

This is Thursday, the 5th of November, 2015. We're continuing our study of kings and prophets, looking now at the reign of a guy we like to call Bad King Manasseh in chapter 21 of 2 Kings. We'll also be looking at the ministry of another of the minor prophets who was commissioned by God to deliver a message at this time to the people who were experiencing this long and evil time of government in the southern kingdom of Judah. Let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, and then we'll begin.

Father, we're grateful for all of the circumstances that You have brought about that have conspired together to bring us to this time of opportunity as we assemble to fellowship in Your Word. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will minister to each heart and will superintend the delivery of the message of truth from Your Word so that each of us is encouraged, motivated, and instructed in those things that will enable us to live our lives in a way that pleases You. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. We began really last time looking at this triad of kings that pretty much define, or put at least a punctuation mark at the end of, the existence of the southern kingdom of Judah, which began with Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, and has continued with an unbroken line of descendants of King David. Unlike the northern kingdom, as you remember, we had a succession of dynasties, although it's more like the TV Dynasty than a real dynasty because most of them didn't last very long at all.

But in the southern kingdom, now it is the only remaining kingdom. The northern kingdom has gone out. Manasseh is the first king to not have any experience of there being a northern kingdom and a sometime ally, sometime enemy up in the north.

And we read about this. It is paralleled in 2 Chronicles 33. You have it here in—sorry if I hit my microphone there—in 2 Kings chapter 21. Manasseh was 12 years old when he became king. This, of course, is the beginning of his co-regency with his father about five years into the 15-year extended time of Hezekiah's life. And so there's a 10-year overlap with his father.

So he's actually around 22 when Hezekiah passes away and he takes sole possession of the reins of government. And upon his father's death, he did evil in the sight of the Lord according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. And this theme of removing the evil only to have it return is echoed here.

God first cast this evil out when He sent Joshua and the children of Israel into this land nearly a thousand years previously. Almost 10 centuries previously, Joshua had led the children of Israel in, and they purged the Amorites, the Canaanites, out of the land, and with them their idolatrous and child-sacrificing ways and practices. In the same way here, we're reminded that God had cast out the evil from before the children of Israel so that they could come in and maintain their covenanted worship and practice of obedience and witness to the nations here in this land, which actually was theirs by right of birth.

It belonged to Abraham. God gave it to Abraham. Abraham came in and took possession in the sense of walking it, and everywhere his sandal trod, that land became his according to the word of the Lord by covenant. But they never were able to take full possession and exploit the land and become fruitful and multiply and fill the land because of wickedness, and they end up going down into bondage and slavery, the descendants of Abraham do. The sons of Jacob end up going down there and dwelling in the land first to escape a famine.

Why did the famine come? Who controls agricultural conditions in this land? God does. God essentially removed Abraham's family, his descendants, Jacob and his rather large group of 70 people, down to Egypt where they rejoined Joseph. You know that whole story. And they never really returned. And over the course of time, because they don't return—and the Bible is silent on whether they should have and didn't, or if it was God's will—that they slowly be subject to mission creep on the part of the Egyptians, who initially were their hosts and later become their owners and taskmasters.

It's an interesting question about why and how that happened, but it happened. And then you have the deliverance under Moses, if for no other reason than to provide us one of the primary, if not the primary, pictures of salvation in the Bible: deliverance under the blood of the Passover Lamb out of bondage and slavery in Egypt into a time of sojourn that will end in a land of promise and the receiving of an inheritance. And that is the metaphor; it is the paradigm for what our life is like. We are born in slavery to sin, and we are delivered by the blood of our Lamb.

The song is sung to Him in Revelation: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive glory and honor because He has redeemed us by His blood.” And so you have that picture. So then there is the sojourn, and because they lack the preparation and the spiritual fortitude and faith to enter the land within a year of leaving Egypt, they end up wandering for 40 years. And this is necessary to purge the nascent, incipient nation of Israel. They are not yet a nation. They are a people, but they are not a nation. They don't have a homeland. They don't have a formal system of government, and so on.

But the 40 years of wandering, of course, in real terms changes out the generation. Everyone who leaves Egypt with Moses, except for Caleb and Joshua, dies, to include Moses himself. And there is a new generation, a regeneration, that enters the land of promise with Yeshua, the deliverer and conqueror. Moses is more associated with the time of slavery. Yeshua, Joshua, is associated with the time of victorious entrance and conquest. And there is a lot to be mused upon in that with reference to the first and second advent of the Lord Jesus. He is first the Lamb that was slain, providing redemption, propitiation, reconciliation, atonement—all of the things that are seen in the Law of Moses are pictured and explicated, as they like to say, that we are seeing on Sundays in our study of Christ and the sacrifices.

