



Joyful and Simple Moments
with the Books in the Septuagint Translation



THE PRAYER OF
MANASSEH
THE WICKED KING
2020

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Deacon Bishoy Boshra Behnam

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The Prayer of Manasseh the Wicked King

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**In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
One God Amen.**

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The Repentance of the Wicked King and His Call to God

Manasseh the most wicked king of Judah:

Manasseh, son of Hezekiah the righteous king of Judah, sat on the throne of Judah from 698 B.C. to 642 B.C. (i.e. for 55 years), And it was said of him that he was the most wicked among all the kings of Judah. He worshiped the idols, offered his son a sacrifice to the idols (2 Chronicles 33:6) and practiced magic. He was captured by the king of Assyria, and in his captivity realized that his idols could not save him. He humbled himself and prayed and called on God and repented of all his sins. Thus, God restored him back to Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 33:10-13)

The book of 2 Chronicles tells us about his repentance (33:12-13) and in 33:18-19 (write Bible version abbreviation), we are told that, *“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. Also his prayer and how God received his entreaty...are written among the sayings of Hozai”*

The Orthodox Church counted this prayer as a canonical book that comes directly after the book of Second Chronicles. In the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible, this prayer is placed in the appendix. It is a short poetic prayer that explains the concept of repentance.

In the Chaldean version of the prayer of Manasseh it says, “For the Chaldeans made a brazen mule, pierced full of small holes, and put him within it, and kindled fires all around it; and when he was in this misery, he sought help of all the idols which he had made, but obtained none, for their were of no use. He therefore repented, and prayed before the Lord his God, and was greatly humbled in the sight of the Lord God of his fathers.”¹

God received the repentance of Manasseh, despite the multitude of his sins and the bitterness of its consequences on the people and their leaders. This is because his repentance was according to God’s pleasure, for it was written that, **“He implored the Lord.”** (2 Chronicles 33:12) One can admit his wickedness like Judas did, who betrayed Christ, but he did not implore or seek the Lord. The main factor in repentance is not just acknowledging and confessing our sins, but also longing to return to the Lord, the lover of mankind, and be in communion with Him. This is what we see in the repentance of Peter the

¹ Adam Clarke Commentary.

Apostle after denying Christ, and in the repentance of Manasseh.

The prayer of Manasseh is found in the Biblical manuscript known as *Codex Alexandrinus*, alongside other odes and praises.

The Repentance of Manasseh and His Humble Prayer as an Acceptable Sacrifice to God

When St. Gregory of Nazianzus was preaching his homilies and serving God, he counted himself as poor, sinful and weak, and yet he delivered them in the spirit of love and humility and considered his homilies acceptable before God, who rejoices in the little we offer Him. In one of His orations, he says, “He accepts both Paul’s planting because it is Paul’s, but also Apollos’s watering; and he accepts the widow’s two copper coins, and the publican’s humility, and Manasseh’s confession. Accept my newly created sermon for a newly created pastor. Accept a voice raised in thanksgiving for the marvels before our eyes.”¹

Again he says, “God measures our donation not by the value of the gift but by the ability and motivation of the giver.”²

King Manasseh might have remembered, after he came back to his senses, how the chief priests at the times of Aaron would confess their sins, their families’ sins and the people’s sins wholeheartedly on the day of atonement.

The main themes in the prayer of Manasseh are the loving-kindness of God and His unlimited grace, and the emphasis on God’s longing for our repentance, because He yearns to forgive us and save us from perishing.

Manasseh humbled himself before God and prayed (2 Chronicles 33:22-13). He implored the Lord wholeheartedly in humility and thus was acceptable before God.

+ “Let us learn how we can cause God’s heart to be merciful through our humble and meek prayers, for the Saviour Himself also says, “Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Again, David says, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.” (Psalms 51:17) The Lord does not delight in anything like the meek and humble soul. ³

+ Such a one is worthy of admiration, and of being a friend of God, as one of the prophets says, " But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of

¹ Oration 13

² Oration 19

³ Comm. On Luke, hom. 27

a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word."¹

+ "For the moderate and bridled mind is exalted with God: for "God, it says, will not despise the contrite and abased heart."²

