

**The Reunited Kingdom, part 10
(2 Chronicles 29:1–36:23)**

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The Reign of Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:1-20)

Having reflected on Hezekiah's great accomplishment in the reunification of the nation around the temple, the Chronicler turned next to Manasseh's reign (697/96-643/42). His record of Manasseh pointed to the wonder of God's mercy and the responsibility of post-exilic Israel to respond properly to that mercy.

Comparison of 33:1-20 with 2 Kgs 21:1-18

The Chronicler's account of Manasseh's reign depends to varying degrees on 2 Kgs 21:1-18. On a large scale the accounts of Chronicles and Kings may be compared as follows (see figure 57).

2 Chr		2 Kgs
33:1-10	Manasseh's Early Sins (closely parallel)	21:1-10
-----	Manasseh's Condemnation (omitted)	21:11-16
33:11-17	Manasseh's Exile and Restoration (added)	-----
33:18-20	Closure of Reign (loosely parallel)	21:17-18

Comparison of 2 Chr 33:1-20 and 2 Kgs 21:1-18 (figure 57)

This comparison reveals that Chronicles follows Kings closely at the beginning (33:1-10 // 2 Kgs 21:1-10) and rather closely at the end (33:18-20 // 2 Kgs 21:17-18). The middle portions, however, are very different. The Chronicler omitted the lengthy prophetic condemnation of Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:11-16)

and replaced it with his own account of Manasseh's personal exile, repentance, and restoration (33:11-17). This variation reflects a significant difference of perspective. 2 Kgs 21:11-16 focuses on Manasseh's sins as the final cause for the destruction of Jerusalem. The Chronicler's text treats Manasseh as a model of one who was exiled, repented of his sin, returned to the land of promise, and restored the nation to God.

A number of smaller differences appear in the first and last portions of Manasseh's reign. Some of these variations are corruptions introduced through textual transmission (see *Introduction: Translation and Transmission*). Several items, however, deserve comment.

In the opening section (33:1-10) several significant variations appear. First, in 33:1 (// 2 Kgs 21:1) the Chronicler omitted the reference to Manasseh's queen mother. The reason for this omission is not clear, but this was his practice from here until the end of the book (33:21 // 2 Kgs 21:19; 34:1 // 2 Kgs 22:1; 36:2 // 2 Kgs 23:31; 36:5 // 2 Kgs 23:36; 36:9 // 2 Kgs 24:8; 36:11 // 2 Kgs 24:18

Second, the Chronicler probably intended to emphasize Manasseh's apostasy by shifting from singular "Baal" and "Asherah" (2 Kgs 21:3) to **Baals** and **Asherahs** (33:3). The plural of **sons** (33:6) as opposed to "son" (2 Kgs 21:6) may not have been a shift introduced by the Chronicler. The difference in Hebrew amounts to only one internal letter which could easily have confused copyists (see *Introduction: Translation and Transmission*). Moreover, the Septuagint (Greek version) of 2 Kgs 21:6 also reads "sons."

Third, the omission of the comparison between Ahab and Manasseh (33:3 // 2 Kgs 21:3) probably results from the Chronicler's view that Ahaz was the worst king of Judah and they are to be closely compared to the northern King (see 28:2-4).

Fourth, **in the Valley of Ben Hinnon** is added in 33:6 (// 2 Kgs 21:6) to specify the place of human sacrifice. Perhaps the reference was important for some unknown reason to the post-exilic readers of Chronicles.

Fifth, 33:7-10 paraphrases portions of 2 Kgs 21:7-10 for no apparent reason.

Sixth, at one point, the Chronicler specified that Manasseh seduced **Judah and the people of Jerusalem** (33:9 // 2 Kgs 21:9). Perhaps his purpose here was to help his post-exilic Jerusalemite readers more easily identify with the characters of the story.

The closing section (33:18-20) also contains several variations. First, Chronicles substitutes a reference to Manasseh's prayer in the place of his sins (33:18 // 2 Kgs 21:17). This shift demonstrates that the Chronicler's chief interest in the reign of Manasseh was his prayer of repentance. Second, the Chronicler also added the literary source from which he derived his account of Manasseh's prayer (33:19). Once again, his chief concern is evident. Third, the reasons for the variations in the burial notice are uncertain (33:20 // 2 Kgs 21:18).

