

especially in Deuteronomy – that the Israelites would only have rest from their enemies if there was total obedience to God. They had not to copy the ways of the Canaanites nor of the other nations surrounding Israel. The preaching of the prophets emphasized this. The gods of the nations were ‘no-gods’. Although they did not know it, the other nations had been guided by the Lord. Later, Jeremiah would be astounded at the idea of a nation changing its gods. Unheard of! This is what Manasseh was leading Israel to do – turning away from the LORD and returning to the worship of the Canaanite gods, Baal and Asherah. Manasseh should have known what the Law required. He would have been aware of what the prophets had said and what had happened to the northern country of Israel as a result of their wickedness. He chose to ignore it and seal the fate of Judah. There was no prophetic activity during the 55 years of his reign. Amos and Hosea were long gone. Isaiah and Micah ended their ministries shortly before the death of Hezekiah. Jeremiah and Zephaniah did not minister until the reign of Josiah. Manasseh would not have listened if there had been prophets.

The Bible has never been more available than it is today, in formats and language that everyone can understand. Yet in many western countries there is a famine of the Word of God. A survey in UK showed that a majority of church members never open a Bible from one Sunday to the next. The illumination is there but many are content to remain in ignorance.

CONCLUSION

Farmer Brearley had been to market and was about to drive home again. ‘Let’s see, now,’ said he thoughtfully, looking over the parcels in the trap. ‘I’ve got my sack of meal, and my new fork, and my sheep-salve. I reckon that’s the lot.’ So he climbed up and drove off at a canter, but once or twice he looked round and scratched his head. ‘I reckon that’s all,’ he said uneasily. ‘I reckon so.’ At last he drew rein at his own door, where his daughter stared in astonishment. ‘Eh, Father,’ she exclaimed, ‘whatever have you done with Mother?’

Only about 100 years were left to the kingdom of Judah. It could have been so different. Tragedy is inevitable when God is forgotten.

GOD IS FORGOTTEN 2 Kings 21:1-9 John 6:60-71

INTRODUCTION

When King George III is mentioned, Americans can think of nothing good, leaving the only course of action separation from England as the way of securing liberty. Yet, George III was a popular monarch. He was a devoted husband and affectionate father. His tastes were simple; in religion he was sincere and he was brave. He was a patron of the arts and had a keen interest in farming – sharing the interests of most Englishmen of his day. The writer of the Book of Kings can find nothing good to say about King Manasseh, son of Hezekiah. His final comment on the king:

2 Kin 21:16 ¹⁶Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides the sin that he made Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

Chronicles tells us that Manasseh was called to account by the king of Assyria and that he repented of his wicked ways and humbled himself. *Kings* is concerned to show how the rulers measured up to the standards set by God in the Law and proclaimed by the prophets. In this regard Manasseh failed miserably.

AFTER REFORMATION – REACTION

King Ahaz had been bad enough, but his son, Hezekiah removed all the items of idolatrous worship, cleansing the country of all the evil his father had introduced. Now, Hezekiah’s son, Manasseh undoes what his father had done and reverts to the wicked ways of his grandfather, Ahaz. Hezekiah had put an end to the Baal and Asherah worship which had been the religion of the Canaanites before Israel came into the Promised Land. God had commanded the Israelites not to adopt Canaanite practices. They had to dispossess and destroy the Canaanites. During the reigns of wicked kings, like Ahab in Israel and Ahaz in Judah Canaanite worship had re-emerged. Hezekiah had removed the high places – local Canaanite shrines – and cut down the trees and poles that were worshipped there. This localized Baal worship had not been seen in the south for over 100 years. Now, Manasseh leads the country back to the evil ways. He is the worst ever king of Judah. Why did Manasseh undo all the good his father had done? Why did he go against the Law? It was quite clear.

Deut 18:9 - 11 ⁹...you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. ¹⁰There shall not be found among you

anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer¹¹ or a charmer or a medium or a wizard or a necromancer,

Even having experience the grace and goodness of God, some will not accept his way.

