

Group Study Outline

2 Kings 21:1-23:30

How to study such a long section? If you opt to attempt all three chapters, remember that the reading alone will take some time, so select only the most pertinent questions.

Theme Sentence

There is a point where evil reaches the point of no return, and the Lord's dreadful judgment becomes inevitable and inescapable.

Launching Question

Do you think there ever comes a point where it's too late for a person to repent?

READ 2 Kings 21

Questions

What is it that makes Manasseh so bad? Why was God's judgement inevitable? Why is it so significant that Judah became like the other nations (2, 9)? What is ominous about the mention of Ahab in v3? (Who was Ahab?)

What is so terrible about what Manasseh does to the temple (7-8)? If that's what he does in the temple, what does that show he does/doesn't value?

'They did not listen' (9) ... to what? (cf 17:13-14)

What would it mean if the people did 'listen' to the prophets in 11-15?

Thinking it through

Look back to 20:16-18. Look forward to 23:26-27.

What is the story of Manasseh doing between these two summaries?

Was this a point when it was too late for Manasseh/Judah to repent? Why?

READ 2 Kings 22:1-23:25

Questions

What is it that makes Josiah so good?

Why might it be significant that his first task was temple repairs (22:4ff)?

There's good reason to think that 'the book' found in 22:8 is Deuteronomy.

Given how that book ends (eg Deut 28), why is 22:13 Josiah's response?

In what ways is the word he receives in 15-20 good news or bad news?

Look at verses 23:1-3, 4-20 (summarised in 24) and 21-23.

Describe these three phases of Josiah's reforms.

What is he really doing in all three of them?

Thinking it through

If someone asked 'what is repentance?', how could this passage help us explain?

READ 2 Kings 23:26-27

Thinking it through

Was there any point in Josiah's reforms if God's mind was made up?

Was it too late for Josiah/Judah to repent?

What does this passage tell us about God's judgement and our response to it?

Where is Jesus in these chapters ...? do any of the stories point you to him?

2 Kings 21:1-23:30



The bigger picture

The key to understanding 1 and 2 Kings is the two 'bookends'

- the promises made in 2 Samuel 7:4-17
- those promises fulfilled in Jesus, the King-for-ever.

As we read 2 Kings, we're looking at each king pondering if there's any way that he might be the fulfilment of the promises God has made ... and yet at the same time knowing that none of these kings could possibly be that King-for-ever.

2 Kings 20:16-18 sets the theme for the last sorry chapters of the book: just as Israel had been carried off into exile in Assyria, so now Judah (who 'walked in the customs that Israel had introduced' 17:19) will 'be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left'. All the 'provocations' of Manasseh-and-son (in ch 21) confirm this course of action (23:26-27); the personal repentance and public reforms of Josiah's reign (in chs 22-23) were genuine, but too late.

But yet even at this eleventh hour, the story points us to Jesus. At the very start of the divided kingdom, a mysterious man of God had promised that a certain Josiah would eventually undo Jeroboam's archetypal idolatry (cf 1 Kings 13:2; 2 Kings 23:16). It takes three hundred years, and then he comes. But there would be a far greater 'son born to the house of David' who would avenge the Lord's honour, bring the Lord's judgment and absorb the Lord's wrath.

[NS]

Theme Sentence

There is a point where evil reaches the point of no return, and the Lord's dreadful judgment becomes inevitable and inescapable.

Application

As we read 2 Kings, we're not really looking to the kings or prophets for examples to follow. There may be times when they do the right or wrong thing, but this is not being told to us so that we copy them, or not. Instead, we want to be asking: what is God doing? why is he doing it? how do we respond?

- God will not delay punishment for ever; he will act to fulfil his promises. It is scary to realise that there is a point of 'no return' when even the most heartfelt repentance will not delay him any longer in bringing his judgment.
- Since human hearts are typically set against walking in the Lord's ways, whenever I read the Bible, it will demand thoroughgoing reform of life.
- The repentance the Lord looks for is a 'by the book' attitude, keeping his commandments for the sake of the honour and righteousness of the Lord.

Commentary

Manasseh 'did what was evil ... led them astray to do more evil'

