow at a venture now, but the arrow will go between the joints of somebody's harness. I may be speaking to some who have made a covenant with death and an agreement with Hell. "Thus says the Lord, your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with death shall not stand." Give yourself up to all manner of iniquities as you may, yet the Grace of God is able to deliver you from the terrible bondage!

Not satisfied, even, with this awful form of evil, Manasseh led others astray. All Judah and Israel felt the force of this evil king's influence and the people seemed as eager for idolatry and every kind of vice as the king, himself, was. Alas, when the weather bell allures all the flock to their destruction! You, young man, know that you are leading others in the house away from God. And, young woman, your influence on your sisters is very destructive. I may be addressing some man who has even gloried in the shameful fact that he has led others in the ways of sin!

It is an awful picture that I have to paint in giving you Manasseh's portrait. I hardly care to go through with it, but I must, in the hope that some other great sinner may say, "If such a man as that was, nevertheless, forgiven, why should not I be?"

If worse could be, here was one thing worse than I have mentioned. God spoke to Manasseh, sent His Prophets to him, but he would not hear. He that is often reprov'd intensifies his sin. If you did not know better, if you had never been warned, if nothing had ever crossed your path to stop you from evil, why then, there might be some excuse for you! Behold, tonight, a hand lays hold upon your horse's bridle and throws the animal back upon its haunches—and a voice cries out in a tone of authority, "You shall go no farther! In the name of the living God, I bid you dismount and bow the knee and seek mercy." It may be that you will reject my feeble words as you have refused others, much more powerful, but that would be a terrible adding of sin to sin.

And then, to crown all, Manasseh persecuted the people of God. "Manasseh shed very much innocent blood till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." It is said—we do not know whether it was so, or not—but it is highly probable that he caused Isaiah to be cut in sunder with a wooden saw. An awful agony of death, indeed, for so grand a Prophet. Now, you never killed anybody. You were not willing—you could not do such a thing, I know, but yet how many there are who have added to all their other sins—that of ridiculing God's people? O husband, if you have persecuted your wife, do not so again, I beseech you!

There is sin enough for you to answer for without adding that awful iniquity.

He that ridicules and persecutes the people of God, does, as it were, put his finger into God's eye, and it will not be long before Jehovah, Himself, will deal with him. The God of patience may bear long with him, but, in the end, the persecutor shall not go unpunished!

Now, heaping up all that I have said, mountain on mountain, foul sin upon foul sin, I may say of Manasseh that he is a compound of every sort of wickedness! I scarcely know what more of evil he could have done, yet he was pardoned, and if you look straight up there, amidst the glorious band that sing before the Throne of God of Free Grace and dying love, you will see Manasseh in the front rank! And you will hear his voice among the sweetest and the loudest of them all, shouting, as we sang just now—

"Oh may this strange, this matchless Grace,

This God-like miracle of love,

Fill the wide earth with grateful praise,

And all the angelic choirs abo ve!

Who is a pardoning Godlike Thee?

Or who has Grace so rich and free?"

When he was pardoned, this is how it came about. Being in great trouble, he turned to Jehovah, his God. Yes, it is by the way of trouble that many are rescued from sin. They are brought to have just a little taste of the fruit of sin and that tree bears very bitter fruit. And when they have a taste of it, then they turn to God. I could not help saying, the other day, of a young man, "Well, if he should have to suffer for his sin, it may be the saving of him." Sometimes the sorrow that follows upon transgression is the only way by which the transgressor can be delivered from it. So Manasseh was brought among the thorns and then he turned to Jehovah.

And we are also told that he humbled himself greatly. Great sinners must have great humbling. If you want to be saved, you who have greatly transgressed, bow very low—lie in the very dust before God. Nothing will do for you but to prostrate yourself before the Lord in the confession of your sin. Do not attempt to cloak it. Make no apologies for it, but humble yourself greatly before God.

Then it is added of Manasseh that he prayed. Prayer has wondrous power to bring peace to a troubled conscience, but, mind you, it must be prayer mixed with faith. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved," is the Gospel command to an awakened sinner! Pray with your whole heart until the Lord hears you and sends you a gracious answer of peace! God heard Manasseh, dealt graciously with him and brought him back to his kingdom. But, best of all, the Lord first of all brought him back from his sin and made a new man of him! And, by His Grace, Manasseh set to work to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, to lead back his people to the worship of God and to clear the House of the Lord from the idols with which he had polluted it! Oh, that the Lord would speak to some man, tonight, who has been a slave of sin and break his bonds asunder! It may be done in a moment! God's Grace can take a slave of Satan who wears manacles on his hands, fetters on his legs and chains about his heart—and the Lord shall only speak and that man's chains shall drop from him and, in a moment, he shall be free! And he shall go home to change everything and to astonish his old companions with the story of the marvelous

miracle that the Grace of God has worked!

