

NOON BIBLE STUDY: 2 KINGS 21

WE LAST WERE IN OUR STORY AT THE END OF HEZEKIAH'S REIGN. HEZEKIAH OVERSAW TREMENDOUS REFORMS IN JUDAH AND INSPIRED NATIONAL REVIVAL. HE TRUSTED THE LORD. HE ENCOURAGED THE KINGDOM AND SAW THE LORD WORK POWERFULLY AGAINST THEIR ENEMIES. HEZEKIAH HAS DIED (THOUGH 15 YEARS LATER THAN HE FIRST THOUGHT) AND HIS SON MANASSEH TAKES THE THRONE.

HANGING OVER OUR STORY SHOULD BE THE PROPHETIC WORD SPOKEN TO HEZEKIAH AFTER THE BABYLONIAN OFFICIALS VISITED JERUSALEM:

2 KINGS 20:16-18 - THEN ISAIAH SAID TO HEZEKIAH, "HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD. 17 'BEHOLD, THE DAYS ARE COMING WHEN ALL THAT IS IN YOUR HOUSE, AND ALL THAT YOUR FATHERS HAVE LAID UP IN STORE TO THIS DAY WILL BE CARRIED TO BABYLON; NOTHING SHALL BE LEFT,' SAYS THE LORD. 18 'SOME OF YOUR SONS WHO SHALL ISSUE FROM YOU, WHOM YOU WILL BEGET, WILL BE TAKEN AWAY; AND THEY WILL BECOME OFFICIALS IN THE PALACE OF THE KING OF BABYLON

SO WHILE ASSYRIA IS NO LONGER A THREAT, AND BABYLON IS YET TO RISE, THE WORD OF THE LORD IS UNCHANGED. AND WITH THIS SOBER REMINDER, WE MEET MANASSEH.

2 KINGS 21:1-9 - MANASSEH'S TERRIBLE REIGN

IT IS NOT A STRETCH TO SAY THAT MANASSEH WAS THE WORST KING OF JUDAH. AND HE REIGNED THE LONGEST! NOT ONLY DID HE UNDO WHAT HIS FATHER HEZEKIAH HAD DONE, HE WENT EVEN FARTHER IN HIS EVIL.

- REBUILD "HIGH PLACES"
- ERECTED ALTARS FOR BAAL AND ASHERAH, WORSHIPPED ALL THE HOST OF HEAVEN
- BUILT ALTARS AND PUT THEM IN THE COURTS OF JERUSALEM'S TEMPLE
- MADE HIS SONS "PASS THROUGH THE FIRE" (CHILD SACRIFICE TO MOLECH)
- PRACTICED WITCHCRAFT, DIVINATION, DEALT WITH MEDIUMS AND SPIRITIST
- SET CARVED IMAGE OF ASHERAH IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

"MANASSEH SEDUCED THEM TO DO EVIL MORE THAN THE NATIONS WHOM THE LORD DESTROYED BEFORE THE SONS OF ISRAEL" (V. 9)

2 KINGS 21:10-15 - THE LORD'S RESPONSE TO MANASSEH'S EVIL

THE LORD RESPONDS TO THIS EVIL BY SPEAKING THROUGH HIS PROPHETS. THE WORD OF THE LORD STATES THAT BECAUSE OF JUDAH'S EVIL AND IDOLATRY, THEY WILL BE FORSAKEN AND DESTROYED. THE PROPHECY USES THE LANGUAGE OF ISRAEL'S DESTRUCTION IN RELATIONSHIP TO JUDAH NOW.

V. 13 - A LINE & PLUMMET - THIS IS THE LANGUAGE OF AN ARCHITECT OR BUILDER, SURVEYING A PROJECT. IN THIS CASE, THESE ITEMS ARE NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION BUT DESTRUCTION.

V. 13 - AS ONE WIPES A DISH - THIS WILL NOT BE A DIFFICULT THING FOR THE LORD. THE DESTRUCTION OF JUDAH AND JERUSALEM WILL BE COMPARABLE TO A PERSON WIPING A DISH DRY.

IT IS NOTABLE THAT THIS FORETOLD JUDGMENT IS THE LORD'S DOING AS A RESULT OF JUDAH'S SIN. THE LORD IS THE ONE BRINGING THE JUDGMENT AND WRATH UPON THE NATION WHICH HAS FORSAKEN HIM COMPLETELY. THIS WON'T BE AN ACCIDENT OR MILITARY DEFEAT, IT WILL BE DIVINE JUDGEMENT. AND THIS JUDGMENT CONNECTS US TO THE EARLIER ORACLE FROM ISAIAH TO KING HEZEKIAH REGARDING THE FUTURE OF JERUSALEM.

