

2 Kings 21:1-15. Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. His mother's name was Hephzibah. ² He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. ³ He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he also erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. ⁴ He built altars in the temple of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem I will put my Name." ⁵ In both courts of the temple of the LORD, he built altars to all the starry hosts. ⁶ He sacrificed his own son in^a the fire, practiced sorcery and divination, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger. ⁷ He took the carved Asherah pole he had made and put it in the temple, of which the LORD had said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my Name forever. ⁸ I will not again make the feet of the Israelites wander from the land I gave their forefathers, if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them and will keep the whole Law that my servant Moses gave them." ⁹ But the people did not listen. Manasseh led them astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites. ¹⁰ The LORD said through his servants the prophets: ¹¹ "Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols. ¹² Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. ¹³ I will stretch out over Jerusalem the measuring line used against Samaria and the plumb line used against the house of Ahab. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. ¹⁴ I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance and hand them over to their enemies. They will be looted and plundered by all their foes, ¹⁵ because they have done evil in my eyes and have provoked me to anger from the day their forefathers came out of Egypt until this day."

Our Lord is the master of patience and grace

Our Lord is the master of patience and grace! How wonderfully true this is! The history of God's Old Testament people, the story of God's New Testament believers, and the record of our own lives, brings out these divine characteristics of our God over and over again. Our Lord is the God, the master, of patience and grace!

As the Lord passes before Moses on Mt. Sinai he describes himself in this way, ***"The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. (Exodus 34:6).*** And it was a good thing for the people of Israel that he was such a compassionate and patient God. For in the context of Exodus 34, God had just recently

shown the Israelites incredible patience and grace. Not too long before this description of himself, the people of Israel had demonstrated their complete lack of patience and restraint. Impatient for Moses' return they fashioned for themselves a golden calf. They bowed down and worshipped what their impatient eyes could see and they disrespected and dishonored the God who had time and again shown them almighty power and amazing grace and tender patience. Yet despite the disobedience and their constant grumbling and their lack of trust God was still patient with them. What a God of remarkable grace and patience! They would wander in the desert. They would be chastised for their disobedience, but God would be faithful to his people and to all his promises.

Generations had passed by since those days in the desert. God had blessed his people, given them the Promised Land, and God saw to it that his house of worship, the temple had been built. Through these generations kings had come and kings had gone. There were kings who had tested the patience of God, and kings that honored God and were thankful for his patience and grace. A good king named Hezekiah, had prayed for the patience of God and God spared Jerusalem for the sake of his faithful servant, King Hezekiah. God was patient and merciful with his people and did not bring upon them the destruction that they rightly deserved, but he gave them more time. God continued to be faithful. He continued to be patient with his people.

But God's patience would seemingly be taken to a whole new level when good King Hezekiah's son - wicked King Manasseh - took over the throne. With all the virtues of King Hezekiah, Manasseh unfortunately, seemed to have inherited none. His was a life of extreme sin, deplorable wickedness, and reckless rebellion. He was wicked in every way and it seems that he tested God's patience in every way imaginable.

Manasseh had reinstated the detestable practices of the Canaanites. While his father, Hezekiah, had torn down the altars and shrines at the high places, Manasseh, made sure that they were rebuilt. He undid the religious reform that his father accomplished and Manasseh led the ungodly charge into pagan practices. Manasseh worshipped the starry hosts and served the pagan gods. This king of Judah, the leader of God's people, practiced sorcery and divination. Instead of praying to the Lord, he consulted mediums and spirits. Manasseh even offered his own son as part of his repulsive worship of these pagan gods. He did *much* evil in the eyes of the Lord. And if this wasn't enough, he "set up shop" in the temple; he performed these disgusting acts of disrespect in God's own house.

Now let me ask you, "How would you do in a situation like that?!" What if someone came into your house and repeatedly did something that was disrespectful, distasteful, and offensive to you. Wouldn't your blood boil? Wouldn't your anger get the best of you? If someone came into your house repeatedly spit in your face with their disrespectful and disgusting behavior, there would come a point when you would have had enough; and it would come much sooner rather than later. By nature and in practice our patience runs thin. Even in a situation far less trying, we blow up. We lose our patience, sometimes at the smallest things. And I am absolutely certain that your patience would not have lasted as long as God was patient with Manasseh and the people of Judah; for 55 years God put up with all of this.

Make no mistake about it, God is not powerless. He does not simply stand by and watch, because there is nothing that he can do. No, he is not a helpless push over. Instead we remember how God describes himself. ***The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished...*** God is patient, but he is also just. He is so generous with second chances, he is so generous in giving the sinner time to repent, but God is also a God of justice so a time will come when chastisement and ultimately punishment will be carried out for those who do not give him the fruits of repentance that he demands. God is faithful to his promises of grace and to his promises of judgment.

