

July 11

2 Kings 21

King Hezekiah, despite the fact that he did not finish as strongly as we would have liked, was a good king. He honored the Lord and the Lord honored him as well. He was one of the best kings the Southern Kingdom of Judah ever had. His son, Manasseh, was one of the worst. He rebuilt all of the pagan high places that his father had torn down. He built altars for Baal, he worshipped all of the hosts of heaven and just in case we might not understand that, that clause has reference to demons. We are told that he consorted with familiar spirits. He set up pagan altars in the temple courts and actually went so far as to place an idol inside the temple!! He made his sons "pass through the fire." (You will remember, I am sure, that this is a reference either to human sacrifice or at the very least to a pagan "initiation" ceremony that had to do with demonism.) According to the writers of scripture, Manasseh had a more negative and debilitating influence upon Judah than all of the nations God had driven out before them when they entered the land of Canaan. Since Manasseh reigned for 55 years in Judah, his influence was very persuasive indeed and he succeeded in "undoing" virtually every positive thing his father Hezekiah had ever accomplished.

The extent of Manasseh's evil can hardly be imagined. In addition to doing more evil than all of Israel since they came out of Egypt, verse 16 says he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. There is an uncorroborated but very old Jewish legend that says it was during the reign of Manasseh that the prophet Isaiah was martyred. According to this story the king had him placed inside a hollow tree trunk and then had the tree sawed in half! Ouch! There may be an allusion to that event in Hebrews 11, in the chapter of faith where in verse 37 the preacher of that great sermon says many of the heroes of faith were killed, "They were stoned, he says, they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword." He may very well have been talking about Isaiah. And if it was, then it was during the reign of wicked Manasseh that it happened!!

Verses 12-14 of 2 Kings 21 pronounce God's final judgment upon the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Because Judah failed to learn from the graphic example of her Northern cousin upon whom God's judgment had finally fallen, in the form of an Assyrian firestorm which took them into an exile from which they would never return, God said Judah would suffer the same fate. My friends, there are two ways in which you and I can learn some of the most important lessons that God wants to teach us. We can learn them from the experience of others or we will learn them at the hands of a much more exacting and painful teacher -- our own personal experience. When they saw the hammer of God's judgment fall upon their northern cousins, the people of God in Judah should have realized that unless they repented and followed the Lord they too would be judged. They failed to learn from the experience of others. They were therefore condemned to repeat that experience in their own lives.