



# Enter the Story

## ***Manasseh***

A narrative about how far the grace of God will go.

## ***THE BIBLE***

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 20-21, 2 Chronicles 32:33-33:20

*Prepare for the Story*

## **ICEBREAKER**

Everyone has at least one bad habit ... what's one of your bad habits that you would like to change?

*Rewind the Story*

Can someone highlight what has happened in the story so far ...

- Amos – A Farmer and a Plumb Line
- Undying Love – Hosea & Gomer
- The Last Kings of Israel – Alliances and Allegiances
- Judah's Tale of Two Kings – Ahaz & Hezekiah

*Hear the Story*

### **Scene One: Hezekiah's Illness**

Hezekiah was a righteous King who walked with the Lord and ensured that the people of Judah only worshiped Yahweh. He ruled for a total of twenty-nine years. During the fourteenth year of His reign, he developed a severe illness and found himself close to death.

The prophet Isaiah went to him and said, *"This is what the LORD says: Get your things in order because you are going to die; you are not going to recover."* Hearing this, Hezekiah prayed to the LORD, *"God, please remember how I have faithfully walked with you and how I have devoted my entire life to do what is right in your eyes."* As he prayed, he wept bitterly.

But before Isaiah could leave, the word of the LORD came to him again, saying, *"Go back and tell Hezekiah, this is what the LORD says, 'I have heard your prayer and seen your tears, I will heal you. Three days from now, you will go to the temple of the LORD. I will add fifteen years to your life.'"*

Isaiah instructed the King's servants to make an ointment from figs, which they applied to the King, and just as the LORD had promised, He recovered. At this time, Hezekiah had no heir. He married Isaiah's daughter, and a few years later, they had a son, and they named him Manasseh.

### **Scene Two: The Reign of Manasseh**

After Hezekiah's illness was cured, he ruled over Judah and served God faithfully for fifteen additional years. But when he died, his son Manasseh became King when he was only twelve years old. The loss of his father weighed heavy on the young ruler. Instead of turning to the God that his father worshiped, Manasseh, in his pain and anger, turned to other gods out of spite.

He rebuilt the pagan shrines that his father had broken down. He constructed altars to worship Baal and set up Asherah poles throughout the land. He bowed before all the powers of the heavens and worshipped the stars in the sky. He desecrated the LORD's Temple by building altars to the gods of the stars inside the courtyards. He even created an idol and set it up to be worshipped in the LORD's temple.

He embraced all the evil practices the LORD condemned, even worshipping the Canaanite god Molech, pledging his dedication to the god by sacrificing his own sons in the fire in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom.

He practiced sorcery, divination, and witchcraft. He consulted with mediums and psychics. He did everything that was evil in the LORD's sight and followed the detestable practices of the pagan nations that the LORD had previously driven from the land.

Manasseh led the people of Judah and Jerusalem to do even more evil than the people who had come before them; so much evil and it stirred the LORD's anger.

### **Scene Three: Manasseh's Warning**

The LORD spoke to Manasseh and the people through his servants, the prophets, saying, *"King Manasseh of Judah has done many detestable things. He is even more wicked than the Amorites who lived in this land before Israel. He has caused the people of Judah to sin with his idols. So this is what the God of Israel says: I will bring disaster on Jerusalem and Judah – it will be so shocking – that the ears of those who hear about it will tingle with horror.*

*I will judge Jerusalem by the same standard I used for Samaria; I will use the same scale that I used for the family of Ahab. I will wipe away the people of Jerusalem as one wipes a dish and then turns it upside down. Then I will reject even the remnant of my people who are left, and I will hand them over as plunder for their enemies. For they have done great evil in my sight and have angered me ever since their ancestors came out of Egypt."*

Even with these warnings, Manasseh did not change his ways. Anyone who spoke up for the LORD was put to death – including his own grandfather, the prophet Isaiah, which tradition suggests was sawn in two. During his reign, Manasseh murdered countless innocent people, and it was said that during his reign, Jerusalem was filled from one end to the other with innocent blood.

### **Scene Four: Manasseh's Repentance**

Because Manasseh ignored God's warning, the LORD sent the commanders of the Assyrian army – who captured Manasseh and took him to Babylon as their prisoner. After twenty-two years on the throne in Judah, the Assyrians put a ring through his nose, bound him in bronze chains, and led him away while the people of Judah watched.