And then at the entrance into this land, you have the picture of the Lord Jesus in victory and in deliverance and into permanent dwelling in a prepared place, a promised covenanted place. Well, all of this is background, and it is referenced ever so briefly here when it says that Manasseh did evil in the sight of the Lord according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. This harks back to their purpose, their definition. Who are they? What defines the people of God? They are the ones whom God delivered out of bondage, sustained during the time of sojourn, and delivered into this land of covenanted promise and blessing. And He drove out before them evil.

Now they themselves are reintroducing it. And what is the consequence? What is the penalty? What is the outcome, inevitably so, of re-embracing what God cast out and enjoined them to stay away from and not to practice? Do not become like the nations. You remember what we like to call the cycles of blessing and the cycles of discipline, the things that were mentioned on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim when they were first looking at going into the land, and God said, “If you are faithful and obedient, here are the blessings. If you are unfaithful and disobedient, here are the curses.” Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal.

And one of the curses was, “If you embrace the practices of the people that I am driving out before you, I will drive you out just like I did them. I will bring upon you the curses that I am bringing upon them. I will treat you no differently than I treat them, because you by choice have identified yourself with them instead of with your God, your Maker, your covenant King, capital K.”

So this is what has been cyclically happening. There is sort of a spiral—not a horizontal spiral, kind of a slanty diagonal spiral—where they come up and then they go down, and they come up and they go down. This happened all the way from the days of the judges. Remember Gilgal, Gilgal, Gilgal? They would be under oppression, and God would send them to deliver. They would cry out to the Lord, and they would be delivered. And then they would get very happy in that moment. Then they would become complacent. Then they would become apathetic. Then they would become indifferent. Then they would become disobedient. Then they would become rebellious. God would put them under judgment. Then another crying out to the Lord, and around and around and around it went.

Well, that was the beginning of their dwelling in the land. This now, toward the end of their dwelling in the land, is a bookend and is similar. There was initially a great leadership provided to the nation of Israel as they came into the land. They had a great example, Joshua. He functioned as their military leader, their political leader, and their spiritual leader. He wore all three hats as they came into the land.

In the descent of Judah here at the end, we have these three kings, and each of them has sort of an emphasis, if you will. Hezekiah we see largely as the political leader. He's bound up with dealing with the Assyrians, trying to make policy, trying to make alliances, and he makes a pretty bad hash of that job. In terms of the leadership for spiritual things, Manasseh is sort of the antitype of Joshua. He leads them in exactly the wrong direction. He's the anti-Joshua, the opposite of Joshua.

In much the same way that Hezekiah failed in the politics—he invites the Babylonians in, which he should not have done; he tries to pay off the Assyrians, which he should not have done; he extends his reign for his own personal purposes instead of recognizing God's timing, which he should not have done; he strips the gold from

the temple and sets a bad example for the people, which he should not have done—now we have Manasseh, whose sins are not so much political or military as spiritual. He is a spiritual antitype, and that's what we see here. He did evil in the sight of the Lord. It's the first thing out of the gate in terms of description.

He rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah, his father, had destroyed. It makes me wonder, if they are the same high places, how destroyed were they? If he rebuilt the high places that were destroyed, evidently he went to the same locations and reinstituted, probably with fresh boards and fresh rocks and perhaps fresh people. But it's almost nostalgia for the people who, in the days of Hezekiah's father Ahaz, had gotten into these bad practices, and they've been biding their time under the 29-year reign of Hezekiah. And less than a generation has passed, and now it's all coming back.

This is like when they resurrect bad things in the movies, and you've got the Brady Bunch movie, and you have the Planet of the Apes revisited for the umpteenth time, and you have Rocky revisited for the umpteenth time, and all of these old things. There is no new thing under the sun, and because there is such a lack of creativity, all they can do is dig up the dead bones of stuff that never should have been made in the first place and make it over again. Well, this is what is happening now under Manasseh in spiritual terms. They are digging up the dead bones of destroyed pagan Canaanite Amorite worship, and they are literally dusting it off and propping it back up and making this the order of the day.

