

# Knowing God in the Word

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death. Philippians 3:10.

## Contradictions in Scripture: The Repentance of Manasseh

In our studies on supposed “Contradictions in Scripture,” we have considered the differences between the four gospels, and have seen that generally the supposed “contradictions” between them are caused, not by a real mistake in one of the gospel records, but rather by a misunderstanding on the part of us, the readers. Usually, the problem is that the event that supposedly is in contradiction happened more than one time. Thus, when people assume that the events are the same, and then find that they are different, they assume a discrepancy. As it has been said, we create our own troubles, and then are troubled by the troubles we have created.

Yet the gospels are not the only part of the Bible that repeats the same event. We find a very similar situation in the Old Testament, where I and II Chronicles repeat some of the events found in II Samuel and many of the events found in I and II Kings. Are there any apparent contradictions here, in the repetitions between Chronicles and Kings? The fact is that there are, most notably the instance of the fate of King Manasseh.

In II Kings 21 we read of King Manasseh, the son of the righteous King Hezekiah.

*1. Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah. 2. And 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.*

So we learn that, unfortunately, King Manasseh was not a righteous king as his father had been. Instead, he did evil in the sight of the Lord. And we read how he did evil in the next few verses.

*3. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; he raised up altars for Baal, and made a wooden image, as Ahab king of Israel had done; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.*

The first evil act that Manasseh did was to rebuild the high places, built for idolatrous worship, that his father Hezekiah had destroyed, and to build altars to the false god Baal and the host of heaven. This idolatry was a great wickedness in the sight of God.

*4. He also built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, “In Jerusalem I will put My name.” 5. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.*

Next, Manasseh builds altars to the host of heaven in the house of the LORD itself! This was not just idolatry, but also a deliberate slap in God's face at the same time.

*6. Also he made his son pass through the fire, practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.*

Manasseh next worships the false god Molech by passing his son through the fire. This religion of Molech basically worshipped him as the god of strength. Newborn babies were passed through a furnace built into an idol of Molech. If the child came out the other side of the furnace alive, he was

thought to be strong enough, as Molech had accepted him. If the baby died, however, it was thought that Molech did not approve, and so this baby did not deserve to live. This was a very abominable practice, of course, in the sight of God.

*7. 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, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; 8. and I will not make the feet of Israel wander anymore from the land which I gave their fathers—only if they are careful to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that My servant Moses commanded them." 9. But they paid no attention, and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.*

Next, Manasseh places an Asherah pole in the house of the LORD. This pole was actually a carved image of an elongated male sexual organ. One worshipped Asherah by committing adultery or fornication with the "priestesses" of Asherah (who were actually prostitutes) beneath the Asherah pole. This worship was abominable enough in and of itself, but Manasseh set this Asherah image up in the temple of the LORD!

*10. And the LORD spoke by His servants the prophets, saying, 11. "Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations (he has acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols), 12. therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Behold, I am bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle. 13. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab; I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. 14. So I will forsake the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become victims of plunder to all their enemies, 15. 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.'"*

The extreme evil committed by the man Manasseh so incenses the LORD that He sends a prophet to tell Judah that he is going to destroy both Jerusalem and Judah in a horrible way.

*16. Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides his sin by which he made Judah sin, in doing evil in the sight of the LORD.*

On top of all else he had done, Manasseh also murders many innocent people. A good number of these would probably have been those who dared to remain faithful to the LORD through all the evil Manasseh was doing. The statement that he "filled Jerusalem from one end to the other" with blood is not literal, of course. What it means is that there was not a place you could go in the city where there hadn't been someone who lived there that Manasseh had murdered. So great was the wickedness of this man!

*17. Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh—all that he did, and the sin that he committed—are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? 18. So Manasseh rested with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza. Then his son Amon reigned in his place.*

Thus, the record of the book of Kings regarding King Manasseh comes to an end. As far as we can tell from Kings, Manasseh started out sinful and ended up sinful, a wicked and unrepentant man. This passage, however, recommends to us that we check it against the same record in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah, which we have over in the book of Chronicles. So let us check the record of Manasseh there in II Chronicles 33.

*1. Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. 2. But 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.*

The record in Chronicles starts out the same way the record in Kings did, by stating that Manasseh was an evil king.

*3. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.*

This is the first sin of Manasseh, again, just like we saw in II Kings.

*4. He also built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem shall My name be forever." 5. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.*

Again, he proceeds to build his sinful altars in the house of the LORD, defiling it.

*6. Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.*

Again, passing his sons through the fire to Molech and practicing witchcraft are added to the sins of Manasseh.

*7. He even set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; 8. and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I have appointed for your fathers—only if they are careful to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses."*

Again, the carved idol, the "Asherah pole" that we learned of in II Kings, is mentioned here, set up, not just anywhere, but in the house of the LORD itself.

*9. So Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.*

The last sin of Manasseh, filling Jerusalem with blood, is not mentioned here, but what is mentioned is that he caused the country to do more evil than the nations that had been in the land before the LORD drove them out before Israel.