While in Babylon, Manasseh was tortured by his captors, and in his distress, he cried out to the gods he had worshipped, but no relief came. Until, at last, he cried out to Yahweh, the God his father had worshipped, and humbled himself before the God of his ancestors.

The LORD heard his cries and was moved by his request. So the LORD delivered Manasseh and brought him back to Jerusalem, and put him on the throne in Judah. This was when Manasseh finally realized that Yahweh was the only god in the world.

### **Scene Five: Manasseh's Legacy**

After returning to Jerusalem, Manasseh ruled over Judah for another thirty-three years. During that time, He renovated the outer wall around the city, re-fortifying and extending its height to protect the people from their enemies. He rebuilt the military and stationed officers in all the fortified towns in Judah.

He removed the altars and idols to foreign gods that he had established in the LORD's Temple. And he tore down all the altars he had built throughout Jerusalem and then threw what remained outside the city.

He restored the altar of the LORD and began making the annual peace and thanksgiving offerings on it. And He instructed the people of Judah to worship the LORD, the God of Israel. After fifty-five years of ruling over Judah, Manasseh died and was buried in the palace gardens.

#### *Retell the Story*

- What happened during the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Hezekiah's reign as King?
- Why did God heal Hezekiah?
- When did Manasseh become King?
- How was Manasseh different than his father, Hezekiah?
- What kind of evil practices did Manasseh actively participate in?
- How did Manasseh respond to God's warnings?
- Who did God send to capture Manasseh?
- What happened while Manasseh was in Babylon?
- How did Manasseh spend the remaining years as king?

#### *Discuss the Story*

- What is your first reaction to this story? How did this story make you feel?
- What stood out to you from this story? What did you notice for the first time?

- What from this story made you wonder?
- Manasseh became king at the age of twelve. How do you think losing his father at such a young age affected his decisions as king?
- When God offered Manasseh a chance to repent, instead of changing course, it appears that he doubled down and moved further away from God. Why do we prefer to “double down” instead of admitting our mistakes and heading in the other direction?
- Why do you think it took Babylonian humiliation, captivity, and torture to get Manasseh to repent? Why do we often have to go through hard and difficult seasons in order to turn to God?
- Manasseh could easily be categorized as a tyrant and possibly the worst King to rule over God’s people. Why do you think God responded to his prayers and cries of repentance?
- For 22 years, Manasseh did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for 33 years, he dedicated himself to correcting his mistakes. What do you make of the reign of Manasseh?
- Did you hear anything that reminded you of **other** stories?
- From this story, what did you notice about humans?
- What do you notice from this story about God’s character or qualities?

## 1) FATHER TO SON

In the history of the kings who ruled over God's people, there is perhaps no greater juxtaposition than that of Hezekiah and his son Manasseh. Hezekiah was known as a man who faithfully followed Yahweh, while his son Manasseh worshipped every other god under the stars. Why do you think these two men were so different? What value could there be in raising the next generation to know God? Read **Deuteronomy 6:1-8**. How important is it to help your kids find and follow Jesus?

## 2) WORST OF THE WORST

When you look at the list of evil things that Manasseh did, it paints a gruesome picture: sorcery, divination, witchcraft, worshipping false idols, murder, child sacrifice, and the shedding of innocent blood. He committed mass murder and exterminated anyone who got in his way, including his own grandfather. When we think about the kind of man Manasseh was, it's fair to group him with some of the worst villains in history. Which leads us to ask the question, how can God forgive the worst of the worst? In God's Kingdom, dictators, tyrants, rapists, and murderers are given a second chance. Does this seem right and fair? Should grace cover the worst of the worst? Or should God's grace have limits?

## 3) REPENTANCE

Manasseh may have spent over two decades as a villain, but while in Babylon, God heard his cries and accepted his repentant heart. It's one thing to apologize. It's another thing to be repentant. What indicators need to be present in the life of a person to know that repentance is genuine? If you have the time, make a list of people in the Bible who demonstrated genuine repentance.

## Pray

God,

*May we grow in our desire to love and honor Your name above any other name. In this fallen and broken world, more than anything we want to be faithful to You. We do not want to settle for cheap substitutes who offer no hope. We ask that in our arrogance You extend Your grace. Soften our hearts to hear Your wisdom and Your guidance. When we stray, bring us back to You once again. You have offered us a living hope that will never disappoint or fade away. Our hope is in You and You alone. Amen.*