

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Tragedy of Wanton Living II Kings 21:1-26

Intro: Word association: what does the term “ride it out” mean. For most of the English speaking world, the phrase makes some vague reference to holding on, enduring in the midst of difficult times. To people on the Gulf Coast and the Eastern Seaboard, the term means only one thing – hurricanes. When faced with a major storm there are only 2 options: head for the hills or ride it out; evacuate or hang tight. Most of us have experienced the rigors of riding out a storm and so far, we’ve survived. But in the middle of it, you’re not 100% sure you’ll come out of it unscathed.

It was something just like that in Judah during the reign of Manasseh – only without the evacuation option. Manasseh was the worst king Judah had ever had the misfortune to be ruled by. Remnant believers of the time just had to batten down the hatches and hope to ride out the storm and it was a long storm. This wasn’t a 6-8 hour tempest; it lasted 55 years! During this dark season in Judah’s history, evil reigned. Manasseh would make Athaliah’s and Ahaz’s reigns look like a Sunday picnic. As one theologian put it - Manasseh plumbed the depths of evil in an unprecedented and particularly grievous way, and did so for a prolonged period of time (Darlington).

1 – Manasseh’s 55 year reign is a problem for those who are sticklers for chronology. If you start counting from the end of Hezekiah’s reign (687/686 BC) you’ll end up well into Josiah’s reign which begins about 640 BC. Some say that he was made co-regent with Hezekiah at 12 years of age and ruled with his father for 10 yrs or so and then ruled by himself until about 642 BC. But really, Manasseh’s 55 yrs were more of a theological rather than a chronological problem. 55 yrs equates to the longest reign of any king in either Judah or Israel! During that time, he wiped out all of Hezekiah’s reforms, exponentially increased wickedness and exhausted the patience of God (23:26-27)!

Why was he given so much time to do so much damage? If the years of the wicked will be shortened, as [Prv 10:27](#) says, then why weren’t they shortened for Manasseh? Why was he made an exception? In spite of his

godlessness, our text will report no personal or professional adversity. The writer simply presents a long reign followed by a peaceful burial in a garden. All the while, God's faithful are wondering, praying and pleading "How long, Oh Lord?" We might also wonder why God does that. Why does God allow this godless brigand 55 yrs to wreak his ruin upon Yahweh's people and Yahweh's kingdom? It's quite possible that this long reign was part of Yahweh's judgment on Judah, the first installment. **Isaiah (3)** says 1 sign of divine judgment is the wicked quality of a country's leaders.

55 is only a number but it's also a mystery. To be honest, there are a truckload of theological mysteries all around us. Cults established on false histories that have never produced a shred of corroborating evidence are still thriving and expanding around the world. There are some 100,000 billion complex cells in the human body; the human hand has 652,000 nerve ending; the retina contains some 124 million rod-shaped cells to distinguish light from darkness and about 6 million cone-shaped cells that respond to millions of shades of color. Our bodies are an unfathomable work of engineering design and an inexhaustible treasury of discovery and yet, most "accepted" science declares that it all came about by accident! Why does God allow this? Inquiring minds want to know!

The truth is that these mysteries should actually humble us. Christians who hold a high view of the Bible's authority, who believe that the Bible teaches consistent, rational doctrine and clear morality should also remember that biblical clarity doesn't eliminate life's puzzles. Having some knowledge of God's truth doesn't mean we comprehend all of God's ways. How many times do we find ourselves asking, "But why is God doing it this way?" That was probably the exact question asked by the faithful in Judah who lived their entire lives under Manasseh's reign.

2-9 – This passage is a summary section that actually points to 3 devastating problems with Manasseh's reign. The first is obvious – he's introduced a new paganism into Judah! We should note that the perversions of Manasseh in **v2-7** form a direct contrast to the reforms of Hezekiah in **18:3-8**. The new king is working hard to eliminate all of the good things his father had established in Judah.

The author itemizes Manasseh's apostasy just so that we can feel the cumulative weight of it all. He reinstated fertility worship (**3b**). This was in

the tradition of Ahab, the infamous ‘antichrist’ of the northern kingdom. He installed an Asherah image in the temple itself (7a)! He gave himself over to astral worship (3d). Altars to the sun, moon and stars were erected in the temple courts (5). This was a new form of idolatry popularized by Babylonian influence, no doubt. Borrowing a page from Ahaz’s playbook, Manasseh even stooped to the horrors of child sacrifice (6a) and gave himself over to all kinds of divination, trafficking in dark powers. Manasseh wasn’t satisfied with just doing evil – he multiplied evil, bringing it as a perverse art to ever despicable depths.

