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## **DIVINE JUSTICE AND MERCY**

– JULY 16. – 2 CHRON. 33:1-20. –

**"Cease to do evil; learn to do well." – Isa. 1:16,17.**

MANASSEH, the central figure of this study, was the son of the good King Hezekiah. Manasseh succeeded to the throne of Judah in his twelfth year – the bad son of a good father. This matter of good fathers and evil sons, and evil fathers and good sons was probably due, frequently, to the good or evil character of the mothers, as well as to the fact that the king, occupied with the affairs of state, could not give proper attention to the cultivation of his own children. Doubtless, there are exceptions to every rule, but it is impossible to avoid a certain amount of reflection against the parents in respect to every scape-grace child.

### **HOW FEW RECOGNIZE THE SACREDNESS OF PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

Parentage is undoubtedly the highest and most important function of human life. Yet how few realize the sacredness of parental responsibilities! The Prophet inquires, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" While admitting the inference that none of our race can possibly be perfect, we must admit also that in the parents reside great possibilities respecting the good or evil of their children. This responsibility should be felt in mating – before marriage. We are not urging that marriage should be put upon the same plane as stock breeding, and the finer sentiments disregarded; but we do claim that the spirit of a sound mind should be sought in connection with the most important contract of life, affecting not only the destiny and happiness of the pair, but also of their offspring.

Whoever will acquaint himself with the care exercised by the scientific florist and gardener for the obtaining of choice varieties of

fruits and flowers and vegetables, will have reason to feel ashamed of the little attention that is paid to the attainment of proper ideals in respect to the human race – indeed, it is amazing that with the majority there is no ideal whatever; blind, brute passion alone is recognized.

The breeder of fine horses, dogs, cattle, etc., will explain how careful he is with the mother during the period of breeding – her health, her surroundings, all are considered, because all have to do with her offspring, yet these same breeders of cattle, horses, poultry, etc., seem to give little consideration to the condition of the wife, the mother of their own children, during the period of gestation. How strange that a horse-fancier realizes that the breeding mare will be benefitted by pictures of running horses and by seeing horses racing, and that as a consequence her foal will be more speedy and more valuable, yet fails to apply this principle to his wife!

Is it any wonder that children are born nervous and peevish when we know that the mother in bearing them was fretted and annoyed in a thousand ways? Is it any wonder that children are born to a heritage of passion, anger and lust, when we think of the experiences of their mothers which are thus impressed upon them? Surely all parents of reasonable judgment, understanding these matters, would lay proper foundations for character in their children – foundations upon which, subsequently, they would patiently, carefully and lovingly develop their children along the lines of the highest standards of righteousness and the beauty of holiness and loyalty to the Creator! But while this should be the endeavor of all, when could we hope ever to bring the world into a condition to desire and strive for such results? Never! Hope for the world would die were it not based upon the sure Word of the Lord, which promises mankind help from on High in the great Kingdom of Messiah.

## **THE VALLEY OF HINNOM**

King Manasseh reintroduced idolatry, built altars for the worship of Baal in the courts of the temple, used enchantments and

communicated with evil spirits. The Lord permitted him to take this course and apparently the majority of the nation were swayed either to good or evil by the example of their kings. Thus the people were [R4840 : page 185] made to err. The punishment for this course followed. The king of Assyria was permitted of the Lord to be the executioner of the punishment. He captured the city and took the king prisoner. The punishment for idolatry was not eternal torment, be it noted; that erroneous view came to us during the "Dark Ages." We are getting back to a better understanding of God and His Word.

After the king had been in captivity a while, his senses commenced to return to him and he began to learn his lesson. Thoughts of his good father, King Hezekiah, and the Lord's blessings upon him, surely came to his mind. King Manasseh repented, sought the forgiveness of the Lord and obtained it, and was restored to his own kingdom.

In connection with the king's idolatrous delusions, it is recorded in verse six that he "caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of Hinnom." That valley lies just outside the city of Jerusalem, to the south. It is now considerably filled up and covered with orchards. Of old it was a deep valley. It was used for religious rites at one time. A great brass image erected there, the body of which was hollow, constituted a flue for the fires built underneath. The image had outstretched arms, which became heated and upon these arms children were sometimes offered in sacrifice to the false deities, wholly contrary to everything authorized by the Almighty.

Later on, this valley of Hinnom was polluted so that it might never again be used as a place of worship. No doubt it was used as a place for the destruction of the offal of the city of Jerusalem – dead cats and rats and dogs, etc., were thrown there and fire and brimstone burned therein for the destruction of the foul gases. The bodies of the vilest criminals might after death also be thrown into this valley as refuse, indicating no hope of future life for them.

In the New Testament, written in Greek, this "valley of the son of Hinnom" is styled *Ge-hinnom*, or, later, *Gehenna*. Our Lord several times used this valley in illustrating the Second Death – the hopelessness of all those who would wilfully, intelligently and persistently refuse the grace of God.

### **LEARN TO DO WELL**

Our text, from Isaiah, is the Lord's admonition, "Cease to do evil; learn to do well." It represents God's general attitude toward our race. He does not chide us for being sinners, for He Himself explains that we were born in sin and mis-shapen in iniquity, in sin did our mothers conceive us. What the Lord desires in us is that, realizing our wrong condition, we shall *turn therefrom* to the best of our ability to do right. We shall not be able to effect this transformation in ourselves except so far as to have a right will and a pure heart, or honest endeavor for righteousness. To all such the Lord proposes succor, assistance, and this assistance [R4840 : page 186] He has provided for us in our Redeemer. He is an assistance already to those who can accept Him and His Word by faith. He will be an actual assistance to the great majority of mankind through the establishment of His Kingdom. Eventually all who will come to love righteousness and hate iniquity shall be enabled to attain eternal life, and all who will love iniquity and hate righteousness shall have the punishment of the Second Death, symbolically represented in *Gehenna* – "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord."

