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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A2339 ~ Manasseh Rules over Judah.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

After the death of good King Hezekiah, his son, Manasseh, became king of Judah when he was only 12 years old. He reigned for 55 years, from 697 BC to 642 BC.

He undid all the good work that his God-honouring father had done in restoring the worship of the Lord throughout Judah. And Manasseh refused to listen to the prophets of God too; instead, he rebuilt the heathen places of worship and the people turned away from God.

Manasseh also shed much innocent blood in Jerusalem, because he killed those who refused to stop worshipping the Lord and start following his pagan gods.

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The political situation during the first part of Manasseh's rule became increasingly unstable. The Egyptians, the Assyrians and the Babylonians were each trying to gain control of the region. Eventually, the Babylonians, under their great king Nebuchadnezzar, defeated both the others and in time, Judah came under Babylonian rule.

But before this occurred, first, God allowed the Assyrians to invade Judah because Manasseh was doing really wicked things that God detested. These included Manasseh sacrificing his sons to pagan gods, rebuilding the heathen places of worship, defiling God's Temple with altars to worship the stars, and consulting fortune tellers and spirit mediums. As a result, the Lord said that He would eventually do to Jerusalem what He'd done to Samaria. In both 2nd Kings, Chapter 21, and 2nd Chronicles, Chapter 33, the writers make it very plain that the Lord had said: "In Jerusalem shall My name be forever." He had specially chosen Jerusalem as His dwelling place for all time.

But God's protection of the people of Judah, as well as its northern kingdom, Israel, was all conditional on their kings and the people being faithful to their covenant with God by honouring God and obeying His law, as given by Moses. However, the people had a habit of breaking their covenant with God and under Manasseh, they were required to ignore God's ways and commands. Since Judah's godly leader, Hezekiah, was now gone, the people of Judah turned back again to their evil ways. And although God sent them prophets to call them to return to Him, Manasseh and the people wouldn't listen. So the Lord withdrew from Judah His covenant blessing and protection and in came the Assyrian armies, who captured Manasseh. He was taken as prisoner to Babylon, which at that time, was under the control of Assyria.

Manasseh became distressed about his situation and repented of his sins. He cried out to God, who graciously heard him and brought him out Babylon and back to Jerusalem again. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God, and he attempted to restore the true worship of the Lord again. He removed the pagan altars and idols from the Temple of God and urged the people of Judah to serve the true God. However, this was all too late to change the course of Judah's history. Manasseh's son, Amon, was as evil as Manasseh had been himself before repenting, so as soon as Manasseh died, the people returned once again to their idolatry. Amon undid any good that his father Manasseh had done during the last years of his life. But after only two years of rulership, Amon was killed by his own officials. He was replaced by his 8-year-old son, Josiah, the last godly king of Judah.

Manasseh, in spite of all his evil, teaches us one important thing: from a human perspective, it's never too late to seek God and repent from our sin. Yes, for Judah, it was too late, but not for Manasseh. We must never give up hope for people, no matter how wicked they are; we must never stop praying for them and their salvation. Yes, God may have rendered final judgment on them but we humans can never know that. Like the thief on the cross beside Jesus being crucified, people can come to faith in the final moments of their life. As long as breath remains in one's body, it's never too late to repent.

Notice how God brought about Manasseh's repentance. He caused him distress. It was the distress of imprisonment that prompted Manasseh to turn to the Lord. Thus Manasseh's distress was a sign of God's mercy and grace. God often uses distress to bring us to repentance. During times of distress, we should always be asking: "God, what are You trying to show me?" If we respond to God's discipline in this way, we shall be able to thank Him for it in the end.

We can ask: why did the prosperity of Judah depend so greatly on the king being faithful to the Lord? As leader of the nation, the king influenced the people for good or for evil. And we have to ask ourselves: do we discourage those around us from living a godly life, or encourage them to honour the Lord gladly?

When considering the various kings of Judah, it makes one wonder how wicked Ahaz's son could have been godly Hezekiah, who then had wicked son, Manasseh, only for Manasseh to repent and turn back to the Lord; yet for Manasseh to be followed on the throne by his wicked son, Amon. The answer is that each individual person is free to make his or her own choices in life. Our parents influence us greatly, but they don't determine the final course in life that we take. We should sympathise with godly parents whose children don't follow God. Although no parent is perfect, the main responsibility must be given to the wayward child. Happily, however, for most parents, the proverb in Proverbs, Chapter 22, holds true: "Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it."

Let’s now look at the life of someone who did faithfully follow his parents’ teachings all his life. This account will encourage us to do similar things too. We must never underestimate the power of one good godly life of character, integrity and courage. Eric Liddell was born to Scottish missionaries serving in China in 1902. In his early childhood, he played with the Chinese children and spoke their language perfectly. When he and his older brother were in primary school, they returned to Scotland and they were educated for the next 12 years in boarding school. After the boys had settled in, their mother returned to China. She faithfully wrote a letter to them each, every week, and no doubt, she continued her parenting role in those letters.

Both Liddell boys were naturally good athletes who trained for rugby union and cricket. Eric excelled in short-distance running and he had a very unusual running style. Yet Eric became the hero of the Scottish people, because he was their fastest sprinter and his quick speed earned him a spot in the 100-metre British Olympic team for the 1924 Olympics in Paris.

But Eric Liddell had told his country that he could not run in the Olympic 100-metre race, because the finals were scheduled on a Sunday. Sunday was a day of worship and rest for Eric. He would not run, even if he were his country's only hope of winning an Olympic gold medal. This made the Scottish people very upset with Eric and some people even called him a traitor. But Eric stood firm. He'd never run on Sunday and never would, not even for an Olympic gold medal. That says a lot about Eric's character, for he wasn't ready to be swayed by fame or the cheers of a crowd.

With very little time remaining before the Olympics began, Eric trained and qualified for another race that was not scheduled on a Sunday. Eric knew his chance of winning the 400-metre race was slim because two of the runners in this race had already set world record times as their fastest times. In addition, on the day of the race, Eric was assigned the worst lane. But his team trainer slipped him a note before he left his hotel room, which encouraged him and that he kept in his pocket. It was the Scripture verse from 1st Samuel, Chapter 2, with the Lord saying: "I will honour those who honour Me." Liddell knew his decision not to run on Sunday honoured God.

In the actual 400-metre race, as Eric rounded the turn on the track where the runners usually ran as a group together, he expected to see the world-record holders ahead of him. But they weren't. Eric went on to the finish line first, winning the gold medal in a new world record time. Eric received a hero's welcome in Scotland when he returned home. But it wasn't long after that that he stopped running altogether and went to China to tell people about Jesus Christ. He knew God was calling him to return to China to help teach the Chinese people about the Lord.

It was a dangerous time for him to return, though. Japanese soldiers had invaded China and were treating the Chinese people badly. They had killed many of them, burned their villages and destroyed their crops. When Eric arrived in China, it was even worse than he expected. It was not the land that he had left many years before. The Chinese, whom he once played with, now did not want foreigners in their country.

Despite the difficulties Liddell faced, he stayed in China. He was sure God had called him to be there. He began teaching at a British-run Chinese college. He loved teaching the boys there and challenging them in sports.

Eric started having severe headaches. He died of a brain tumour at the age of only 43, with the end of the war still months away. He was greatly mourned both in the camp and back in Scotland.

Each of us is called to honour God in our daily lives, whether we're famous or not. In Luke, Chapter 12, Verse 8, the Lord Jesus said: "I tell you the truth, everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, the Son of Man (that's Jesus) will also acknowledge in the presence of God's angels. But anyone who denies me here on earth will be denied before God's angels."

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The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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