*10. And the LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not listen.*

Although the words of the prophets are not mentioned here as they were in Kings, the fact that they spoke to the people and warned them is again mentioned. Yet the people would not listen, preferring the sins of Manasseh to serving the LORD.

*11. Therefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon.*

Now we come to a record we did not see in II Kings 21. That is, that Manasseh is captured by the army of the king of Assyria. He certainly deserved it! He is taken with hooks. These were traditionally put in the nose of the one captured. Then, the captive was led around by this hook. Imagine the pain and humiliation of being led about by a hook through your nose! Then, he is also bound with bronze fetters, and carried off away from Judah to Babylon. There he is held, a helpless captive. This was a fitting punishment for Manasseh indeed, though we might say it was still much less than he deserved!

*12. Now when he was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,*

Now here is again something that there is no mention of in the book of Kings. That is, that Manasseh, being thus captured and in captivity and affliction, turns to the LORD his God as he never would when he was free and in power, and implores the LORD for help. He also humbles himself greatly before God. What an unexpected move for a man like Manasseh! Yet this is why the LORD had had him taken into captivity rather than having him be slain: to give him the opportunity to repent.

*13. and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God.*

Manasseh prays to the LORD, and the LORD receives his entreaty and hears his supplication. Again, Manasseh certainly didn't deserve such mercy! Yet the LORD grants it to him anyway, and restores him to his land and to his kingdom. Now, Manasseh realizes that the LORD Whom he had so dishonored and despised is indeed the true God.

*14. After this he built a wall outside the City of David on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate; and it enclosed Ophel, and he raised it to a very great height. Then he put military captains in all the fortified cities of Judah.*

First, Manasseh takes pains to guard Israel from further attack.

*15. He took away the foreign gods and the idol from 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 he cast them out of the city.*

Now, he starts to try to undo all the evil things he had done. He takes away all the foreign gods and idols that he had put there, and removes them from the house of the LORD. All the altars are removed as well, and they are dumped unceremoniously outside the city.

*16. He also repaired the altar of the LORD, sacrificed peace offerings and thank offerings on it, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel.*

Now, he repairs the altar of the LORD, and offers sacrifices and offerings upon it. He also commands Judah to serve the LORD instead of the false gods he had formerly urged them to worship. Of course, the people would do so when commanded to by the king, but, unfortunately, it was far too late to change the hearts of many of those whom Manasseh had led astray.

*17. Nevertheless the people still sacrificed on the high places, but only to the LORD their God.*

We see that Manasseh did not clean up all the messes he had created. The high places he rebuilt are not destroyed, though the people worship only the LORD there. Yet worship was not supposed to be done on the high places, but only at Jerusalem. Yet it seems that Manasseh is not prepared to tackle this problem, as his father had done.

*18. Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel, indeed they are written in the book of the kings of Israel.*

At first, it would seem that this book refers us back to Kings, just like Kings referred us to this book. Yet, though we might say that the prophecy of II Kings 21:10-15 might be the "words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of the LORD God of Israel," we certainly never read of any "prayer to his God" in II Kings. It appeared from there, as we saw, that Manasseh never repented, but continued a wicked king to the end of his days!

So what is wrong here? Is this a mistake? Does it refer to something in Kings that isn't there, or that has somehow dropped out of the text, so Kings is actually a corrupted book? Is this at last evidence of errors in Scripture? I do not believe so. Look carefully at the reference to this book at the end of the verse. It calls it "the book of the kings of Israel." Yet, if we read through the book of Kings that we have in our Bibles, we will see that it is a book that records the facts regarding the kings of Israel AND of Judah. This might not seem to be a big deal to us, and yet it is something that we need to take note of. For there are other books mentioned with similar titles that we do not actually have. For example, I Kings 14:19 says, "Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he made war and how he reigned, indeed they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel." Now again here if we looked at the book of Chronicles we would see that it never records anything about Jeroboam, how he made war, or how he reigned. The book of Chronicles records only the things regarding the kings of Judah. Yet again this is the key to the puzzle. For this book of the Chronicles of the kings of Israel must be a different book than the one we have in our Bibles, which is the book of the Chronicles of the kings of JUDAH. So there was another book of Kings, one that we do not have, that focused mostly on the kings of Israel, but that, after the ten tribes of Israel went into captivity, recorded facts about the kings of Judah and had more details regarding Manasseh here towards the end of the book. Thus, this is not an error. It does not refer us to something in the book of Kings that is not there. Rather, it refers to a different book of Kings that the LORD did not see fit to enter into our Bibles. Therefore, there is no contradiction here. Yet let us move on, for there is still the question of why Kings makes it out as if Manasseh remained evil, whereas Chronicles tells us of his repentance and turning back to God.

*19. Also his prayer and how God received his entreaty, and all his sin and trespass, and the sites where he built high places and set up wooden images and carved images, before he was humbled, indeed they are written among the sayings of Hozai.*

No book of Hozai is in our Bibles, so apparently this is a book that we do not have access to. Perhaps someday God will restore this book in His Kingdom.