He raised up altars for Baal and made a wooden image, just as Ahab king of Israel had done. Those who fail to learn from history, what happens to them? They are doomed to repeat it. Within the living memory of most of the people in the southern kingdom, the northern kingdom has been taken out, and it has been made abundantly clear by prophet after prophet after prophet that the reason for that was Baal worship and the practices of King Ahab and his whole dynasty that he was a part of. They are doing the very same thing. “Well, we are different down here. We can pull it off. They just didn't do it right. We will do it a better way.”

And he worshipped all the hosts of heaven and served them. He also built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord said, “In Jerusalem I will put My name.” And when he says built altars, he built altars to these hosts of heaven. These are worship of essentially demonic entities. This is astrology, this is soothsaying, and so on. We saw this when we first looked at his malfeasance. He built altars for all the hosts of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. He made his son pass through the fire, practiced soothsaying, witchcraft, consulted spiritist mediums. If there is anything that would be a sin of the high hand in God's eyes, Manasseh figured it out and did it, and led the people of Judah into following him. He found sympathy and found those who thought this was all a good idea.

He even set a carved image of Asherah that he had made in the house of which the Lord had said to David and to Solomon his son—you remember what happened when one of his grandfathers just presumed to walk in there where the priests would go? He doesn't just walk in. He sets up an idol in the house of the Lord. And you notice, once again, there is the word of the Lord: “I have chosen this place out of all Israel. I will put My name there forever. I will not make the feet of Israel wander anymore from the land which I gave their fathers, if they are careful”—this is verse 8—“to do according to all that I have commanded them and according to all the Law that My servant Moses commanded them.”

All of this stuff about the unconditional covenant to Abraham—you know, the land promises and the people promise and all the rest of it—and we are told in seminary, all the books and everybody says, “Well, it was an unconditional covenant. That is why God walked through the pieces and Abram did not.” I am sorry, but everywhere I look in the Word of God, the fulfillment of those promises is conditional. It is conditioned upon statements just like this in verse 8. They will have a permanent inheritance in the land so long as, only if, they are careful to do according to all that I have commanded them.

The northern kingdom, the ten northern tribes, have been blown out of the land and scattered almost irretrievably. So how is that the maintenance of an unconditional promise fulfillment? It is not. They disobeyed, and the covenant is off. The deal is off. The promise is no longer functional.

This is true for you and for me. The promises of God are many. They are precious. They are life-giving. They are blessing and inheritance rich. But they are conditional. We will inherit, we will serve, we will enjoy the presence of the Lord Jesus and all of the privileges of the New Jerusalem and the kingdoms that are to come if we endure, if we are faithful.

Now this is what we are coming to tonight. If we endure, we shall reign with Him. Remember that? It is one of the things Paul says. If we endure. You have need of endurance so that after you have suffered a while, you receive the promises. You have need of endurance.

What does it mean to have patience? What does it mean to have endurance? You think about, suppose that you had your wits about you. You are a faithful, God-fearing, Old Testament Scripture-believing Israelite in the southern kingdom of Judah. Hezekiah dies. Manasseh comes to the throne. And all of the sudden you see this grotesque, manifest, rebellious wickedness being perpetrated in your land, the land of King David, the land of King Solomon, the land of the covenant people of God, God's presence on Mount Zion. And you see all of this heinous practice being perpetrated and expanded and popularized by King Manasseh. Talk about vexing your righteous soul.

So what do you do? This description is a lively picturing of exactly what faithful believers in Judah—and there were many still in the kingdom—but they are powerless to overthrow or otherwise resist the king. They don't have leverage. They don't have a representative. He is completely uninterested in their cause or their case or their words. Prophets come and warn him, and he is heedless. And these things go forward because there is a center of mass in the people that is willing. Manasseh didn't pull this all off single-handedly. Restoring the high places, you have to have people attending and giving and supporting, and his actions here are widely supported because there is a substantial majority of people in Judah who actually are sympathetic to all of this wickedness. And the faithful believers, as they usually are, are a minority.

Well, we are moving through this quickly because there is a prophet who is going to rise up and address this question for us. What do you do in a situation like this when you are not in sympathy with the king, and you are not in sympathy with the evil that is being popularized and practiced and made the rule of the day? And you suffer if you resist it. You suffer if you don't go along with it. You suffer, and you are penalized if you are not an active part of it. What do you do? Well, there is a prophet of God that is going to talk about this extensively.