I am not trying to preach to you with any fine words. I do not need to do that, but if God would apply His Truth to your hearts, it would be a thousand times better than the grandest of human oratory! And why should He not do so? Where is the man who would not ask Him to do it, the unsaved soul that came in here resolved on sin? O Spirit of the living God, lead that soul to cry to Jesus, now, and to trust Him to give immediate deliverance! You need not wait till you get home—this transformation may be worked in a moment! This marvelous change is the miracle of Christianity! Those who say that it does not take place, say so for lack of knowing better. We have seen it! Yes, we have felt it! Do I not remember when, from the depth of conscious sin, condemned as I was in my own judgment and ready to be swallowed up in the jaws of Hell, I leaped into eternal peace and into new life from hearing that word, "Look unto Me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth"? Let some other poor soul look to Christ and he or she shall be saved as I was!

There was more that I had meant to say about Manasseh's case, but I think I have said enough about his sin and his salvation, so now let us turn to the other side of our subject.

II. I shall spend only a very few minutes upon my second head. LET US CONSIDER WHY THERE SHOULD BE

OTHERS LIKE MANASSEH. I will give you a very few considerations. Will you please put them away in your hearts,

you for whom they are intended, you who are great sinners and have not yet found the Savior? I should say, judging from many probabilities, that God will save other great sinners as He saved Manasseh.

I should say so, first, because He speaks to such great sinners and commands them to repent. I will only give you the one command mentioned in that part of the first chapter of Isaiah which we have read and the other that is recorded in the 55th Chapter of the same Book. The Lord is speaking to men whose hands were full of blood—that is an awful condition for anyone to be in—yet He says, "Wash you, make you clean." "Come now, and let us reason together: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Well now, if the Lord bids men repent and turn to Him, He must mean that He will save them! It would be a cruel tantalizing of the human heart to say, "Repent," and yet not to save those who do so! God's calls to repentance are promises of forgiveness. Where He says, in the 55th of Isaiah, "Let the wicked forsake his ways and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord," you do not wonder that it is added, "and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." The very duty of repentance gives a hope of pardon. Is it not so? Do you not catch this idea? Do you not know that God has commanded even you to repent, great sinner as you are? If so, there is implied in the command a promise to receive you!

But, then, notice, next, the great promises God has given to great sinners. The Bible is full of them and the promises are not put in for sinners of a certain degree, only, but all the guilty are bid to come, believe and live. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Whoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The gate of mercy is set wide open and over the portal is inscribed the invitation, "Come and welcome; come and welcome." Have you never heard the story of a man who, in his dream, thought that he stood outside the gates of Glory? He saw a company come up to Heaven's gate, singing as they went along, and when they had entered, there were great shouts and much sounding of trumpets. And he asked, "Who are these?" And it

was told him, "This is the noble host of Prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord, and they have come up here." His eyes filled with tears as he said, "I cannot go in with them."

Then there came another company, a slender band, who sang to the praise of Almighty Grace and entered Heaven amidst triumphant shouts, and he asked, "Who are they?" And the answer was, "That is the goodly fellowship of the Apostles." "Alas," he said, "I cannot enter with them." And the tears stood in his eyes, again. He was cheered as he heard the joyous tramp of others who came along—these wore the red uniform and they sang psalms of victory and, when they entered through the gate of pearl, there were exultant cries amidst the glorified, and the man said, "I pray you, tell me, who are these?" And they answered, "These are the noble army of martyrs." Then the tears flowed still more freely, for he said, "I cannot enter with them."

He was in despair till he saw a great white-robed company coming up the hill, but, as he looked at them, he recognized Saul of Tarsus among them, and the woman who was a sinner, and the Philippian jailor, and Manasseh, and they came along chanting right lustily the praises of Free Grace and dying love. He heard that this was the company of sinners saved by Sovereign Grace and he said to himself, "I think I can enter with them," so he joined the train and stole in within the gate. But he said within himself, "There will be no songs of welcome, no shouts of exultation for us." What was his astonishment, however, to find all Heaven ringing with a louder shout than ever because great sinners had come home to Heaven, saved by the blood of the Lamb! This is not a dream, it is a fact, so I expect, since there are so many precious promises in God's Word that a good many great sinners will be saved!