Structure of 33:1-20

The Chronicler's variations from Kings gave a distinctive shape to his account. His record of Manasseh's reign divides into a five step symmetrical pattern (see figure 58).

Opening of Manasseh's Reign (33:1)

Manasseh's Heinous Sins (33:2-9)

Manasseh's Exile and Restoration (33:10-13)

Manasseh Ignores God (33:10)

Manasseh Taken Captive from Jerusalem (33:11)

Manasseh Prays for Deliverance (33:12)

Manasseh Brought Back to Jerusalem (33:13a)

Manasseh Acknowledges God (33:13b)

Manasseh's Extensive Restorations (33:14-17)

Closure of Manasseh's Reign (33:18-20)

Outline of 2 Chr 33:1-20 (figure 58)

Manasseh's reign begins and ends in the usual fashion (33:1, 18-20). The middle portion of the account reports Manasseh's change of heart while in exile (33:10-13). On both sides of this central material are two series of reports. Lengthy notices of the various sins he and Judah committed appear first (33:2-9). This catalogue of sins is balanced by reports of the king's reforms after he returned from exile (33:14-17).

Opening of Manasseh's Reign (33:1)

The Chronicler began by closely following the account of 2 Kgs 21:1 with the exception of omitting Manasseh's mother. Manasseh was **twelve years old** when his reign began and remained king for **fifty-five years** (33:1). Many historians have argued that Manasseh was co-regent with Hezekiah for about ten years. This suggestion seems likely and brings the king's reign within the limits established by some archaeological findings. Whatever the case, Manasseh reigned longer than any other Judean king.

Given the entirely negative portrait of 2 Kgs 21:1-18, the length of Manasseh's reign may have prompted the Chronicler to search for another perspective on the king. He considered long life a blessing from God, and the record of Kings gave no reason to expect such a blessing for Manasseh. (For a summary of the Chronicler's outlook on the blessing of long life see comments on 1 Chr 29:28.)

The explanation of Manasseh's longevity becomes clear in the Chronicler's presentation of the king's repentance and reforms (33:10-17).

Manasseh's Heinous Sins (33:2-9)

Chronicles continues to follow closely the record of 2 Kgs 21:2-9. This material is separated from the surrounding context by repetitions in 33:2a and 33:9b. Both verses note that Manasseh **did evil like the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites**. A similar connection exists between **evil in the eyes of the Lord** in 33:2a and 33:6b. As a result, this series of reports on Manasseh's violations of God's Law fall into two sections: Manasseh's various sins (33:2-6) and Manasseh's image in the temple (33:7-9).

33:2-9 Depends heavily on the language of Dt 18:9-13 (see also 28:2-4). There Moses warned Israel not to "imitate the detestable ways of the nations" (Dt 18:9). Moses even listed several specific sins mentioned by the Chronicler in 33:2-9.

The first report of Manasseh's various sins (33:2-5) follows the lead of Dt 18:9-13. It begins with the note that the king **did evil** in God's sight by **following the detestable practices of the nations** driven from the land (33:2 see also 33:9b). In a word, Manasseh had violated the warning of Dt 18. A number of passages indicate that the Canaanites were particularly wicked people deserving the judgment of Israel's conquest (see Gen 15:16; Dt 18:9-12; Lev 18:28; 20:23). This accusation against Manasseh highlights the severity of his apostasy. Like Ahaz before him (see 28:2-4), and the leaders of Judah in Zedekiah's day (see 36:14), Manasseh had reached such depths of sin that he deserved the judgment laid against the Canaanites.

The text follows this opening accusation against Manasseh with a catalogue of different sins: **high places, Baals and Asherahs, starry hosts** (33:3; see 21:11; 28:25), **foreign altars** in the temple (33:4-5), child sacrifice, **sorcery, divination, witchcraft, mediums, and spiritists** (33:6).

