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MANASSEH'S TRANSGRESSION AND REPENTANCE.

– NOV. 20. – 2 CHRON. 33:9-16. –

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." – 1 John 1:9.

MANASSEH was the son of the good king of Judah, Hezekiah, the reformer, whose faith and works we considered in our last study. And tradition being true that Hezekiah's wife was the daughter of the Prophet Isaiah, we might reasonably expect from such parentage a noble son, with large reverence and spirituality, who would follow closely in the steps of his father as a reformer. But we find to the contrary, that Manasseh made the people to err and to do worse than the Canaanite nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel when he brought the latter into the land of promise.

Manasseh was but twelve years of age when he entered upon his kingdom at the death of his father, Isaiah, his supposed grandfather, having died previously. It does not surprise us that one so young, even tho well-born and well-endowed naturally, should be in danger of taking the wrong path; indeed, it is the brightest children, the most precocious, that are in greatest danger if placed in positions of responsibility and influence early in life, without experienced advisers. Lacking experience, this precocious boy-king evidently concluded that the inferiority of the kingdom of Judah to some of the surrounding nations in riches and strength was in great measure because it did not have the same kind of gods and of religious worship. Consequently, [R2386 : page 336] it was probably within ten years of his accession to power that he began to institute what he no doubt regarded as a religious revolution, in recognition of the various deities which his father had neglected to worship and to propitiate. No doubt he was helped along [R2387 : page 336] in such a course of reasoning by friends of the false religions or by evil counsellors, who adopted his views and pandered to them and extolled the wisdom of his course,

to thus gain his kingly favor and to feather their own nests; – for there seems to be plenty of such an unprincipled class in every age, everywhere.

Some have spoken of Manasseh as a most wicked person, comparing him to the worst character on the pages of history; but to us this seems unjust. We concede that he "did *wickedly*" as do all who violate righteousness: but we do not concede that he was a *wilful*, intentional evil-doer. It appears rather that his wrong course was in large measure the result of his youth and inexperience, and his ambition to be great, – which led to his loss of confidence in his father's God and his nation's religion and tradition. The religious qualities (veneration and spirituality) inherited from good parents, took a turn in a wrong direction, so that instead of being a zealous, earnest champion of true religion, he became the zealous promoter of false religion, idolatries, etc. His zeal and conscientiousness are both attested in the fact that he spent large sums of money in establishing idolatry, and even caused his own children to pass through the fire of Moloch, – a sacrifice to these false gods.

Thus it has been with zealous promoters of false religions, we believe – the largeness of the religious organs of their heads, which would have made them zealous for the service of the Lord, being misdirected made them zealous in evil, tho unwittingly. We have no record that Manasseh was a promoter of moral wickedness, except as his false religions sanctioned immoralities and led to them, and the statement that "he shed innocent blood very much:" and we consider it quite probable that this latter crime was done in ignorance also – under the frenzied zeal of false religion – Satan blinding his eyes. – 2 Cor. 4:4.

The intimation of the context is that Manasseh got under the influence of wicked spirits, spiritism, as we would call it to-day: he placed himself under the guidance of wizards, necromancers, etc., and was guided by a wicked spirit, "a familiar spirit," who, pretending to

represent the dead, and to be able to give him super-human wisdom and advice, deceived him, as they have deceived the whole world, under various forms and by various errors, – leading mankind more and more into separation from God and his righteousness, as they come under their influence.*

**See [What Say the Scriptures About Spiritualism?](#) – 10c., this office.*

There is a lesson in this for all; – to the effect that no matter how well-born, how intelligent, how zealously conscientious they may be, they need right instructions – they need to become the Lord's people by the New Covenant and consecration; that they "may be all taught of God." Whosoever does not get the right teaching – the truth – to direct his conscience and zeal will be sure to be found by the great adversary and be blinded with plenty of false teaching, to pervert his talents and opportunities to the interest of falsehood, error and sin. And the same wicked spirits which deluded and misled Manasseh, and which we find are active in all parts of the world, opposing the true God and his instructions, are ready still to assist and to mislead all who have not found the only true guide to life – the Lord. How important then that all, and especially those who would make progress in religious life, should seek and find the true guide, and the wisdom that cometh from above.

The record is that God spoke to the king and to the nation respecting their wrong course, but they were so infatuated that they would not hearken – the glitter, show and sensuous fervor and spirit of sacrifice of the false religion, appealing more to the degenerate mind and heart, than the reasonable, true religion. The Lord probably spoke to these people through his prophets, – Micah in the early part of the reign, and Nahum later on.

The arch-deceiver, Satan, the forwarder of all false systems, is still at work in the world; and while he has not been able to hinder the advancing light of Christianity, which rising in Judea, has spread with more or less effulgence over Europe and America, he nevertheless

does not abandon his efforts to seduce those who have been partially enlightened with this true light. He well knows that it would be absurd to attempt to turn back Christianity, and to substitute therefor the worship of Moloch, and he makes no such attempt: but he continually endeavors gradual encroachments upon the simplicity of the gospel of Christ. With some he favors ritualism, vestments, ceremonies, genuflections, etc., that he may thus lead as near to idolatry as civilized, enlightened minds could sanction: to the intent that the worshipers might the more draw near to the Lord with a merely lip service and outward formalism, which would satisfy the cravings of their religious organism, while their hearts might be far from grace. With others the adversary suggests an opposite extreme, which equally ignores the Word of the Lord, leading the deceived to reject the simple and meaningful arrangements which the Lord has prescribed.