The Prayer of Manasseh Son of Hezekiah

1. "O Lord Almighty, the God of our fathers, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their righteous seed;
2. Who made heaven and earth with all their ornamentation;
3. Who set the bounds of the sea by the word of Your command; who closed the abyss and sealed it by Your fearful and glorious name;
4. Before whom all things tremble and fear because of Your power;
5. For the majesty of Your glory is unbearable, and the wrath of Your threats toward sinners cannot be withstood;
6. Yet Your merciful promise is immeasurable and unsearchable.
7. For You are the Lord Most High, and are tenderhearted, patient, very merciful, and who repent toward the evils of man.
[You, O Lord according to Your great goodness have promised repentance and forgiveness to those who have sinned against You and in the multitude of Your mercies You have appointed repentance for sinners, that they may be saved.]³
8. "Therefore You, O Lord God of the righteous, have not appointed repentance for the righteous, for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who have not sinned against You; but You have appointed repentance for me, a sinner,
9. Because I have sinned more than the number of the sands on the seashore. My lawlessness, O Lord, is multiplied. Yes, my lawlessness is multiplied, and I am not worthy to fix my eyes to behold the heights of heaven because of the multitude of my wrongdoings.
10. I am bent down with so many iron chains that I shake my head over my sins, neither do I have any relief. For I have provoked Your anger and done evil in your sight. I have set up abominations and multiplied idols.

¹ Comm. On Luke, hom. 27

² Comm. On Luke, hom. 102

³ This part of verse 7 was found in the Coptic translation of the prayer which is used in the readings of Bright Saturday

11. “Now therefore, I bow the knee of my heart, begging goodness from You.
12. I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned, and I know my lawlessness.
13. I ask and beg you: forgive me, O Lord, forgive me, and do not destroy me because of my lawlessness; neither reserve evils for me, nor be wrathful forever; nor condemn me to the lowest parts of the earth; for You are the Lord God of those who repent.
14. And in me, though I am unworthy, You will show Your goodness, and will save me according to Your great mercy.
15. Therefore, I shall praise You continually all the days of my life, for all the powers of the heavens praise You, and Yours is the glory unto the ages. Amen.”

The Prayer’s Structure and Content

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1. An Invocation and calling on the name of God. | 1 |
| 2. Praise to the merciful creator who does not accept evil | 2-7 |
| 3. Confession of Sins. | 8-10 |
| 4. A Supplication asking for forgiveness. | 11-13 |
| 5. A Concluding Thanksgiving. | 14-15 |

The Prayer of Manasseh and the Concept of Repentance

King Manasseh was notorious both for being evil himself and for propagating corruption and sin among his people and their leaders throughout 55-year reign. And in his heartfelt contrition, he became a marvelous example of repentance, of revealing its meanings and of practicing it.

Therefore, no wonder that his prayer is similar to the psalm of repentance (Psalm 50), which the church arranged that her children pray in the Agpeya prayers (the Coptic prayer book). His prayer carries the same spirit and the true Biblical mentality as we will see in the following commentary.

Spiritual Insights from the Text

1- “O Lord Almighty” [1]

The repentant king addresses his speech to God the Almighty (Pantocrator), the One God, creator of all. This king was a polytheist, in his arrogance and stubbornness. He worshiped many gods) who compete with each another, and

yet now asks to draw near to the One Almighty God, the Lover of mankind.

2- The king seeks to learn from his fathers about God's interactions with them, which is why he calls upon God in his prayer saying: **“O Lord Almighty, the God of our fathers, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their righteous seed.” [1]**

He resembles the righteous people of the Old Testament, who experienced the blessings of their ancestors and sought to follow their example. These ancestors are the great patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the prophets, King David, and all the righteous people of the New testament, who experience the unity of the church of Christ from Adam until the second coming of the Lord in the clouds, and especially St. Mary, the prophets, the martyrs and all the saints.

Manasseh realized that he is their descendant and wished to enter into a covenant with God like them. He returns from his straying and from breaking the covenant and the divine law. As we too offer daily repentance, we ask for the renewal of the covenant every day, by the work of the Holy Spirit and through the blood of Christ.

Someone might ask: why do we raise our hearts to the God of our fathers? Shouldn't God be a personal God for each one of us?

a. He is the God of all the faithful from Adam to the end of the ages. This is the one bride of the heavenly groom. As the parents delight in seeing the spirit of love and unity among their children, so does our Lord Jesus Christ ask us to pray, even in our private rooms in the name of all saying “Our Father who art in heaven” and not “My Father...”

b. The evil king calls God, “the God of our fathers, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” The secret of their holiness is their Holy Father, who longs and is able to sanctify any one coming close to Him.

c. If Manasseh in his wickedness surpassed the corruption of the worse evildoers, he now asks to join the faithful and be counted among them.

d. In his struggle against evil, King Manasseh declares his admiration of

those who preceded him in the fight and were victorious by God's grace and tender mercy. Because God appreciates whoever accepts to live in communion with Him, Manasseh calls Him: **“the God of our fathers, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their righteous seed.”** “You are the God of the righteous.” “You are the Lord God of those who repent.”

e. God chose Moses as the first leader to His people, in order to free them from their slavery to Pharaoh. He manifested to Him how much He appreciated all the righteous ones who preceded Him. On many occasions, He spoke to him saying: *“I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”* (Exodus 3:6) He also commanded Moses, *“Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: ‘The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations.’”* (Exodus 3:15).

