

## The Hebrew Corner

The apostle Paul is often held out as the prime example of how wicked men can change due to having an encounter with God. However, in the Tanach is a story that rivals the account given in the book of Acts concerning Paul.

In 2 Kings 21:1-2, we read the following:

“Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hephzibah. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.”

Nowhere in the book of 2 Kings do we get an indication that Manasseh did anything but evil during his reign. The details are given in 2 Kings 21:3-9:

“For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. And he built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD said, In Jerusalem will I put my name. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, of which the LORD said to David, and to

Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever: Neither will I make the feet of Israel move any more out of the land which I gave their fathers; only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them. But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the children of Israel.”

High place in Hebrew is bamah (במה, bah-MAH), a hill, a mountain, a man-made platform or mound on which sacrifices to Baal and other idols were made. The phrase “pass through the fire”, refers to an ancient practice of sacrificing children by fire to the heathen god Molech, a name derived from the Hebrew word for king, melech (מלך, MEH-lehch). This gives a strong example how far Manasseh had strayed from God, sacrificing his son to the false god Molech, instead of the true God and King of the universe, and encouraging the people of Judah to do the same. Of additional interest in this passage is the word translated as wizard, which in Hebrew is yihd'anee (ידעני, yihd-duh-ah-NEE), from the Hebrew root yadah (ידע, yah-DAH), meaning to know. Seeking to know the spiritual world by attempting to contact spirits, whether by a séance or other means, is forbidden by God in the bible (see Leviticus 19:26). Consulting with people who do this, then, as Manasseh did, is a serious sin, To compound all of this, 2 Kings 21:16 indicates that Manasseh killed people indiscriminately:

“Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the

LORD.”

So is this the whole story of Manasseh? Let's turn to 2 Chronicles 33, which gives its own account of this king. 2 Chronicles 33:1-10 gives a very similar portrayal of Manasseh as the account in 2 Kings 21. After these verses the story takes an unusual turn (2 Chronicles 33:11-13):

“Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God.”

Evidently Manasseh was not treated well in Babylon, although we are not told what the nature of the affliction was. Faced with this affliction, he humbled himself before God, likely for the first time, and prayed to him. God heard his prayer, sinful as he was, and brought him out of bondage, and back to Judah. In Jerusalem, even more evidence of the change in Manasseh is noted (2 Chronicles 33:15-16):

“And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the LORD, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel.”

Peace offerings in Hebrew is zibchai sh'lameem (זבחי שלמים, zihv-CHAI shuh-lah-MEEM), and thank offerings is zibchai toda (תודה זבחי, zihv-CHAI toh-DAH). Peace offerings and thank offerings were prescribed by God in the Torah (Leviticus 7:11-13). Manasseh was now acting according to God's plan rather than against it. The giant first step for Manasseh was to humble himself before God, and then to ask him for help.

May we all humble ourselves as did Manasseh, and follow his plan for us, to receive Jesus as our savior, and act according to the example that he set for us. God bless you and your family during the month.