We were reminded of this truth about our God in Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants in the gospel for today. After giving those wicked men chance after chance, finally it was decided that those wretches would receive a wretched end. And so it was with Manasseh's Judah. Our ears tingle and our knees shake when we think of the punishment that God was about to lay down on his people. ***Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. ¹³ I will stretch out over Jerusalem the measuring line used against Samaria and the plumb line used against the house of Ahab. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.***

Judgment would come, but certainly not without giving his people plenty of chances to avoid such judgment. True to his own description of himself God was *slow* to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. The wicked and awful actions, the disgusting and vile practices, the blatant disrespect, and the terrible indifference of God's beloved people caused God great anger and sorrow. And yet in a measured way God responded. God did not strike suddenly and unexpectedly, but he gave his people proper warning. Even in this proclamation of judgment he gave them yet another chance to repent. God sent not just one prophet, but prophets, to report that it had been decided that these wretched sinners would receive a wretched end. God gave them adequate time and plenty of chances, but now justice was coming.

A certain theologian once made this rather astute observation about God's patience, "God is in control of all things, including himself". (A.W. Pink, "*The Attributes of God*") How often don't we let a situation get the best of us? How often don't we lose our cool and lose control of ourselves in anger and frustration? We blow up in anger and impatience against our children and our neighbors, our spouse or our family, for far less. Instead of acting in anger and frustration, instead of punishing his children in a sudden fit of rage, God gave his children chance after chance, and finally he acted in justice and discipline.

While all of this is certainly a good advice for us and a remarkable lesson in patience for our lives; the reason we truly appreciate this section of Scripture is it shows us the incredible patience and grace of God that saves us. This lesson does more than teach us a thing or two about the virtue of patience so that we can be patient with others in our life, but this lesson is so incredible because it demonstrates the extraordinary patience, the remarkable grace, and the holy justice of our God.

God is incredibly patient with us. For years of disobedience, our rebellious years of our youth, the poor choices that we made last year, last week, that we still make today, and

yet God gives more chances to repent. He gives us more time to live for him and serve him and produce fruits that please him.

The ways that we disrespect him and dishonor him may not seem as blatant and outlandish as the ways of Manasseh, but still, they hurt him. They should pile up. They should be held against us. Every time that we had loved something more than him, every time we failed to come to him in prayer and we trusted and loved other things, this should all be held against us. He should wipe us off the face of the earth. He should wipe us clean like a dinner plate and set us off to the side and be done with us. But yet he is patient and gracious. He is patient with the sinner who deliberately dives headlong into a sinful lifestyle, and he patiently leads weak and stubborn sinners to repentance time and again. He gives us chance after chance. He gives us time. He gives us grace. Instead of wiping us clean like a dish, he wipes away all of our sins. He wipes our slate, our plate, clean through the blood of Jesus. Our Lord is the master of patience and grace.

That is what makes our God unique, that is what makes our God awesome and remarkable, gracious and divine. If the life of Manasseh is a story of God's patience, the end of his story is a story of God's grace. After all those years of horrible and vile and offensive living this wicked king was sent off to Babylon with a slave's hook put in his nose and bound by bronze shackles, but Manasseh, this most evil of men, even he, was led to repentance. 2 Chronicles 33 records for us this unexpected end to a story that could only be explained by God's patience and grace. ***12 In his distress he sought the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. 13 And when he prayed to him, the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God.***

Afterward Manasseh was a changed man. He rebuilt God's city, he restored God's house, he got rid of the foreign gods, and he encouraged the people to worship the LORD God. After a lifetime of wasting his life he used his remaining years to serve the LORD. And God graciously accepted his confession and his service. Our Lord is the master of patience and grace!

Maybe you can relate all too well with this story of Manasseh. Too many years misspent. Or maybe you know someone who could benefit from hearing this story. Maybe you know someone who hasn't been to church in a while, maybe you know someone who has lived a majority of their life, 55 years even, away from God, deliberately running away from his Word and his ways. Don't rule anyone outside of God's grace. Look for your opportunities to share the good news of Jesus. Look for opportunities to invite and welcome back to church those who have been away for a long time. Because this is the God we worship and we love. He is the master of patience and grace. Each of us can consider the patience and grace that God has shown to us.

So dear people of God, let us not see this incredible lesson as a reason to misuse God's goodness and take advantage of his patience. Let us not receive God's grace in vain. Instead let us be compelled by God's incredible kindness to produce the fruit that our master wants us to produce during this time of grace. Let us praise and thank, serve and obey our gracious God, because our Lord is indeed the master of patience and grace. Amen.