2 Kings 21:1-18

- 21:1 Fifty-five years is a record - the longest reign of any of the kings of Israel or Judah. But that wasn't the only record: he was also the worst king. It's not just that he was worse than any other Israelite king; he was even worse than the Amorites (11), the pagan, pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan! It was Manasseh who put Judah beyond hope of recovery (23:26).
- 2-9 lists the terrible 'evil' that Manasseh introduced. Note the summary to begin and end the list (2, 9) as the ominous pattern of 16:3 is fulfilled. Just as Israel became like the surrounding nations (17:8, 15), so Judah became like Israel (which meant, in turn, becoming like the surrounding 'nations whom the Lord drove out ... destroyed').
- 3-7 Manasseh brought in the same paganism that Ahab had done in Israel (3) – fertility and astral worship, child-sacrifice and the occult ...
- 7-8 which meant overturning everything that the temple stood for. 'In that house', the Lord had put his name for ever ('name' means 'Yahweh himself and all that he has revealed himself to be') so it is massively significant to put Asherah 'in the house' instead. Manasseh despises the highest honour of the covenant: the **presence** of the Lord himself. And also (8) the Lord's **promise**: covenant blessing/security (cf Deut 28:1-14).
- 9 To what did they not listen? presumably 'all that I commanded them'. Acts 7:51 is the NT summary of this OT history: God's people consistently resist the Holy Spirit as he speaks, whether through Moses or the prophets (17:13-14). Verse 15 agrees that this was always so, for Manasseh was consistent with a pattern as old as the Exodus.
- 10 Right on cue, prophets speak: 'Because ...' (11a) '... therefore ...' (12a).
- 11 Dale Ralph Davis shows how the four images expound judgement as ...
- terrible (12b 'ears tingle' at disaster cf 1 Sam 3:11; Jer 19:3);
 - inevitable (13a. Given v3, we know what this plumb line will show!);
 - total (13b. They're like a bowl that has been thoroughly washed-up);
 - beyond help (14 ... since they are easy pickings for enemies).
- 17 The one noteworthy thing in the other annals is, as here, his sin/evil!

Amon 'did ... as his father had done'

2 Kings 21:19-26

- 20-21 Three times in these two verses we're told that Amon copied his dad. But 23 takes it further ... to follow the ways of this father meant abandoning the ways of 'his fathers' (ie the patriarchs who were faithful to the Lord).
- 23-24 An appropriately seedy end. We don't know why servants assassinated the king (except that it reveals what these closest to him thought of him), nor who 'the people of the land' are. But, amazingly, the result of such shenanigans is a Davidic-line king sitting on the throne (24b)!

Josiah 'did what was right ... turned to the Lord with all his heart'

2 Kings 22:1-23:30

- 22:2-3 Only Asa (1 Kgs 15:11) & Hezekiah (18:3) share a favourable comparison with David. So where will such a king begin his reforms after Manasseh? We focus on his eighteenth year (3) as he turns his attention to the temple (cf 21:7) using the collections of 2 Kgs 12 'to repair the house'.
- 8-10 but more significant than the repairs is The Book that Hilkiah has found. It almost seems that Shaphan is unaware what the 'book' might be! Given 23:25, we can presume that it's Deuteronomy, which ends with promises of unimaginable blessing or the desperate punishment of the Lord's curse.
- 13 Josiah does the right thing: given the gap between God's commands and Judah's practice, and given the inevitability of God's kindled, great wrath, he knows he needs a go-between ('for me, for the people, for all Judah').
- 15-20 The Lord's word via his prophetess sets the direction for the rest of Josiah's story:
- (a) God will keep his word from Deuteronomy; there's no hope for Judah.
 - (b) but yet God will delay 'the disaster' until after Josiah's death, since he'd responded rightly to the Lord's word (in faith and repentance).

Josiah's reforms are described 23:1-23 (for these are what made him unique 24):

1-3 Josiah & the people re-commit to the covenant (in line with 'the Book')

4-20 Josiah initiates a thorough reform
(which is then summarized in 24 as in line with 'the Book')

21-23 Josiah & the people re-establish the Passover (in line with 'the Book')

So, all of Josiah's reforms were 'by the book' (!). In other words, you only truly de-Manasseh-fy (!) and 'walk after the Lord' as you 'keep his commandments' (3).

23:4-20 Look how determined Josiah was in his thoroughgoing reforms:

- removing pagan vessels from temple (4)
 - deposing pagan clergy (5)
 - smashing the Asherah image (6)
 - pulling down the prostitute's apartments (7)
 - defiling the high places and sacking their priests (8-9)
 - defiling the place of child-sacrifice (10)
 - getting rid of sun-worship (11)
 - smashing royal idol shrines (12)
 - defiling Solomon's idols (13)
 - breaking up fertility worship (14)
 - pulling down/defiling Jeroboam's altar at Bethel (15-16) cf 1 Kgs 13:2
 - defiled all the other Samaritan high places and their priests (19-20)
- 26-27 There is no doubt that a national, spiritual reformation was desperately needed after the wicked reign of Manasseh. But in the end, even a reformation this thorough could not save the nation. It was too late. Josiah knew that this was the case since he'd already been told 'my wrath ... will not be quenched' (22:17). So, his actions were not motivated by self-interest (of hoping to save himself) but by genuine covenant loyalty.
- 28-30 Josiah's end in a needless battle foreshadows what is to come for all Judah.