HOWEVER, THE NEXT VERSES GIVE US THE CONCLUSION OF MANASSEH'S REIGN, AND THIS JUDGMENT IS STILL (SURPRISINGLY IN MY OPINION) FORTHCOMING.

2 KINGS 21:16-18 - END OF MANASSEH'S REIGN

THE TEXTS ADDS THE INFORMATION THAT MANASSEH ALSO SHED "VERY MUCH INNOCENT BLOOD UNTIL HE HAD FILLED JERUSALEM FROM ONE END TO ANOTHER..." JEWISH TRADITION TELLS US THAT THE GREAT PROPHET ISAIAH WAS IN HIDING FROM MANASSEH IN A CEDAR TREE. UPON HEARING THAT ISAIAH WAS IN THE TREE, MANASSEH ORDERED THE TREE CUT DOWN AND SO IT WAS, WITH THE GREAT PROPHET SAWED IN HALF WITH THE TREE.

WHETHER OR NOT THIS WAS THE HISTORICAL CASE, YOU CAN SEE IT'S PROBABILITY IN THE VICIOUS REIGN OF MANASSEH. COMING OFF THE HEELS OF HEZEKIAH'S GOD FEARING REIGN, YOU CAN IMAGINE MANY IN THE CITIES REBELLING AGAINST MANASSEH'S REVERSAL TO IDOLS - BUT HIS VIOLENT RESPONSE WOULD QUICKLY QUIET THEIR PROTEST.

MANASSEH IS SO AGAINST THE WAYS OF THE LORD AND THE PREVIOUS KINGS OF JUDAH, THAT HE DOESN'T EVEN GET BURIED IN THE KINGS TOMBS AS WE OFTEN READ IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS. HE WAS BURIED IN THE GARDEN OF HIS OWN HOUSE, IN THE GARDEN OF UZZAH. THE ESV STUDY BIBLE OBSERVES THE FOLLOWING:

"MANASSEH'S BURIAL SITE LAY OUTSIDE THE "CITY OF DAVID" (I.E., THE ORIGINAL SETTLED AREA OF JERUSALEM ON THE SOUTHERN HILL) THAT IS NOTED AS THE RESTING PLACE OF PRECEDING KINGS (E.G., AHAZ IN 16:20). THE GARDEN OF UZZA WAS PERHAPS AN ENCLOSURE ON THE TEMPLE MOUNT DEDICATED TO THE ARABIAN GODDESS AL-UZZA, WHO WAS IDENTIFIED WITH VENUS (NOTICE MANASSEH'S WORSHIP OF ASTRAL DEITIES IN 21:3), OR AN ENCLOSURE AT THE SOUTHERN END OF THE KIDRON VALLEY, JUST OUTSIDE THE CITY WALLS, WHERE THERE WAS A "KING'S GARDEN" (25:4; NEH. 3:15)....(THESE) EASTERN SLOPES OF THE KIDRON VALLEY WERE ASSOCIATED WITH IDOLATROUS WORSHIP (1 KINGS 11:7). (ESV STUDY BIBLE, 2 KINGS 21:17-18)

2 KINGS 21:19-26 - THE REIGN OF AMON

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON. AMON CONTINUES THE PRACTICES OF MANASSEH.

NOTICE HOW CHAOTIC LIFE IN JUDAH IS WITHOUT THE LORD. AMON'S OWN SERVANTS CONSPIRED AGAINST HIM AND ASSASSINATE HIM. IT'S NOT CLEAR THAT THEY REBELLED AGAINST THE KING OUT OF ZEAL FOR THE LORD, BUT CLEARLY AMON'S KINGDOM WAS SHORT-LIVED. THEN THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND KILL THE PEOPLE WHO KILLS AMON. EVIL LEADS TO EVIL WHICH LEADS TO EVIL WHICH LEADS TO EVIL. THE CYCLE CONTINUES. AMON GETS BURIED NEXT TO HIS FATHER IN THE GARDEN GRAVE. MANASSEH RULES FOR 55 YEARS, AMON RULES FOR 2.

