DISCOVERY

Teacher's Guide

Comparison of Manasseh and Josiah

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

2 Kings 21:1 through 23:30

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

"And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him." (2 Kings 23:25)

BACKGROUND

This portion of text covers three kings of Judah over a span of eighty-eight years.

The first eighteen verses of chapter 21 are the account of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, who was born after Hezekiah's life had been extended by God for fifteen years. Hezekiah had been responsible for a spiritual revival that swept the entire nation during his reign, and had done away with the idolatry that his father, Ahaz, had established.

Manasseh came to the throne when he was twelve years old, and reigned for a total of fifty-five years. After the death of Hezekiah, he reversed the religious reforms instituted by his godly father, and reinstituted pagan worship. One of Judah's most evil kings, he practiced sorcery and witchcraft, and even sacrificed his own son in idol worship. He took idols into the Jerusalem Temple, rebuilt the high places that his father had destroyed, and erected altars for Baal. He made an image of Asherah (a female goddess of sex and fertility), and worshiped the sun, moon, planets, and stars.

The parallel account in 2 Chronicles 33:11-19 indicates that late in Manasseh's reign, Assyria overthrew Jerusalem and captured the king. He was imprisoned in Babylon, and there, humiliated and powerless, he "humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers" (2 Chronicles 33:12). God heard his repentant prayer and extended mercy. Manasseh was not only freed from his confinement, but was returned to his throne in Jerusalem. Back in power, Manasseh destroyed the idol shrines he had built, did away with his desecrations of the Temple, and restored the Temple worship. However, a decisive turn into idolatry had already been made by the nation. Manasseh's conversion seemed to have no lasting impact, for when Judah ultimately fell, God attributed it to the sins of Manasseh.

Verses 19 through 26 of chapter 21 concern the reign of Manasseh's son Amon, who became king at the age of twenty-two. Sadly, Amon apparently was not

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influenced by his father's repentance, for it is recorded that he "did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, as his father Manasseh did" (2 Kings 21:20). He served idols and forsook God. After just two years of rule, his servants conspired against him and he was assassinated in his own home.

Chapter 22 begins the account of Josiah. This ruler, commended in Scripture as a godly leader who "turned to the LORD with all his heart" (2 Kings 23:25), ascended to the throne at eight years of age, when his father, Amon, was assassinated. In contrast to his father, Josiah had an interest in the true God. The account of his life in 2 Chronicles records that he began seeking God in the eighth year of his reign, and four years later undertook reforms to stop idol worship in the nation (see 2 Chronicles 34:3-7).

At the age of twenty-six, Josiah instituted the rebuilding of the Temple, which had deteriorated and been left in a state of disrepair during the periods of idol worship in the land. While the workers were making these repairs, they found the Book of the Law. When Josiah heard the book read, he recognized with horror that his people had neglected the commandments of God, and thus stood in danger of judgment. Rending his clothes as a sign of grief and repentance, Josiah immediately set out on a campaign to obey the Lord's instructions and to lead the people of Judah in a return to the God of their fathers.

Josiah died in battle after a reign of thirty-one years in Jerusalem. In spite of his efforts toward reform, Judah reverted again to idolatry after his death.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. King Manasseh was raised by a godly father, Hezekiah. However, he rejected his spiritual heritage and did "that which was evil in the sight of the LORD." What specific sins are attributed to Manasseh in 2 Kings 21:3-7?

These verses list many specific sins that Manasseh committed.

Verse 3 – He built up the high places that Hezekiah had destroyed, erected altars for Baal, and worshipped the hosts of heaven.

Verse 4 and 5 – He built altars for the worship of pagan deities in the House of the Lord.

Verse 6 – He burned his son as a human sacrifice, practiced soothsaying, and sought counsel from mediums and wizards.

Verse 7 – He defamed God by setting up a graven image in the Temple.

2. What spiritual concept is illustrated by the fact that Hezekiah, one of the godliest kings in the history of Judah, had a son who was one of the most wicked?

Your students should conclude that each individual is personally responsible for the choices he or she makes. Ask your class: Is a godly heritage a guarantee

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for a child's spiritual well-being? Your class should conclude that while Christian parents offer a child a wonderful opportunity to understand the privileges and blessings of serving God, a godly heritage is no guarantee.

It could be noted that Manasseh followed the example of his wicked grandfather, Ahaz, more than that of his God-fearing father. If your class is comprised of senior adults, you may find it valuable to discuss ways grandparents can positively impact their grandchildren in spiritual matters.

3. In 2 Kings 21:10-15, we find a prophetic utterance announcing the coming desolation of Jerusalem and Judah because of Manasseh's sin. What word pictures are used in verse 13 to describe the judgment that would come upon Judah?

The first of three word pictures is the phrase "the line of Samaria," and it depicts the measuring line of a builder. Along with the "plummet of the house of Ahab," these building analogies refer to the judgment to come upon Judah, just as it had come upon Samaria and the evil house of Ahab. The third word picture—that of scouring a dish clean and then turning it upside down—describes the completeness of Judah's destruction.

It might be interesting to point out to your students that while God pictured the wiping clean of the bowl, the dish was not broken into pieces. Thus, the possibility of God's using Judah once again was left open by this illustration. How might this give us hope today?