I expect it, again, from the Nature of God. God is merciful and He is Infinite in every attribute, so that He is prepared to be greatly gracious. Oh, yes, if there are any little sinners about, and they trust in Jesus, He will forgive them, but, oh, how He delights when there comes along a great sinner and He blots out all the sins of the Jerusalem sinner and makes him perfectly clean! You may be willing to sign a receipt for sixpence or a shilling, but really, it seems more worthwhile, when you do get a pen in hand, to write a receipt for a thousand pounds! So, God delights to give a receipt where there has been great sin and to pardon great iniquity! I should say, judging from the greatness of God's mercy, that there would be a great many sinners saved!

And I should say it yet more positively from what I know of the value of the blood of Jesus. I see on yonder—

"Green hill, far away, Outside the city wall,"

there stands a tree and on it hangs the Glory of the universe put to shame by men, the everlasting Son of God bleeding and dying, "the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." I cannot set a limit to Christ's love! I should not like to attempt the task—can you? He dies. His crimson tears put out the sun, the touch of His Cross tears the rocks asunder. O great sinners, from the Glory of our crucified Savior, I expect to see many of you saved!

I will say no more upon this point, but beg you to go and try it. Men and women, if you have not yet obtained mercy, go home and fall on your knees before God—and do not get up until you have received it! Even now, plead the promise, "O Lord, You have said that You will forgive all who believe in Christ. I know that You cannot lie. I trust Your dear Son, therefore, O Lord, save me!" Cast yourselves at the feet of the crucified Christ and, trusting in Him, pray earnestly until the answer of peace comes to your heart!

Just notice this, that from now on impenitence is inexcusable! I can imagine a great sinner saying, "It is no use for me to repent, for I can never be forgiven." But now that we proclaim to you free pardon through the finished Sacrifice of Christ, impenitence becomes a sevenfold crime! Turn you, turn you, turn you, turn you! Quit your sins! Fly to Christ and begin a new life, for there is forgiveness for the very chief of sinners! There is forgiveness for theft, for lying, for fornication, for adultery, for murder—there is forgiveness for the most crimson and scarlet sins—for all who leave them and fly to Jesus! Trust Him, for His Grace will enable you to start anew!

As for despair, it is damnable. While the story of Manasseh stands on record, no mortal has a just excuse to perish in despair! No one is justified in saying, "God will never forgive me." Read over again the history of Manasseh. See to what lengths of sin he went, to what extravagant heights of evil he climbed, and then say to yourself, "Did Sovereign Mercy reach him? Then it can also reach me! I will draw near to the great King at once and sue for pardon at His Mercy Seat."

As I shall meet you again in that Great Day when Heaven and earth shall rock and reel beneath the footsteps of the coming Judge, I beseech you, let us meet on good terms on that day! Let me not be there to be a swift witness against anyone for his condemnation, but rather let me say, "We spoke together on that midsummer evening in 1888 and we remember it, for that night we gave our hearts to Christ, and now we meet in Heaven!"

Now, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I have not been talking to you, you see, but you are not like the prodigal's elder brother—you will not fit here and growl because there is nothing for you. I know what many of you have been doing—you have been praying, "Lord, bring Brother Prodigal home!" Perhaps, after all, some of you have been grumbling because you have not had even a kid to feed upon, tonight, that you might make merry with your friends. But if a sinner has come to Jesus, if Brother Prodigal comes home, why, then the calf will get killed and you will have your share of it, and we shall have music and dancing, tonight, over sinners saved! The great Father's joy shall flow over into our hearts and we will rejoice with Him! May He send a blessing! I beseech you, pray for it, for Jesus' sake!

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—201, 202, 568.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: 2 Chronicles 33:1-20; Isaiah 1:2-19.

2 Chronicles 33:1. Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign. He was, therefore, born after the time when Hezekiah was raised up from the bed of sickness. That prolongation of life was not all mercy—I am not sure that we should be so eager for such an extension of earthly existence either for ourselves or for others. Had Hezekiah been able to foresee what would be the abominations of the first part of Manasseh's reign, should he come to the throne of Judah, I think that the godly king might have been content to die at once rather than live any longer to become the father of such a sinner—and one who would prove to be such an enemy of the true faith. "Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign." It was too early for a youth to reign over any nation. It is a great temptation and a serious peril, when an individual has too much power before he reaches his manhood. It would have been far better for Manasseh if his accession to the throne had been postponed for a good while. You who are very young and are entrusted with wealth and position, may God keep you from going wrong! It will need great Grace to preserve you in the right path.