The Adversary's attempt upon those who have been enlightened with the present truth are more along the latter line. Those who have been made free by the **[R2387 : page 337]** truth from various superstitions and false doctrines, from the worship of God as a fierce, merciless Moloch, and who have been brought by the truth to the liberty wherewith Christ makes free, and to the simplicity of the gospel arrangements set forth in the New Testament; these the Adversary would fain seduce to what he is pleased to represent to them as a still larger liberty – a liberty beyond that which our Lord and the Apostles and the early Church recognized: – a liberty to ignore the assembling of themselves together; claiming a greater blessing through private communion with the Lord and the study of his Word than through any human help or communion. Those whom the Adversary gets to this point, of considering their own judgment superior to the testimony of the Lord's Word, respecting his will, are in a fair way to be side-tracked entirely and very quickly.

Others he persuades to believe, that since they see the real meaning of baptism to be a heart consecration to the Lord (burial to self and the world), it is wholly unnecessary that they should perform

the *symbolic immersion in water* – persuading that since it would be only a symbol or an outward form, to represent an invisible transaction, therefore it would be improper, – or at least not obligatory. This is an extreme of anti-formalism, which has its basis often in too great self-confidence, too large an appreciation of their own wisdom, a too small appreciation of the wisdom that cometh from above, and that has been plainly set forth to us in the Word of God. Such persons evidently do not realize that by their arguments and conduct they are claiming to be more wise than our Lord, who not only performed the true baptism, but also submitted to the symbolical one, saying, "Thus it behooveth us to fulfil all righteousness."

They also set themselves up as being more wise than the Apostles, who both taught and practiced the symbol. Our Lord commended them to us as his mouthpieces, assuring us that he would guide their judgments and teachings so that we might have full confidence in the same, saying, that Whatsoever they would make binding upon earth we might know would be binding in heaven; – so fully would they be under the control of the holy spirit in their doctrinal presentations to the Church. How unwise on the part of any who admit that God has taught them all that they know of his grace through these very Apostles, to claim a superiority of wisdom on one or two points. Such as are thus "heady" will pretty surely soon or later stumble over other truths; because it is one of the conditions that those who are "taught of God shall be the meek, the teachable: as it is written, "***The meek*** will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way." – Psa. 25:9.

Others still hold that it is not proper to celebrate the Eucharist since we discern that the real spiritual significance of the Last Supper is our partaking of the merit of our Lord's sacrifice by faith, feeding on him in our hearts, – and our consecration to be broken with him in the service of his truth, and to drink with him the cup of suffering and self-denial for the truth's sake. Seeing these *realities* they hold that we should no longer perform the *symbol* of these by commemorating our dear Redeemer's death, as he commanded all his followers should do,

saying, "Eat ye all of it;" "drink ye all of it:" and as the Apostles did and taught the early Church to do. Surely, such renouncements of the beautiful and simple symbols which our Lord left us is not "taught of God" – and cannot be sustained by his Word. It is the great adversary, who thus would seduce us from the simplicity and obedience which is pleasing to the Lord and acceptable to all the "meek." Let all who have been "taught of God" adhere closely to his teachings, as presented in the Scriptures, ignoring on the one hand a tendency toward formalism and idolatry, and on the other hand a tendency to lean to their own understanding and wisdom, and to ignore the simple and meaningful observances which the Lord has commanded. No other course is either reasonable or safe.

As a punishment for taking the wrong course, and to open the eyes of the king and the people, the Lord permitted the king of Assyria to invade the land, and cause much affliction, and to carry away the king a fettered prisoner, to Babylon. There the king came to his senses, and came to realize that the gods he had so zealously worshiped and sought to propitiate had no care over him: realizing his mistake, he bethought him [R2388 : page 337] of the religion and God of his fathers, and prayed to the true God for deliverance, and was heard and brought back again to his capital city and to power. The record is that "Then Manasseh *knew* that Jehovah is God." The clear intimation is that previously he *did not know*, was honestly mistaken. That his sin was largely of ignorance is testified to by his subsequent zeal in the Lord's cause – pulling down the idols and the altars which he had previously mistakenly built, under a misguided religious enthusiasm.

Manasseh's character and experiences remind us considerably of Saul of Tarsus: both were religious enthusiasts; both for a time were evil-doers, through lack of knowledge of the truth; both were remarkably chastened of the Lord, and found it "hard to kick against the pricks." Both were prompt to acknowledge divine disciplines, and to profit thereby; and both showed their sincerity by their subsequent zeal in the Lord's service.

The Lord evidently loves warm, ardent natures, altho they may be more liable to mistakes than more coldly calculating ones. It was their ardent temperaments [R2388 : page 338] that caused our Lord to specially love Peter and James and John and Paul, and which caused them to manifest so fervent love for him. If Peter did make some blunders through impetuosity he learned afterward a better exercise of judgment, under which his zeal found glorious exercise. If Paul's zeal for a time made him a bitter opponent of the truth, it afterward, under the control of the "spirit of a sound mind," made him a most valiant soldier of the cross and defender of the faith.

Therefore, let us never despise opponents or even persecutors; for they may be conscientious, but blind: they are worth far more if turned to the truth and its service than many of the cold, indifferent, listless. And if we find ourselves cold or luke-warm, let us cultivate fervency, let us fan the flame of sacred love in our hearts by frequent reflection on the Lord's grace toward us – our covenant with him – and the exceeding great and precious promises of his Word.