God also commanded Moses to gather the elders of Israel and to tell them, *“The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me, saying, ‘I have surely visited you.’”* (Exodus 3:16) Moses also realized how much God appreciated the former saints and thus he said, *“Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; do not look on the stubbornness of this people, or on their wickedness or their sin.”* (Deuteronomy 9:27)

During the reign of Jehoahaz over Israel, Hazael king of Syria arose against him, but it is written, *“the LORD was gracious to them, had compassion on them, and regarded them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not yet destroy them or cast them from His presence.”* (2 Kings 13:23) At the time of the Maccabees, it is also written, *“May God do good to you, and may He remember His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, His faithful servants.”* (2 Maccabees 1:2)

Our Lord Jesus Christ declared that the righteous people of the Old and New Testaments rejoice together in the kingdom of heaven when He said, *“And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matthew 8:11)

3- Manasseh refers to God as He **“who made heaven and earth with all their ornamentation”** [2] By these words, he recants from worshipping

creatures, as it was written about him, *“he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.”* (2 Kings 21:3-5) He also declares that God is, **“before whom all things tremble and fear because of Your power.”**

One of the fruits of his repentance is that he, *“knew that the Lord was God.”* (2 Chronicles 33:13). This he did not learn as a spoilt child in the royal palace, but only when he was bound with fetters, humiliated, and chained into captivity. In his prayer, he declares that God is the true God feared by all creation, who offers salvation to all repentant souls when they return to Him.

The mystery of the marvelously ornamented heavenly hosts, and of the goodness of earthly creations, is the holy Creator Himself. For this reason, Manasseh yearns to return to God. When God operates in his soul, it will be transformed into a new sacred heaven, and when He operates in his flesh, He will transform it to a new earth where the righteousness of God dwells.

4- “Who set the bounds of the sea by the word of Your command; who closed the abyss and sealed it by Your fearful and glorious name;” [3]

God granted man freewill to choose life, by remaining in loving communion with Him, or death by listening to the counsel of Satan and his powers. At the same time, he declares God’s authority as He set bounds to the sea that it cannot exceed being bound by God’s command.

As the righteous rejoice in their friendship and communion with God, Manasseh sees God as fearful, in front of whom everyone trembles. Truly, God grants the heaven and earth their ornaments, and so, if the earth represents the body and the heaven represents the soul, therefore God desires to glorify our bodies and our souls through our eternal inheritance, as we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). The secret of our glory is God himself!

God has granted freewill, but at the same time He does not allow us to go through hardships that we cannot bear that we may not break down.

5- “before whom all things tremble and fear because of Your power;” [4]

6- “for the majesty of Your glory is unbearable, and the wrath of Your threats toward sinners cannot be withstood;” [5]. Our Holy Lord does not accept sin. And though He is angry with sinners, He is merciful, does not wishing their death and opens the gates of repentance before them.

Manasseh realized God's unlimited powers:

a. "for the majesty of Your glory is unbearable"

b. "And the wrath of Your threats toward sinners cannot be withstood;"

c. "Yet Your merciful promise is immeasurable and unsearchable."

7- "Yet Your merciful promise is immeasurable and unsearchable." [6]

8- "For You are the Lord Most High, and are tenderhearted, patient, very merciful, and who repent toward the evils of man."

Repentance and confession are the means by which we return to the merciful, longsuffering Savior and dwell in communion with Him. While Manasseh was in prison, he realized God's plan for him, for God's wrath and chastisement is upon sinners, and His chastisement aims to demonstrate His merciful will. When we grieve over our sins and weaknesses, God never intends to wreak vengeance on us or harshly rebuke us, but grieves over our sin. We grieve over our sins and He grieves over the depths of sin we have fallen into.

9- "And in the multitude of Your mercies You have appointed repentance for sinners, that they may be saved." Through his repentance, King Manasseh was released from prison in the land of his enemies and returned to his kingdom. Instead of humiliation, his honor was restored, giving hope to all sinners no matter how great their sins may be.