1. And he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. Manasseh's was a long reign, a varied reign and, at first, a wicked reign of the very worst kind. Sometimes men are spared, notwithstanding their sin.

Manasseh's was one of the longest reigns on record—"He reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem."

2. But 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. The Lord drove out the Canaanites for the very sins that Manasseh committed! If we follow in the sins of others, we must not wonder if we share in their doom. It is a sad thing, however, when the child of such a father as Hezekiah does evil in the sight of the Lord, "like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom Jehovah had cast out before the children of Israel."

3. For he built, again, the high places which Hezekiah, his father, had broken down. These high places were, at first, built for the worship of God, the true God—but, then, the Law of Jehovah was that there should be only one altar, namely, that at Jerusalem. This was not Popery, but Ritualism—it was adding something to the simple worship of God and, therefore, it was wrong. He who goes a little way in sin will soon go a long way. It is always a mercy to stop where you ought to stop and not begin going down. Hezekiah had broken down the high places and his son, Manasseh, rebuilt them.

3. And he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. He not only worshipped them, but he served them. He threw his whole strength into the propagation of this form of idolatry. They who build altars to God, contrary to the Lord's Law, will soon have false gods! First, men set up images to remind them of the true God, and then they go off to the worship of the idols, or false gods. Oh, that we may have Grace to make no similitude of the Lord and to set up nothing contrary to the simple teaching of the Word of God!

4-5. Also he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, In Jerusalem shall My name be forever. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the House of the LORD. There was plenty of room elsewhere for them if Manasseh needed them, but nothing would do for him but that in the House of God, itself, must be built altars for the worship of the sun and all the host of stars!

6. 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 wizards. All which is imitated, nowadays, by certain persons who try to break through the veil which parts us from the spiritual world. Manasseh did this on a large scale.

6-11. He worked 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, 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: neither 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. So 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. And the LORD spoke to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not listen. Therefore 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. If you will not learn anywhere else, you will have to be taught among thorns, in chains and in exile. There are some men who will never go to Heaven except through a sea of affliction and trial. Oh, for wisdom to yield to Almighty Grace at once!

12, 13. And when he was in affliction, he asked 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. He had set up Baal and Ashtaroth, but now he knows who is the true God, and he bows before Jehovah.

14-17. Now after this, he built a wall outside the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entering in at the fish gate, and compassed about Ophel, and raised it up a very great height, and put captains of war in all the fenced cities of Judah. And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the House of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the House of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel. Nevertheless the people did sacrifice, still, in the high places, They do the same, today, and we cannot get them

away from them. Even some who love the Gospel yet cling to the old Romish rites and ceremonies. Ah, men do love to multiply outward performances instead of spiritual worship! The one altar of Calvary is not enough for them—they must have many altars—"Nevertheless the people did sacrifice, still, in the high places."

17. Yet unto the LORD their God only. So far, it was well, but it would have been better if they had given up all those altars.

18-20. Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and his prayer unto his God, and the words of the seers that spoke to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel. His prayer, also, and how God was entreated of him, and all his sins, and his trespass, and the places wherein he built high places, and set up groves and graven images before he was humbled: behold, they are written among the sayings of the seers. So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house: and Amon, his son, reigned in his place. The short passage, which I am going to read from the first chapter of Isaiah, seems to get a fine illustration in this story of Manasseh.

Isaiah 1:2, 3. Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord has spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel does not know, My people do not consider. Heaven and earth might well be called to witness such strange ingratitude as this of which the Lord had to complain of!

4. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. What a terrible indictment and every word of it was true!

5-9. Why should you be stricken any more? You will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of Hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah. As the Prophet's vision proceeds, the true state of the people is seen.

10-15. Hear the Word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the Law of our God, you people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? says the LORD: I am full of the

burnt offerings of rams, and the fat offered beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of the goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this at your hand, to tread My courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot! Away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates: they are a trouble unto Me; I am weary to bear them. And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide My eyes from you: yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. They were horribly wicked people, they could hardly have been worse. They were so bad that even their prayers were not fit for God to hear. Yet He says—

16-19. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land. What blessed words of mercy! Oh, that everyone of us may prove them true in our own case, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

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