*20. So Manasseh rested with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house. Then his son Amon reigned in his place.*

Thus the record of Manasseh in Chronicles comes to an end. Yet, though it started out the same as the record in Kings, what a different ending do we see for Manasseh in Chronicles than we did in Kings! In Kings, we saw nothing but wickedness from Manasseh, and from all that we saw, we would expect that this extremely wicked king would have no future outside the lake of fire and the second death. Yet in Chronicles, we see a very different end for Manasseh. We see a man who turned back to the LORD, not just as a show, but from his heart, and who truly had faith and sought to serve Him. From Chronicles, it would appear that Manasseh was forgiven by the LORD, and lived out the rest of his days as a believing man, one whom we might expect to be a recipient of eternal life, and even to have a place in God's great Kingdom. Yet how can this be? Is this a "contradiction"? Why does Kings present only a wicked picture of Manasseh, while Chronicles ends with a repentant picture? What is the difference?

To discover the answer to this puzzle, we must understand why there are two records of these events rather than one. In the gospels, we saw that there were four records of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth to present four different pictures of Him, and four different aspects of Who and What He is: a King, a Servant, a perfect Man, and God Himself. So what is different between the perspectives of Kings and Chronicles that justified the LORD repeating what was written in these books?

I believe the major difference between Kings and Chronicles is one of perspective. In the gospels, we saw that Matthew and Luke are from a human perspective. That is, to mankind, Christ is a King. To us, Christ is a Man. Mark and John, however, are from God's perspective. To the Father, Christ is a Servant. And to the Father, Christ is God Himself. Thus, the perspective of Matthew and Luke is more from a human point of view, and the perspective of Mark and John is more from God's point of view. And Kings and Chronicles are the same way. That is, Kings (and Samuel) gives

the events it records from a human viewpoint. Chronicles, however, lists many of the same events, yet this time from God's viewpoint.

An example of the different perspectives in Kings and Chronicles can be seen in the building of the temple by Solomon. In Kings, this is given only two chapters, I Kings 5&6. Yet in Chronicles, the same events cover a total of six chapters, II Chronicles 2-7. Thus, Chronicles has three times the information on the building of the temple that Kings does. That is because, of course, the building of the temple was the most significant event of Solomon's reign from God's perspective. This also shows us another factor of Chronicles. That is, that it focuses much more on the religious aspects behind the events, whereas Kings satisfies itself with the more political side, and the governmental aspects of those same events. That is, Kings, from man's perspective, looks more on the outward appearance, whereas Chronicles, from God's perspective, looks more on the heart.

And here we have our key for figuring out the difference in the records of Manasseh's reign between Kings and Chronicles. For from man's perspective, the extremely wicked acts that Manasseh committed could never be repaid. All the awful things he did, all the people he murdered, all the misery and destruction he caused, could never be forgiven from a human standpoint. It would be like if Adolf Hitler, shortly before his death, actually repented and turned to the Lord Jesus Christ to be his Savior. If any such event occurred, Hitler might have attempted a few weak things to try to fix some of the terrible deeds he had committed. Yet would that have been enough to restore Hitler in the sight of men? After all the people he had slaughtered and all the atrocities he had committed? Would the world ever have changed its mind about Hitler and thought of him as a good man at the end? Certainly not! In man's eyes, a monster like Hitler could never be redeemed. There was nothing he could do to erase all the horrible things he had done. Yet from God's perspective, even this was possible, though we have no evidence that Hitler ever did any such thing.

And so it was with Manasseh. From the perspective of men who had suffered so terribly under Manasseh's monstrous reign, nothing could ever be done to restore their perspective of him. Always he would remain the hated monster that he had been, no matter any claim of repentance on his part or any small acts of retribution that he had tried to commit. Nothing could erase all the terrible atrocities Manasseh had done before the LORD led him to repentance. And Kings, taking the perspective of men, views Manasseh only as an abomination and a most exceedingly wicked king.

Yet how different is Chronicles' view of Manasseh! For from God's viewpoint, no matter how wicked a man may be, he can always turn back to the LORD for forgiveness and grace. And Manasseh did that, so even this wicked king was forgiven and redeemed in the sight of God. In God's eyes, Manasseh was restored and brought back into favor at the end of his life. Thus, Chronicles records this sincere turnaround, and assures us that Manasseh ended up his life as a man who worshipped the true God and had faith.

So we see that, once again, there is no contradiction here. The difference is merely one of the perspectives of the two books. II Kings 21 never says Manasseh did not turn around at the end. It only ignores that fact, for from a human perspective, Manasseh's evil acts could never be atoned for. Yet II Chronicles 33 is from God's perspective, and records for us how even an extremely bloody, Godless, immoral, rebellious man like Manasseh could be forgiven and restored through God's grace. Thus there is no discrepancy here. There is only the reminder that, though from our human perspective some things are unforgivable, there is nothing that is beyond the grace of God. Let us thank God for recording for us this truth, and helping us to see in the fate of Manasseh one more example of the boundless nature of His wonderful grace!

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