One aspect of this passage is repeated in the report that follows. Both 33:4-5 and 33:7-9 focus on the violation of the temple where the **Name** of God dwelled (see *Introduction: 11*) *Name of God*). Here the text focuses on **altars to all the starry hosts in both courts of the temple** (33:5). Later, a more serious violation occurs in the temple (33:7-9). The repetition of these themes strongly suggests that the Chronicler considered the violation of the temple Manasseh's worst sin. He defiled the place of God's holy presence and thereby incurred the wrath of God (see comments on 33:7-9).

The list of Manasseh's various sins concludes with the comment that they were **provoking** [the Lord] **to anger** (33:6b). The king of Judah stirred the wrath of God against himself and eventually suffered personal exile to Babylon (see 33:11).

The second report focuses on one of Manasseh's particular sins (33:7-9). The king **took the carved image** ("carved Asherah pole" [2 Kgs 21:7]) and **put it in God's temple** (33:7). As in the similar scene in the previous report (33:4-5), the severity of this violation is highlighted by the mention that the temple was the place where God promised to put his **Name forever** (33:7). As Solomon's

dedicatory prayer explained (see 6:14-42), the temple was the place of God's Name so that prayers could be heard and the people could be blessed in all kinds of circumstances (see *Introduction: 11) Name of God*).

To demonstrate the severity of Manasseh's sins, the text elaborates on the promise of the permanent presence of the Name. God's presence in the temple was the assurance that the **Israelites** would not have to **leave the land** again ... **if they will be careful to do everything** [God] **commanded them** (33:8). The Chronicler added the explanation that these commandments included **all the laws, decrees and ordinances given through Moses** (33:8). The standard of the Mosaic Law was the standard for divine judgment and blessing (see *Introduction: 14) Standards*). If Israel kept the Law then access to the Name would be available. Serious violations of the Law, however, would lead to judgment (see *Introduction: 10-27) Divine Blessing and Judgment*).

Manasseh hardly met the conditions for the preservation of the nation. As the Chronicler made clear, he **led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray** (33:9). Neither Manasseh nor the people observed the conditions of fidelity required for continuance in the land. Instead, the text returns to the opening of this section and explains that he **did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites** (33:9; see 33:2). With these words, the Chronicler closed on an extremely somber note. Manasseh was condemned to the judgment of God.

Manasseh's Exile and Restoration (33:10-13)

The middle portion of Manasseh's reign (33:10-13) forms a turning point between the king's sins (33:2-9) and his reforms (33:14-17).

Structure of 33:10-13

This central portion of Manasseh's reign consists of five balanced steps (see figure 58). This episode begins with Manasseh ignoring God's warnings (33:10), but ends with him acknowledging God (33:13b). In the center of the story is the king's cry to God for help (33:12). Leading to Manasseh's cry is his exile to Babylon (33:11); following the prayer is Manasseh's return to Jerusalem (33:13a).

Manasseh Ignores God (33:10)

The Chronicler began this segment of Manasseh's reign by indicating the rebellious attitude of the king and nation. This material abbreviates the record of 2 Kgs 21:10-16 where the prophetic word came against the king to no avail. **The Lord spoke** through his prophets against the sins of **Manasseh and his people** (33:10). As in 33:9, the Chronicler made it clear that Manasseh was not alone in his guilt. He led the nation astray so that all the people of Judah shared in his violations of God's Law. The

prophetic word against Manasseh and the nation was intended to illicit a response of repentance and humility (see 12:5). Yet, despite these warnings **they paid no attention** (33:10).

Once again, the importance of prophets in the Chronicler's history is evident (see *Introduction: 15) Prophets*). To heed the prophets brought divine blessing; to ignore them was to insure judgment. The repetition of this motif suggests that the Chronicler was deeply concerned that his own post-exilic readers were in danger of ignoring the prophets of their day. Among these prophets was the Chronicler himself whose message needed to be heard.

Manasseh Taken Captive from Jerusalem (33:11)

At this point the Chronicler entirely turned away from the record of Kings to focus on a different dimension to the reign of Manasseh. God responded to Judah's rejection of the prophets by sending **against them the army ... of the king of Assyria** (33:11). During the reign of Manasseh, several widespread rebellions took place among Assyria's vassal nations. It is likely that Manasseh was somehow involved in one of these rebellions. Whatever the case, the king of Assyria came against Manasseh to punish him for his disloyalty.