We’ve discussed most of these forms of idolatry that make up this pile of paganism in detail before but let’s step back and take note of the common virus that infects all of them. It’s all about control. In fertility worship you use the practice of sex to manipulate or encourage the heavenly powers to act in the same way and grant fertility (family, crops, livestock). In astral worship, you look for omens that serve as indications of future events while spiritism is supposed to provide you with secret knowledge on how to act or prepare for what’s coming. Child sacrifice shows how dead earnest you are, what extreme price you are willing to pay, thus, you should be able to purchase the favor you desire. Paganism is the way you manage your life over against all the various ‘powers’ that may determine it.

How exhausting and futile! Paganism is light years away from biblical religion with its sovereign God who walks before and beside me in both green pastures and dark valleys all the way to my final residence! This is what God has provided and this points us to the 2nd devastating problem of Manasseh’s reign. As awful as his new paganism and unrelenting pursuit of evil was, the real tragedy of his reign is not in the perversion Manasseh embraced but in the privilege he abandoned! There’s a hint of this in v4 but v7-8 flesh out the truth.

Here was reality given (7) – Yahweh put His name in the temple and in Jerusalem. Yahweh’s name is another way of saying Yahweh Himself and all that He has revealed Himself to be. Here was security assured (8a) – rest and stability in the land. Here was fidelity demanded (8b) – the obedient response to Yahweh’s gifts of His presence and preservation. Each one of these wonderful blessings was Manasseh’s and Judah’s to enjoy; it was their birthright! But they didn’t listen; besides, Manasseh had already duped them into his super-paganism anyway.

Think of the treasure Manasseh despised! The God who put His name in the temple is the atonement-providing, people-sustaining, prayer-hearing God. Atonement came through the altar of sacrifice; sustenance was represented by the daily showbread; acceptable prayer was seen in the altar of incense. These spiritual treasures were available from Yahweh for the taking but Manasseh would have none of it and none of Him! What a waste! Did he not know who Yahweh was or worse, did he just not care? The presence of God and the promise of God are His people's infinite treasure and highest privilege and Manasseh despised them both.

When we look at our own age, it's not difficult to see that the lost world is following in Manasseh's footsteps in their own pursuit of evil. We may decry it, we should certainly disavow it but we shouldn't be surprised by it. Sinners are sinning! Alert the media! What is surprising is the degree to which the church has turned away from the blessings God has provided to it. We have the complete Word of God and centuries of good, doctrinal exposition with greater clarity coming with every new generation but most congregations fail to reap the benefits of it because their leaders are focused on the latest church-building formula or the shiny, new "doctrine" that's making the rounds. We have God's Word, God's presence, His provision and power (Holy Spirit) and His promise to never leave nor forsake us! How could we ever hope to improve on that? We must never despise our birthright – the old, old story!

The 3rd problem of Manasseh's reign is hinted at in [v2b](#) and [v9b](#). That God dispossessed and exterminated those nations that did these things reveals that an equally ominous end awaits Judah since Manasseh not only practiced the same abominations but led Judah to do more evil than the previous nations. Seeing how abysmally wicked the original Canaanite nations actually were; this was quite an accomplishment on Judah's part. But, if you're going to model your culture after these failed nations, you should be prepared to suffer the same fate as they did. This makes the next passage much less of a shocking surprise.

10-16 – Here we have the prophetic announcement of judgment in its usual "because / therefore" form. [V10-11](#) briefly summarizes the crimes of [2-7](#) and offers them as the rationale for the following judgment ([12-15](#)). The author doesn't say Manasseh's evil outpaced that of any other king of Judah to

date; he says his wickedness out-stripped that of the Amorites, the original pagan residents of Canaan! After the judgment is announced in 12-15, the author adds an additional note in v16. Manasseh smashed and slashed as he liked so there wasn't many lengthy protests.

While the judgment is no surprise – it is pretty graphic. Yahweh depicts the coming disaster through 4 images. First – tingling ears (12): the idea is that the horror of the message heard produces an adverse physical reaction. This speaks of the terror of judgment. Next, God uses building imagery but of deconstruction not construction (13a). God had already made history of Samaria and Ahab's dynasty and Jerusalem was next on His demolition list. This implies the inevitability of judgment. 3rd, God uses kitchen language (13b): a dish is wiped clean and then flipped over to show there's not a drop or lick of anything on it. This is a graphic picture of the totality of judgment. Last, Yahweh vows to abandon His people, to give them up to their enemies' will (14). Judah will be easy pickings for the invaders; they won't be able to do anything to prevent it. This points to Judah's helplessness in judgment.