Let's just finish our review here. They paid, in verse 9, no attention to the Word of God, and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel. A lot of missionaries and European Christians came to this country and said, "Oh, the Native Americans are primitive, and they don't have morals, and they don't dress enough or well enough, and they don't have the morals that we have," and they were decried and looked down upon. But you look at what has become of the society that they began, and we are a hundredfold worse as a culture and as a society here in this country than anyone that was displaced by God when Christians first came over here. Same situation.

The Lord spoke, verse 10, by His servants the prophets, saying, "Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations, acting more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him"—how many times has that been emphasized now?—"therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel: I am bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle."

This is a more potent prediction than even God made for the northern kingdom when He sent Elijah and Elisha and other prophets up there. They didn't say, "I am going to hammer these people so hard that anybody who hears of it, their ears are going to ring." "I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab. I will judge them with the same judgment because I will come to the same measurement, the same verdict, the same conclusion about them as the northern kingdom. I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will forsake the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies. They shall become victims of plunder to all of their enemies."

This was a part of the promise God delivered to these people through Moses hundreds of years before. You follow their practices, you will follow them in judgment. "Because they have done evil in My sight and have provoked Me to anger since the day their fathers came out of Egypt even to this day."

There is an interesting principle here. Why does God go all the way back to their time in Egypt? Hadn't there been repentance and revival? Hadn't there been good times and good generations and good King Jehoshaphat and teaching and repentance and so on? Why is God now holding against them all of their failures and all of their sins going back to their ancestors for the last several hundred years? And God says, "I am going to bring judgment on them for everything they have done since the time they left Egypt." It is as though God is resurrecting old forgiven sins, is it not? And is that a biblical principle?

Clint Eastwood made a movie called *Unforgiven*, but this is unforgiven in a little different sense. You are forgiven and then your forgiveness is revoked. We have any notion of that in Scripture? Any example of it? Any parable the Lord Jesus might have told about a debt being forgiven and then, because of bad attitude, self-centeredness, lack of faith and obedience, someone's debt is de-forgiven? The forgiveness is rescinded and the debt is once again due?

You see it here in the Old Testament. You see it from the lips of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament more than once. In the example prayer that He gives to the disciples: "Our Father in heaven," dot, dot, dot, "forgive us as we forgive others." If we are unforgiving, we are unforgiven—not just on fresh stuff. If we bear grudges, if we move in the direction of evil like these people have done, they have undone the righteousness of the early days of Hezekiah, haven't they? They have reverted to the days of Ahaz. And God says, "Well, I'm going to revert to the days when I held all your sins against you. You're going to revert; I will revert."

Somebody once coined a term, reversionism, to refer to this syndrome, and that's what it is: reverting, going backwards. Isn't it interesting that the harbinger of this time, the reign of Manasseh, this long total of 55 years where he has governmental power, was—the portent of it was—the shadow on the steps of Ahaz reverting, going backwards 10 steps? It's almost like going backward 10 commandments. It's like going backward to before the reforms of Hezekiah. If you go backward from the time of Hezekiah, whose reign are you in? Evil King Ahaz, his father. And Manasseh revives—he's the other side of the threefold prop here—he's renewing and reviving the evil practices of his grandfather.

So you have grandfather, father, and now son. And Hezekiah had his problems, but he at least began well and had a great restoration. But all of that is reversed. They've gone backward, and God says, "I will go backward. I will forsake the remnant of My inheritance," verse 14. "I will deliver them into the hand of their enemies. They shall become victims of plunder to all their enemies because they have done evil in My sight and have provoked Me to anger since the day their fathers came out of Egypt."

I will recall and resurrect all of the charges against this people. I will visit the iniquities of the fathers on the children. This is what God is saying. And He had said at one point, "I won't do that." Well, the promises and the gracious expressions of compassion and long-suffering and mercy from God can be revoked. They can be removed. They can be rescinded. And it is sobering to see that God is calling against these people sins that go back 900 years.

As we talked about last Sunday, there are costs, there are consequences of sin that go beyond just the immediate circumstances. It is taken into account by the Lord God in heaven, and He will not only allow passive consequences—sin tends to have its own built-in bad news—but God will actively judge. He will remove His protection. He will remove His provision. He will remove His presence. He will remove His blessing. And He will revoke His promises on the disobedient.