10- "Therefore You, O Lord God of the righteous, have not appointed repentance for the righteous, for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who have not sinned against You; but You have appointed repentance for me, a sinner, [8] because I have sinned more than the number of the sands on the seashore. My lawlessness, O Lord, is multiplied. Yes, my lawlessness is multiplied, and I am not worthy to fix my eyes to behold the heights of heaven because of the multitude of my wrongdoings. [9] The Lord is close to all the righteous, and thus Manasseh calls Him, "**God of the righteous,**" and is also close to the repentant, and thus he calls Him, "**God of those who repent.**"

Manasseh compares his situation to that of his forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He realized that God is calling him to repentance. Whereas he is unable to get close to God with his human capabilities, God grants him repentance by His grace, that he may rejoice in His mercies and divine

promises. His forefathers did not need to be called to repentance, because their sins were committed out of their human weaknesses, and when they sinned, they were instantly heart-stricken.

Manasseh realized his misery and his headlong immersion in evil, to the extent that he used to boast about his sins as his source of strength and happiness, whereas his forefathers considered their sins a falling short of their lofty desires.

11- “I am bent down with so many iron chains that I shake my head over my sins, neither do I have any relief. For I have provoked Your anger and done evil in your sight. I have set up abominations and multiplied idols.” [10] Manasseh did not hear Christ’s parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, but by raising his heart to God, he prayed with the tax collector (Luke 18:13), and with the prodigal son as he returned to his father (Luke 15:19), **“I am not worthy to fix my eyes to behold the heights of heaven.”**

Manasseh describes the danger of sin and its heaviness. Indeed, it is heavier than iron! **“I am bent down with so many iron chains.”**, and thus he says: **“I shake my head over my sins.”** and concerning their multitude he says: **“I have sinned more than the number of the sands on the seashore”**. The church quotes this verse in its praises and St. Jerome says, “A sin so great needed to find great mercy.”¹

12- “Now therefore, I bow the knee of my heart, begging goodness from You.” [11]

Manasseh emphasizes that he used to worship idols with his body, but after his repentance, he rejoices in bowing his heart to God. His repentance came from the very depths of his heart, **“Now therefore, I bow the knee of my heart”**

He offered a public and a private repentance. Just as he practiced evil in public, he admitted his sin before his people and their leaders. He sinned against God, who searches the depths of people, and offered the cries of his heart in humility, “Now therefore, I bow the knee of my heart,” with his tears and *metanoias*.

¹ Epistle 122: 3.

+ I noticed that many of you beat on their chests and say, “We have sinned,” yet they think that their hearts are saying the same words. I tell them and to the ones similar to them: not everyone who says “I have sinned, I have sinned” receives forgiveness, just as it is written, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven,” (Matthew 7:21)

In the Bible, Judas confessed before the Jewish priests and their elders that he had sinned (Matthew 27:3), and King Saul did the same before Samuel (1 Samuel 15:24-34). David also confessed his sin before Nathan the prophet, but none of them received forgiveness except for David, who confessed his sin from the very depths of his heart (Psalm 51:1). He was steadfast in his prayers and ascetism, and this is evident in the Book of Psalms.

St. John Chrysostom

13- “I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned, and I know my lawlessness” [12]

“Everything, therefore, which the saints do, they do "in the presence of God." The sinner flees from the presence of God. The saints, however, both eat and drink "in the presence of God" and do everything they do "in the presence of God." Even if they do evil, do it before God and in his presence just as the man who said: "To you only have I sinned and have done evil before you." What advantage, then, does he have who does evil before God? That he immediately repents and says, "I have sinned." He, however, who departs from the presence of God does not know how to be converted and to purge his sin by repenting. This, then, is the difference between doing evil before God and to have departed from the presence of God when you sin.”¹

Origen

14- “I ask and beg you: forgive me, O Lord, forgive me, and do not destroy me because of my lawlessness; neither reserve evils for me, nor be wrathful forever; nor condemn me to the lowest parts of the earth; for You are the Lord God of those who repent.” [13]

+ I plead to you, oh You the perfect goodness, do not remember my impulsiveness, do not judge Your servant, (Psalm 143:2)

¹ In Exod., hom. 11. 5.

But Have mercy upon me, O God, According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, (Psalm 51:1)

Blot out my transgressions.

Poor me, for the day of judgement is coming, and what is hidden in my consciousness will be revealed. And then I will hear that voice saying, “here is the man and here are his deeds.” (Genesis 19:5)

What shall I say then?