Of course, this passage doesn't condemn Manasseh to judgment alone. There's actually been an ongoing tradition of evil in Israel ever since Yahweh redeemed them from slavery (15). Their entire national history has been one long exercise in aggravating Yahweh. Manasseh's depravity simply put them 'over the top.' His massive wickedness added to the nation's cumulative apostasy puts Judah beyond hope of recovery! Because of Manasseh, Judah has reached the point of no return. This is clearly revealed in 23:26.

This is a sobering concept: that iniquity can pass a point that places a nation, or an individual, beyond hope of recovery and makes judgment irreversible. The fact that we don't know where that point is should sober us. I read a story about a engineering student who turned 21 and decided to celebrate by drinking 1 shot of scotch for every year of life. He downed 20 shots in 10 minutes but passed out before he could take the last one. The next morning he was found blue and unconscious; he died at the hospital with a blood alcohol level of 0.39%. He had a limit. He didn't know what it was. He went beyond it and it destroyed him. That's how it is with idolatry and depravity. There's a line we can cross but we don't know where it is. This ought to keep us in line or scare us into repenting. A broken and

contrite (crushed) heart (Ps 51:17) doesn't seem all that bad when you consider the alternative.

17-22 – As we have seen, Manasseh was unique. But the author makes this point again in the king's obituary announcement. The standard formula always begins with, "now the rest of the acts of...and all that he did..." This summary formula for the kings of Judah appears 15 times over the course of **I & II Kings** with the standard footnote of the Chronicles record. Sometimes there may be mention of the king's power or cities built or war record or, like in Hezekiah's case, his water system. Only Manasseh earns a special mention for his sin! This doesn't mean the other kings of Judah were pillars of righteousness, but Manasseh was so much the epitome of wickedness, you just can't tell his story without wallowing in the wicked details. What a memory to leave: the only king noted for his sin!

Still, Manasseh didn't just leave a bad memory; he also passed on a rotten legacy. The author's triple emphasis casts Amon as a Manasseh clone. The rotten apple didn't fall far from the rotten tree. Now, II Chron 33 tells us that when Manasseh was carted off to Babylon by the Assyrians that he humbled himself before God and repented. His repentance was genuine because when he returned to Jerusalem, he tried to eradicate his previous corruptions.

Why doesn't the author mention this here? Probably because it didn't make much of a difference. Yes, a repentant king is better than an evil king and it's better that he work to undo the damage he'd done rather than just ignore it. It's great to hear of his wonderful conversion but his new, personal relationship with Yahweh didn't affect all that much. The disaster had been inflicted, the poison had been administered. Whatever change had come to Manasseh had no impact on Amon. Manasseh had already made his impression there. His repentance also came too late to change the culture of the kingdom and too late to change the destiny of the kingdom. A bad memory and a terrible legacy!

23-26 – Political machinations can be that way. After 55 yrs of evil running rampant, with an ever so brief respite followed by what appears to be more of the same in Amon, it seems that someone had enough of him before he really got started. How did this happen? The Bible doesn't elaborate but when the kings and people of Judah began to imitate the sins of their

conquered neighbors to the north, they slipped into the same anarchy and chaos that marked the final period of Israel's history.

What's interesting is that as bad as Manasseh's reign was and as disappointing as Amon's reign was; when all was said and done, the people of the land apparently thought of no one else to succeed Amon but his own son – thus, Josiah ascends to the throne.

So, after over half a century of royal disenchantment who would blame the people of Judah if they were finished with David's line of kings once and for all since it only produced rogues, bums and scallywags! They hadn't seen any royal attractiveness for decades, a generation even, and yet, in line with Yahweh's promise, they install an 8 yr old descendent of David as king. How could they know he wouldn't be a Manasseh 3.0? How could they be sure he would bring any ultimate good since Manasseh had made divine judgment so certain for Judah? They didn't know and couldn't be sure of any of that. But, like dropping anchor to ride out a furious storm, they hold on to Yahweh's kingdom promise in spite of the disappointments and wickedness that has closed in around them.

In the middle of all the chaos and terror from without and within, one fact remained non-negotiable: that Yahweh was still in control in spite of the chaos. Yahweh's promise was backed by Yahweh's honor. This was their bastion of sanity in the midst of trouble, a divine sovereignty somehow rules over this mess. This reality is no less true today. In the face of political upheaval, economic chaos and the freefall of morality, the only thing you can cling to is the surety of God's Word, His tangible presence and His unwavering promises.

If you cannot rightly claim any of these wonderful benefits then you need to do what the people of Judah did – place the last descendent of David on the throne of your heart. Invite Jesus Christ to be your Savior and Lord. Let Him become your anchor in the storm, the solid rock on which to build an unshakable life. 😊