It is no casual thing. It is not a light thing for us to become apathetic and indifferent about the God who delivered us through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and that precious price that was paid for us. Reminded in Hebrews, if we sin willfully after receiving a knowledge of the truth—remember that in chapter 10? Have we received a knowledge of the truth? That is believers, right? The only truth for an unbeliever is Jesus Christ is the Savior, sin, righteousness, and judgment. But for believers, it is the rain falling many times on the field and all it is producing is thorns.

If we sin willfully—that is chapter 6—if we sin willfully after receiving a knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. Well, I thought God said there was always a sacrifice. I thought that was part of His provision. That provision is removed. That option is off the table. There remains no more sacrifice for sins, only a fearful expectation of judgment. This is God dealing with recalcitrant, rebellious, disobedient believers, and it is a serious thing. God is not kidding around.

He's not benevolent. I heard—I was reading something today about somebody was saying Carl Sagan pegged religion when he said that science is always subject to revision, and scientists are great people because they'll listen to the work of another scientist and say, "Oh, well, obviously your experiment has proven me wrong. Isn't that wonderful?" And all these benevolent, benign, wonderfully disposed scientists just say, "Oh, well, I'm so glad the science is moving forward. They're not jealous of their jobs. They're not trying to defend their grants. They're not jealous of their tenure. They're not in competition with other professors and other scientists. Oh no, they're all these wonderfully objective—as long as science is moving forward, that's wonderful. The fact that my

life's work has just been proven wrong by your experiment? Oh no, I'm so happy. We'll revise it and go forward."

But religion? Oh no, it's all dogma and it never changes. And Carl Sagan said, "I've never heard of religion changing in the light of new information." Well, I would submit to you that Carl Sagan may have known some stuff about astronomy and his particular field. He didn't know anything about religion and his view of Christianity. And he said this several times. He caricatured Christianity as belief in a bearded old white guy sitting in the heavens tallying sparrows. He said that several times, just diminishing Christian faith into belief in some sort of old bearded guy up there majoring in minor details.

Well, that's aside from the blasphemous content and import. It is wrong. God isn't some grandfatherly type up there. He's not doddering. He's not indifferent. He is the all-powerful engineer. As much as science has ever been able to figure out and speculate on, they don't know a thimbleful of what God knows. God not only knows it; God did it. Science seems to want to take credit for what they discover, like when they figure out that there's six kinds of quarks. Well, you would think that they're strutting around as though they invented quarks.

It's taken them decades to even figure out that there's more atoms than the Bohr model. I feel kind of cheated that my education only gave me the little planetary system with a nucleus made of protons and neutrons and a few little electrons flying around and shells and valences, and we thought, boy, they've really cracked the foundations of physics now with the Bohr model of the atom. Well, now that's all out the window. They don't even talk about neutrons and protons anymore. It's all muons and gluons and quarks and I don't know what all. I missed out. I'm past it. I can't go back and learn all that now.

They estimate that there could be as many as 100 subatomic particles, each with properties of spin and charge, and this has an effect on the speed of light because protons get absorbed and re-emitted by pairs of these matter-antimatter—I mean, it's just—and they think, you know, they're just so vastly advanced. This stuff is kindergarten child's play. You remember tens man and ones man when you were in kindergarten? At least when I was in kindergarten back in the dark ages. Little cardboard guy, and he had fingers, and one guy was the ones man and he had fingers one through nine, and then there was tens man next to him and he would keep track of the tens. So if you got the number 29, tens man is holding up two fingers and ones man has nine fingers, and that was numbers.

Well, all of this sophisticated, you know, particle accelerator stuff that they're trying to figure out in science, God—He who sits in the heavens—will laugh at how smart they think they are. And they haven't got a hold of the tiniest fraction of one strand of hair in the elephant's tail, much less the trunk and the legs or figuring out the whole elephant. It's pathetic how the wisdom of men is such foolishness to God.

However, when we think that we've got it figured out, we think we have a better way, we go this King Manasseh route. God says, "Fine, you think you're so smart. You can have the consequences of your foolishness, which is going to hurt you in the end all by itself. You're running against the grain of God's universe, and it's going to hurt you all by itself." But for believers who have a knowledge of the truth, judgment will come, active judgment on top of that.

I had somebody ask me this question a couple months back, and I don't know how adequate an answer I gave, but I'm here to tell you from the Word of God, especially this section right here, that sin doesn't just have passive consequences, sort of a built-in penalty like taking drugs and then you become an addict, or illicit sex and you get a STD. It's for believers, and that's all I care about, is believers. Unbelievers, they're on their own. Their issue for them is Christ. The issue for us is God's truth, faithfulness, and obedience in the light of that truth.