4. Amon succeeded his father Manasseh as ruler in Judah. What descriptive phrases indicate the kind of man Amon was? 2 Kings 21:20-22

These few short verses about Amon record several descriptive phrases, and all of them are negative. He did evil in the sight of the Lord (verse 20). He walked in the way that his father walked, and served and worshiped the idols his father served (verse 21). He forsook the Lord God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the Lord (verse 22).

This may be a good time to focus on the fact that our actions and choices do impact others. What difference might it have made in the history of Judah if Manasseh had chosen to follow in the footsteps of his godly father, Hezekiah? How might he have raised Amon differently? What might have been the outcome if the people of Judah had enjoyed a succession of godly leaders, instead of only one here and there in their history? Our lives might not have great political significance, but our actions may still affect the generations to follow us, if the Lord tarries.

This may be an appropriate time to mention that the parallel account of King Manasseh's reign, found in 2 Chronicles 33:11-19, presents the astounding fact that after being captured and imprisoned in

Babylon, Manasseh actually repented of his evil ways and turned to God. Evidence that his repentance was genuine comes from the fact that he was not only released from imprisonment, but was restored to his throne in Jerusalem. However, his change of heart seemingly came too late to make an impact on his son.

5. Josiah's father, King Amon, was very wicked, as was his grandfather, King Manasseh. In spite of being raised in an ungodly home, what did Josiah choose to do? 2 Kings 22:2

Josiah obeyed God completely, even though he was very young. As we read the Biblical accounts of the kings of Israel and Judah, we find that it is very unusual to find one who obeyed God wholeheartedly. However, Josiah was one who did. Seemingly, he had a tender heart from his youth. Due to his young age, he probably was under the tutelage of elders or priests during the early years of his reign. According to 2 Chronicles 34:3-7, he began seeking God in the eighth year of his reign, and four years later began spiritual reforms to stop idol worship in the nation.

This would be a good opportunity to bring out to your students that no one is ever too young to take God seriously and obey Him. Josiah's decisions and good choices in his early years were the basis for the spiritual reforms he later undertook for God. You also could point out that Josiah's background was not conducive to making good choices and living a godly life, yet God helped him do just that. If we have a purpose to serve God, we can be sure that He will be there to direct and help us every step of the way. Your students may be able to share some examples from their personal experiences or knowledge of times when God encouraged and directed young people who came into the Gospel without a Christian background.

6. During his eighteenth year as king, Josiah instructed that the Temple in Jerusalem be repaired, after many years of neglect. While those repairs were being carried out, the Book of the Law was found in the Temple. How did Josiah respond when the Word of God was read to him? What was the significance of his reaction? 2 Kings 22:11

When the Word was read to Josiah, he "rent his clothes." Josiah realized how corrupt his nation had become and was alarmed as he realized that the judgment of God was impending. Tearing his clothes was an indicator of his sincere repentance and grief.

Ask your class what Josiah's action teaches us about how we should respond to the Word of God. The point should be made that however long we have served God, our hearts should be kept tender and responsive to what we read in the Bible. It should cause us, as it did Josiah, to desire to immediately align our lives and bring them into harmony with God's will.

7. Josiah sent emissaries to Huldah, a prophetess of Jerusalem, to "inquire of the LORD" concerning the

fate of himself, his people, and his nation in light of the transgressions of their fathers. Briefly summarize in your own words the answer the prophetess gave.
2 Kings 22:15-20

The prophetess' answer was in two parts. First, she announced that God would bring evil upon Judah as described in the words of the Book of the Law (see the curses described in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26). Second, she foretold that because Josiah had humbled himself before God, he would not experience the desolation, but would die in peace with God.

8. What did Josiah do after hearing the response of the prophetess? 2 Kings 23:1-8

Josiah's first act was to call together the elders of Judah, the priests, the prophets, and all the people for a public reading of the words of the Book of the Law. He then made a covenant with the Lord to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments, and the people stood to indicate their commitment to join with Josiah in this covenant.

He followed this with actions designed to remove the stain of idolatry from the land. He "put down" (caused to cease) the idolatrous priests and those who burned incense to Baal and the sun, moon, and planets. He broke down the places of ritual prostitution, and defiled the high places—the centers of heathen worship.

When Josiah's actions have been identified, class discussion could revolve around the necessity of following repentance with action. It is not enough to say we are sorry; our deeds must prove our words. Josiah not only humbled himself before God, but also took steps to change the behaviors that had incurred God's wrath. As He did for Josiah, God will guide us in what we must do, and we must follow Him in obedience.

9. Josiah took steps to remove all idols from the nation. What idols could be in a person's life in our day?

Your class members may offer a variety of specific suggestions. These could include: material possessions, education, another person, position, hobbies. The conclusion should be that anything we put ahead of God is an idol. By giving these things their rightful place in our lives, we remove the hindrances and are open to listen and obey Him.

CONCLUSION

It is important to learn from the Biblical examples given to us. The lives of these three kings illustrate that God will have mercy upon the wicked when there is sincere repentance, that He will ultimately judge the wicked, and that He always responds to repentant and humble hearts. We learn that our actions impact others, and that this impact can last for generations. Finally, we recognize that even sweeping national reforms are of no lasting value unless there is genuine repentance and ongoing obedience to God.