As the instrument of divine judgment, the king of Assyria made Manasseh his **prisoner** (33:11). The Chronicler's description highlighted the dishonor of this imprisonment. Judah's king was led away with **a hook in his nose** and in **bronze shackles** (33:11). Archaeological discoveries verify that the Assyrians actually inserted hooks through the noses of captives and attached them to chains (see also 2 Kgs 19:28; Ezek 19:4). Manasseh's **bronze shackles** allude to the captivity and exile of Jehoiachin, the last king of Judah (see 36:6). These descriptive details drew attention to the dishonor which Manasseh suffered. The Assyrians publicly humiliated him for his rebellion (33:10).

Interestingly enough, the Chronicler reported that the Assyrians took Manasseh **to Babylon** (33:11). At first glance, this destination is unexpected because the capital city of Assyria was Nineveh. Nevertheless, the Assyrians controlled Babylon at this time and may have dishonored Manasseh even further by taking him to the capital of another defeated people. The Chronicler's purpose for including this information is apparent. He mentioned Babylon to draw a connection between his post-exilic readers and Manasseh. They had gone into exile to Babylon just as Manasseh. This parallel opened the way for the Chronicler's readers to relate Manasseh's experience to their own experience.

Manasseh Prays for Deliverance (33:12)

Manasseh's captivity was one of **distress** (33:12), but he prayed for deliverance. The Chronicler used two characteristic phrases to describe the king's prayer. First, Manasseh **sought the favor of the Lord** (33:12). This expression may be translated more literally, "he entreated the face of God." To entreat the face of God was to seek his benevolent countenance, his favor (see Num 6:24). This phraseology alludes to God's promise after Solomon's dedicatory prayer. There God commanded the people to **seek my face** to find deliverance from trouble (7:14; see *Introduction: 19) Seeking*).

Manasseh prayed toward the temple as the people were to do when outside the land (see 6:34; Dan 6:10). His model prayer was designed to inspire the Chronicler's readers to see the importance of prayer in their day (see *Introduction: 17) Prayer*).

Second, the Chronicler noted that Manasseh **humbled himself greatly** (33:12). Once again, the allusion to 7:14 is evident. Manasseh recognized his disloyalty to God and appealed humbly to be restored through divine mercy (see *Introduction: 18) Humility*).

By noting this remarkable turn of events the Chronicler drew another strong connection between his readers and Manasseh. Solomon's temple not only served as the locus of prayer in Manasseh's day, but in the days of their own exile as well. Humble petitioning in and toward the temple of Jerusalem was their only hope for future blessing from God.

Manasseh Brought Back to Jerusalem (33:13a)

The Chronicler wasted no time describing the results of Manasseh's humble prayers. Just as Solomon had hoped in his dedicatory prayer (see 6:36-39), the Lord heard his prayer and **brought him back to Jerusalem** (33:13a). Even the severe punishment of exile from the land was reversed by prayers offered toward the temple. Moreover, God also brought Manasseh back **to his kingdom** (33:13a). A throne and crown replaced the humiliation of hook and shackles. God's forgiveness led to a complete reversal of Manasseh's misfortune.

It is apparent that the Chronicler intentionally drew attention to yet another parallel between the experience of Manasseh and his post-exilic readers. Just as the king was brought back to Jerusalem and his kingdom, they too had returned to Jerusalem.

Manasseh Acknowledges God (33:13b)

Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, Manasseh's attitude toward God was radically changed. He **knew that the Lord is God** (33:13b). Similar expressions occur frequently in Ezekiel's prophecies as descriptions of experiencing the power of God (e.g. Ezk 6:10,12,13 5). In these and many other cases, to **know** is more than to have factual awareness. It is to be so fully persuaded that Israel's God is supreme so that proper responses follow. Earlier Manasseh had worshipped a number of gods (see 33:3). His experience of deliverance from exile convinced him that true divinity rested in the God of Israel alone. By implication, Manasseh would no longer ignore divine instruction; a new life would follow his new conviction.

At this point the Chronicler drew another parallel between Manasseh and post-exilic Judah. Many of those who returned from exile had come to see the importance of loyalty to the Lord alone. Their experiences had caused them to renew their commitments to Israel's God as well. As time went by, these convictions grew stale. Manasseh's example, however, reminded them of the condition of the restored community when it first returned from Babylon. It was a time of strong devotion to the Lord. As we will see, this initial commitment now needed to grow into a fuller commitment of action.