And if we willfully neglect after we have come to a knowledge of the truth, there is active targeted judgment. There is the withdrawal of God's presence, His blessings, His provisions, His protections. All of those things can and will be removed, and it is a fearful thing—one of the biggest understatements in the Bible—it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Remember Jesus said, "Don't fear somebody that can just kill your body. You need to fear your Father in heaven, who can cast your body and your soul into Hades," a place of unrelenting punishment.

Punishment. We entered into an agreement with God, and it's not all Him and nothing of us. It is incumbent upon us. We owe God faithfulness. We owe Him obedience. We owe Him love and loyalty. And it is the height

of Manasseh-like hubris and arrogance and stupidity to make something else the priority, especially to go with the ways of the world and make that a priority.

If the world is doing it, if it's trending on Facebook, if everybody is tweeting about it, if it is going viral on YouTube, it's probably something for a God-fearing believer to stay away from. Because if you're doing what God wants you to do, you will not be on the wide road. You will not be going through a broad gate. It'll be a narrow road. It'll be a lonely place. If you're going to find life, few there be that find it. And we need to be alert. We need to be diligent.

God's got plenty of counterexamples. He's got plenty of bad people and bad children. There is a scarcity, and there is a great crying need in God's plan and purpose for faithful, obedient, motivated, endure-to-the-end believers, those with the long spirit that Solomon talks about in Ecclesiastes. Manasseh is the antitype, the counterexample.

God says, "I will bring against them all of My anger that has been stored up ever since I delivered these people." Now what does that mean to us? If He says, "Since the day I brought them out of Egypt," He's going back to their beginnings as an entity, and that's what God will do for us if we go the Hebrews 10 route. God can unforgive and resurrect everything that argues against us from the point of our salvation. Notice He doesn't say going back to the days of when stuff happened with the patriarchs. It's back to Egypt. It's back to the salvation point.

I so appreciate that God has separated my sins from me as far as the east is from the west, that He remembers them no more, that He has purged me with hyssop and I am clean. He's washed me and I'm whiter than snow. He has assigned me the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in Him, as we saw in Ephesians, we have so many wonderful blessings and opportunities and potentials and promises. You can lose every bit of that, every bit of it, by carelessness, indifference, being seduced by the Manasseh influences of this world. And it's a serious, no-kidding thing.

We need to be alert. Watch and pray, Jesus told the disciples in the garden, lest you enter into—meaning you succumb to—temptation. Manasseh shed very much innocent blood till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides his sin by which he made Judah to sin and doing evil in the sight of the Lord. It wasn't just him, not just the people he led astray. People lost their lives, innocent people.

Why do you think people would be killed? Why would blood be running in the streets of Jerusalem? These are people who didn't go along, who weren't in harmony and sympathy, who weren't well met with Manasseh and the leaders of this apostate movement. You don't get bloody by going along. You get bloody by standing and resisting.

Well, if you turn over in your Bibles now to the minor prophets—Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk—it is the prophet Habakkuk to which we turn. We're just going to get a taste tonight, just a quick two-minute incursion here. Habakkuk lives and prophesies in this time during the reign of these kings. He is a late contemporary of Isaiah, and he reiterates much of what Isaiah had to say in the days of Hezekiah.

Look at chapter 1. Just skim this real quickly. "The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw. O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, 'Violence!' and You will not save?" What's he talking about? Blood running in the streets of Jerusalem under the reign of Manasseh. "Why do You show me iniquity and cause me to see trouble? Plundering and violence are before me. There's strife, and contention arises. Therefore, the law is powerless. Justice never goes forth. The wicked surround the righteous. Perverse judgment proceeds."

"Look among the nations and watch. Be utterly astounded, for I will work a work in your days which you would not believe though it were told you. For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans." Who are they? What do we call them? Babylonians. This is God's response.

The first part, those first four verses, this is a cry from Habakkuk to the Lord God. But this is a public cry. This is a prophecy. This is Habakkuk speaking for the righteous who are being trampled underfoot, who are being slain during the reign of Manasseh. God replies, "Look, sort of as you stand among the nations, get outside and watch. I will work a work in your days which you would not believe though it were told you. I am raising up the Babylonians, a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful. Their judgments and their dignity proceed from themselves.