My God, when heaven reveals my sins, and the earth arise against me.

St. Augustine

15- “And in me, though I am unworthy, You will show Your goodness, and will save me according to Your great mercy.” [14]

+ Whoever seeks the greatness of mercy, confesses how miserable he is...

+ I was about to lose hope because of my serious wounds if I had not found such a great Physician.

St. Augustine

16- “Therefore, I shall praise You continually all the days of my life, for all the powers of the heavens praise You, and Yours is the glory unto the ages. Amen.” [15] Manasseh concludes his prayer by revealing his longing to praise the Lord and glorify Him all the days of his life and unto the ages, by partaking with the heavenly multitudes in their eternal praise.

The church chants the prayer of King Manasseh during the Vigil of Bright Saturday as she celebrates the Lord Savior of sinners, who destroyed the power of death through His burial, and raised those who had reposed in the hope of the resurrection and dwelt in Hades. The church recognizes that her Savior is made manifest in her, and that He folds the repentant ones in His embrace. He raises them, glorified in the power of His cross and the glory of His resurrection.

St. Jacob of Serugh emphasizes on the connection between repentance and praising the Lord, saying:

+ Oh repentant soul, walk speedily towards repentance, and live! You listen to the voice of Lord saying, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked,” (Ezekiel 33:11). Do not seek to abide in your sins, or else you will die. Return

back to Him as Sarah returned to Abraham (Genesis 12:10-20). Do not rejoice in the worldly life, as Sarah did not prefer the king's table over Abraham's companionship. She was not blamed for her return as you will not be blamed if you returned to God. You will be blamed if you did not. If you do, He will embrace you, welcome you, carry you and offer you to His Father. He will rejoice in you, love you and will tell you:

Our lost image has been found,
Our lost daughter has returned,
Our stolen belongings have been returned to us.

All the angels will rejoice in heaven. They will delight in your presence and be glad at your repentance, and praise at your return. The Father accepts you; the Son brings you to Him and the Holy Spirit returns you. To Him be the glory, praise and glory forever and ever. Amen

St. Jacob Of Serugh, Letter 22.

Why did the church decide to include the Prayer of Manasseh among the other chanted praises of the Bright Saturday vigil?

King Manasseh's reign started when he was twelve years old, and he spent the next 55 years in disobedience to God, in idolatry and in sin. Finally, after God allowed him to be captured and tortured by the King of Assyria, he sincerely repented and his tears of repentance mingled with his joyful tears of salvation. He became a living example to every repentant.

Unfortunately, many people confess their sins, especially when during their teens or youth, but do not feel that God forgave them, and continue believing their repentance to be incomplete. And so, they continue to regret their sins and weep over them, instead of rejoicing and praising God who forgives sins.

For this reason, both St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine emphasize that repentance and confession are two inseparable stages, the grief over sin accompanied by the joy, praise, and faith in God who forgives our sins.

Similarly, St. Arsenius wept throughout his life and even at the time of his departure. They asked him, "Even you, Arsenius, do weep?" He answered, "For this very hour, I have wept all the days of my life!" He shed tears as he confessed his weakness and also declared his joy in God his Savior. His tears were a mixture of his feelings of weakness and of faith in God who forgives sins.

May we all, priests and laity, transform our daily repentance to a living example. May we no longer stop at praying, "Forgive us our trespasses," but mingle it with perpetual praises of glorification to God, the forgiver of sins.

Let us cry out daily, “My sin is at all times before me” (Psalm 51:3), and at the same time, remember God’s promise to us, “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins.” (Isaiah 43:25).

Practical Application:

When we confess, both in private and in front of our confessor, let us always begin by thanking God our Savior, and believing that His mercies are far greater than all our sins, and this way, we will never fall into despair.



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*God received the repentance of Manasseh, despite the multitude of his sins and the bitterness of its consequences on all the rulers and people. The reason is that his repentance was according to God's pleasure, for it was written that, "He implored the Lord."
(2 Chronicles 33:12)*

We see this clearly manifested in the repentance of Manasseh. After God allowed him to be captivated and tortured by the King of Assyria, he sincerely repented, and his tears of repentance mingled with his joyful tears of salvation. Thus, he became a living example for every repentant.

The church chants the prayer of Manasseh on the vigil of Bright Sunday, praising the Lord, the savior of sinners, by whose burial, He abolished the authority of death and saved the souls that died with hope, while they were in hades. The church realizes that her Savior is transfigured in her and embraces those who repent, raising them in glory by the power of His Cross and the glory of His resurrection.