THIS LEADS US TO A GOOD POINT ABOUT LIFE WITH GOD AND LIFE WITHOUT GOD. IT IS TRUE THAT NON-BELIEVERS APPEAR AT TIMES TO LIVE A "GOOD" LIFE. CHRISTIANS OFTEN DEAL WITH TROUBLE AND CHALLENGES, AND WE CAN SING THE VERSE OF "FARTHER ALONG" FROM THE DEPTHS OF OUR HEART:

*"TEMPTED AND TRIED WE'RE OFT MADE TO WONDER
WHY IT SHOULD BE THUS ALL THE DAY LONG
WHILE THERE ARE OTHERS LIVING ABOUT US
NEVER MOLESTED THO IN THE WRONG"*

("FARTHER ALONG", BY JESSE RANDAL BAXTER JR, W. B. STEVENS)

THAT BEING SAID, LOOK AT WHAT LIFE IS LIKE IN JUDAH DURING THE REIGNS OF MANASSEH/AMON COMPARED TO HEZEKIAH. YOU SEE, HEZEKIAH WAS DID NOT LIVE A "TROUBLE-FREE" LIFE BECAUSE HE LOVED THE LORD. LET'S NOT FORGET HIS SICKNESS NOR THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM FOR EXAMPLE. BUT HEZEKIAH HAD SOMETHING THAT THE EVIL KINGS DID NOT.

LOOK AGAIN AT THE REIGN OF MANASSEH. WE READ OF NO MILITARY ENEMY OR PHYSICAL CHALLENGES, BUT INNOCENT BLOOD FILLED THE STREETS. HIS BABIES DIED BY DELIBERATE BURNING AS A SACRIFICE TO A STATUE. HIS SON AMON WILL BE ASSASSINATED BY HIS OWN SERVANTS WHO WILL THEN BE KILLED BY OTHER CITIZENS.

WHICH LIFE DO YOU WANT? YOU SEE, WHAT HEZEKIAH HAD WAS SOMETHING THAT TRANSCENDED THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS DAY OR HIS MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS. HE HAD THE LORD, AND WITH THAT CAME PEACE, COURAGE, AND HOPE.

OUR LIVES ARE NO DIFFERENT, THOUGH THE CONTEXT HAS CHANGED. WE DON'T HAVE ASSYRIAN GENERALS YELLING IN OUR FACE, BUT WE HAVE ENEMIES AND SPIRITUAL BATTLES. BUT IF WE HAVE THE LORD, WE HAVE PEACE, COURAGE, AND HOPE. AND MOST NOTABLY IN AS WE CONCLUDE THIS RECORD, A LACK OF CHAOS. MANASSEH'S REIGN WAS MARKED BY TROUBLE, CHAOS, CONVICTION, A TROUBLED CONSCIENCE AND THE LIKE. AMON THE SAME. HEZEKIAH'S WAS NOT.

HEZEKIAH DIDN'T HAVE THE PROPHETS PRONOUNCING JUDGMENT UPON HIS ACTIONS AS MANASSEH DID. HEZEKIAH HAD THE WORD OF THE LORD TO COMFORT AND GUIDE. HEZEKIAH DIDN'T HAVE ENEMIES IN HIS NATION OUT TO GET HIM AS AMON DID, HE HAD UNITY IN HIS FAMILY/KINGDOM, EVEN WHEN THREATENED BY OUTSIDE FOES.

I THINK THIS IS A GOOD REMINDER FOR US. WE MAY NOT HAVE PERFECT LIVES, BUT WE HAVE SO MUCH TO BE THANKFUL FOR. WE HAVE TO REMEMBER, LOOK AT AND LIVE IN THAT TRUTH. OUR EYES CANNOT BE ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES AROUND US, THEY MUST BE ON THE LORD. WE CAN'T ENVY THE WORLD AROUND US, WE MUST RECOGNIZE HOW PRIVILEGED WE ARE TO NO LONGER LIVE IN THAT STATE.

MANASSEH'S EVIL MAY HAVE THRIVED FOR A LONG TIME, BUT IN THE END, GOD'S JUSTICE HAS THE FINAL WORD.

THE WORLD MAY APPEAR TO BE HAPPY NOW, WHILE WE AT TIMES, MOURN, BUT DON'T FORGET THE FINAL VERSE OF "FARTHER ALONG". WE GET TO SING THIS NOW AND LIVE IT ON THAT GREAT DAY:

*WHEN WE SEE JESUS COMING IN GLORY
WHEN HE COMES FROM HIS HOME IN THE SKY
THEN WE SHALL MEET HIM IN THAT BRIGHT MANSION
WE'LL UNDERSTAND IT ALL BY AND BY*

SOUNDS LIKE A GOOD DEAL TO ME.