Following the feeding of the 5000, Jesus used the opportunity to teach the people that he is the Bread of Life. What does Jesus mean?

John 6:51 ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

This is the language we use at the Lord’s Supper. Because of it, the Early Christians were often accused of being cannibals. Roman Catholics developed it into the erroneous doctrine of transubstantiation, saying the bread at Communion actually undergoes a change into the flesh of Jesus. When Jesus says that the bread he will give is his flesh, he is foretelling his death on the cross. He calls himself the true and living bread to assure us that if we believe in him our spiritual hunger is satisfied just like physical hunger is satisfied when we eat bread. Jesus becomes spiritually satisfying “bread” by the sacrifice of himself, his physical body, on the cross. It is in that sense he says, **I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.** Even at the time there were those who could not get this. It was too hard. They stopped following Jesus and turned away. Going the way of Christ can be hard, often inconvenient. Is this what is happening today? Our own comfort, convenience; our desire to *do it my way* cause us to turn from the life and beliefs that God has called us to and revealed to us.

AFTER INDUSTRY – IDLENESS AND IDOLATRY

Hezekiah had resisted Assyrian invasion. God had rewarded his diligence and the Assyrians never captured Jerusalem. For most of his long reign Manasseh was a vassal of Assyria. He had to pay tribute regularly. He had to provide help for the rebuilding of the King of Assyria’s palace as well as the reconstruction of Sidon that had been captured by the Assyrians to give them a port on the Mediterranean coast. Later, the King of Assyria used Judean troops to invade Egypt. Assyrian soldiers would have been a familiar sight in Judah. The country would have lived under constant pressure to do what the Assyrians wanted. The greatest act of idolatry was accepting the Canaanite religious practice of human sacrifice. Child-sacrifice was a way of seeking guidance from the gods. It was severely condemned in

the Law of Deuteronomy. It had no place among the Lord’s people. Manasseh even sacrificed his own son in such a rite.

2 Kin 21:6 ⁶And he burned his son as an offering and used fortune-telling and omens and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger.

In re-introducing the old Canaanite idolatry, idols were even set up in the very temple in Jerusalem. Setting up altars and idols in the temple was a direct challenge to the exclusive worship of the LORD to which Israel had been called. Manasseh was as bad as Ahab, king of the northern country of Israel had been. He had allowed his wife, Jezebel, to bring Baal-worship[into Israel and the whole country had been contaminated. So wicked had the country become that God’s judgment fell on it and it had been taken into exile never to return. Manasseh’s actions led ultimately to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile in Babylon – God’s judgment on apostasy.

What has this to do with us? I do not bow down to idols. Not Baal and Asherah, no, but we have our modern counterparts. Materialism – cars, houses, money. Careers, learning, leisure, pleasure. Anything that dethrones God from first place in our lives. Idolatry can be very much a part of modern life.

Hezekiah’s reforms destroyed the bronze serpent made by Moses in the wilderness. Because of the association of serpents with the goddess Asherah it had become an object of worship, an idol. How could such an idol have existed for so long? Probably because it was not recognized as an idol or calling it an idol. Hezekiah, however, called it what it really was – a bronze image of a snake. How often we justify sin by either ignoring it or calling it a different name! Some call adultery “a meaningful relationship.” We excuse covetousness by calling it “prudence” or “economy.” A life of sensual pleasure is “living with gusto.”

In answer to a critic, Abraham Lincoln asked, “How many legs does a cow have?” “Four,” was the reply. “If you call her tail a leg, how many does she have?” “Five,” was the answer. “No,” Lincoln said, “just calling a tail a leg does not make it a leg.”

Have we made a similar mistake? Do we think that sin is not sin just because we do not call it by the right name?

AFTER ILLUMINATION – IGNORANCE

In OT there are two main forms of illumination – i.e. God’s revelation of himself and making his will known. There is the Law and the messages of the Prophets. The Jews often referred to their Scriptures (our OT) as *The Law and the Prophets*. The Law was quite clear –