Manasseh's Extensive Restorations (33:14-17)

In juxtaposition to the sins that led to Manasseh's exile (33:2-10), the Chronicler added further material to the account in Kings. He noted the changes which Manasseh brought to the land following his return. His account divides into two parts: military (33:14) and religious reforms (33:15-17).

Two military projects were high on Manasseh's list of restorations (compare 27:3-4). First, he **rebuilt the outer wall** of Jerusalem (33:14a). It is likely that the Assyrians breached this wall when they came to take Manasseh away to Babylon. In all events, to make the wall **much higher** was one of the king's demonstrations of God's blessings to Manasseh (see *Introduction: 24) Building and Destruction*).

Second, Manasseh placed troops **in all the fortified cities of Judah** (33:14b). Military outposts were important to the defensive strategy of Judah's kings. They were especially designed to control the routes likely to be used by an enemy. Restoring the military strength of Judah required the re-establishment of these posts.

Beyond this, Manasseh turned to re-establishing proper worship in Judah (33:15-17). These actions were twofold as well. First, he **got rid of the foreign gods ... the image ... the altars ... and threw them out of the city** (33:15). These actions were direct reversals of the catalogues of sins earlier in this chapter (33:2-6). Manasseh removed the foreign defilements of worship because he had come to recognize the Lord as God (see 33:13b). That conviction led him to destroy the ways of syncretism he had introduced after the reign of Hezekiah.

Second, Manasseh also re-established proper worship in a positive manner. He **restored the altar** in the temple (33:16). The reference here is to the bronze altar established by Solomon (see *Introduction: Appendix B - The Structures, Furnishings and Decorations of Solomon's Temple*).

Moreover, he **sacrificed fellowship offerings** and **thank offerings** on the altar (33:16). Much like other faithful kings, Manasseh not only purified the temple of foreign corruptions, but also re-established the active worship of God in the temple (see *Introduction: 6) Royal Observance of Worship*).

The Chronicler closed this material with an aside in 33:17. Although Manasseh himself had been faithful in his attempts to restore worship, **the people** were not able to free themselves completely from the ways of the past. They only worshipped **the Lord their God**, but they did so **at the high places**. This verse anticipates problems that will arise later in the Chronicler's history. Corruption in Judah was not entirely eliminated.

The significance of Manasseh's restoration efforts for the Chronicler's post-exilic audience is evident. Manasseh had focused on military and religious reform. The post-exilic community must do the same (see Neh 2:17; 13:1-22). The book of Kings presents Manasseh as the worst miscreant of Judah's history (see 2 Kgs 21:1-18). This feature of Kings made the Chronicler's point even more dramatic. If the great villain of Judah did these things after returning from exile, surely the post-exilic community should not stop short of working for the full restoration of Israel's military strength and the purity of her worship.

Closure of Manasseh's Reign (33:18-20)

In balance with the opening of Manasseh's reign (33:1), the Chronicler returned to the record of 2 Kgs 21:17-18. He paid Manasseh honor by noting that he was buried **with his fathers and in his palace** (i.e. in the palace area, see 2 Kgs 21:18 // 33:20). Manasseh's repentance and restoration efforts gained him this honored status in the Chronicler's eyes (see *Introduction: 28) Healing and Long Life/Sickness and Death*).

The most important aspect of this closing, however, appears in the Chronicler's additions to the record of Kings. Twice he varied from 2 Kgs 21:17-18 to note the sources of Manasseh's prayer as well as the prophetic word against him (33:18). The Apocryphal "Prayer of Manasseh" is of a much later origin and not in view here. Even so, it is evident that Manasseh's prayer was a central feature in Manasseh's reign (see *Introduction: 17) Prayer*). The Chronicler also used his characteristic word, **unfaithfulness** as a way of indicating the severity of the king's violations (33:19; see *Introduction: 21) Unfaithfulness*). These additions make it evident that Manasseh's sins and his prayer formed the heart of the Chronicler's concern with the king. He left his readers to contemplate further the relevance of these events for their situation.