Their horses are swifter than leopards, more fierce than evening wolves. Their chargers charge ahead. Their cavalry comes from afar. They fly as the eagle that hastens to eat. They all come for violence. Their faces are set like the east wind."

You remember the east wind is the blighting, destroying, famine-producing wind. "They gather captives like sand. They scoff at kings, and princes are scorned by them. They deride every stronghold. They heap up earthen mounds and seize it. His mind changes and he transgresses. He commits offense, ascribing this power to his god."

Well, that's the introduction, and this sets the tone. This is the theme. It's a back and forth between Habakkuk and the Lord God. Now, just by way of anticipation, we say, "Well, but doesn't Manasseh in his later days repent, and God seems to relent? Don't you have good King Joash coming up, and he's going to repair the temple and so on?" Yes, but when does God pronounce inevitable coming judgment on the lips of Isaiah? When Hezekiah's life is extended, He says judgment is coming, but not in your days.

Here is Manasseh's reign, and Habakkuk hears the Lord God say, "The Babylonians are coming. They are an unstoppable force. They are going to utterly annihilate this land. They are going to take captives. They are an utterly unstoppable force, and I am sending them, the bitter and hasty Chaldeans." It is a prophecy of God, and it is not reversible. It is a judgment of God that is coming, and no amount of repentance at this point will stop it. Why? There is a point of no return.

There is a point at which the door of the ark shuts, and it may sit there on the ground with no rain for seven days, but it's not like if enough people come and knock on the door and say, "We really do believe now," God will reopen the door to the ark and let more people on. Once that door shuts, judgment is inevitable. There is a point of no return. The Bible teaches it over and over and over.

Judah, the southern kingdom, in the days of Hezekiah and in the days of Manasseh reached that point. It really begins under Ahaz. Hezekiah seems to reverse it, but it's not enough. It's too little, too late. Manasseh comes back and exposes the real heart of the people. Josiah is going to have a final revival. Am I saying that right? Josiah? Josiah is what I am trying to say. My mind was telling me; my lips were misspeaking.

Josiah is going to come, and he is a good king, and he has good intentions. Remember when I said that the roles of Joshua are split into these last three major kings? Well, the military part is what's going to get Josiah. He is going to foolishly embark on a military campaign that he should not. And just as you have Hezekiah messing up the political side, you have Manasseh messing up the spiritual side, Josiah, despite his spiritual ambitions, messes up the military side. And it is the closing bookend to the opening days of life and promise in the land, because with those three great kings, you are going to have a couple of little reigns intermingled and interspersed, and you have Hezekiah and the rest of it. But essentially, it is over at the end of Josiah's reign. It is over.

The great prophet Jeremiah is going to make the final call, but he is the weeping prophet because he knows that no matter what he does, the judgment is now inevitable. That point of no return has been passed. Our challenge is not only to never reach that point, but to move as far in the positive direction as we can, because the positive side of God's blessings, His inheritance, His promises, His presence, is as powerful and strong in the positive and opposite way as is this pronouncement of judgment and devastation and destruction.

It is not like, well, God is a feeble blesser, but He is a great judge. God is much greater, if anything, in blessing and in rewarding and in cherishing and in granting inheritance and His presence. He is a reluctant judge. He is a very ambitious and aggressive source of blessing as our heavenly Father. So that is the side we want to be on. This is a heed-the-warning section.

And by the way, it is also going to be very informative to us as we, hopefully faithful and motivated believers, watch our southern kingdom taken by the current-day Manasseh forces, even in our own alleged Christian circles. How do we respond? What are the assurances we have from God in this time? That's the book of Habakkuk, and that's what we're going to be looking at for the next couple of weeks. And it is a wonderful source of information, comfort, and encouragement that we know what's going on in Manasseh's day, and we can look around and see a virtually identical situation surrounding us. But the prophecy of Habakkuk is life-giving. It is stability-inducing, and we're going to see wonderful truth from God, a message for us right here, right now, in this great prophetic book that we look at over these next few Thursdays.

But we'll close for tonight here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank You that no matter what the situation, You never leave us or forsake us as we pursue our relationship with You, as we seek a better understanding of You, as we seek and search for Your truth as for hidden treasure. We know that You are faithful to provide it, to secure it to us, to bless us in it and through it. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will take the things that we see in this portion of Your Word and bless them to each heart, make them a source of strength and stability and motivation for us in the days ahead. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.