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a great insurrection in western Asia against Asshur-bani-pal, the grandson of Sennacherib, in which Judah may have been involved. No Assyrian inscription known at present mentions specifically this captivity of Manasseh, though as Dr. W. E. Barnes explains in the Cambridge Bible "the restoration of Manasseh after this to his kingdom is not incredible, for Necho I of Egypt was first put in fetters and afterward sent back to Egypt."

**In chains**—Literally, with hooks—hooks fastened into the nostrils of captives, a cruel practice of the Assyrians.

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eph. 1. 51.

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## The Lesson Exposition

### "BETTER IF HE HAD NOT BEEN BORN"

It will be remembered that Hezekiah, the father of Manasseh, of whom the present lesson gives an account, had fifteen years added to his life in answer to his prayer (2 Kings 20. 6). That extension of his life, as we pointed out, was a misfortune rather than a blessing. It apparently would have been better if he had died, according to God's first purpose concerning him. Among the advantages to the nation that would have resulted if Hezekiah had died fifteen years sooner would have been the fact that in that case Manasseh would not have been born, which would have been far better. He was but twelve years old at the time of his father's death, and so was born about two years after Hezekiah was raised up from his sickness. It has been suggested that one reason why Hezekiah so earnestly desired to live was the fact that he was childless and hoped for a son to succeed to his throne. There is something worse than childlessness, as many parents have found to their great sorrow. This seems a very clear case in point. It involves some very perplexing questions, nevertheless it appears to be true that it were better if some men had never been born. Why God permits them to be born we may not understand, but Jesus himself declared that the birth of some people is a misfortune (Matt. 23. 24).

### A CORRUPTED YOUTH

The fact was that Manasseh was either born with an unusually evil nature, or that he was ruined in his raising. Probably it requires both assumptions to account for him. He was only twelve years old when he began to reign, but he seemed a century old in sin from the beginning. We cannot tell how much moral perversion in him may have been due to hereditary causes. His paternal grandfather (Ahaz) was a wicked king. Of his mother, Hephzibah (2 Kings 21. 1), we know nothing. If any well have been that she, as the mother of not a few other heirs to thrones, was morally unfit to be the educator of a king. Good on the whole as Manasseh's father was, his later years were his worst. The

**To Babylon**—Babylon, while not at this time the capital of Assyria, was nevertheless one of the royal residence cities, and hence the prisoners may well have been taken thither instead of to Nineveh, the capital.

**12. The God of his fathers**—Jehovah, whom he had forsaken, had not been his God.

**13.** This verse clearly illustrates the purpose of the Chronicler's narrative as a whole, which is to show that apostasy from Jehovah brought destruction upon the nation, while repentance and loyalty to Jehovah brought with it pardon and the blessing of prosperity.

historian gives us a picture of him in those last years that is not attractive (2 Chron. 32. 24-26). His moral influence with his son in those days could not have been strong and wholesome. Then evidently there was a court party that had never been in sympathy with the reforms of Hezekiah, and that was waiting an opportunity to overthrow all that he had done. As essential to the purposes of this party of idolatrous reactionaries we may be sure they used every means to poison the mind of the young prince and gain his sympathy. In any case, by whatever means it was accomplished, Manasseh at the age of twelve was a thoroughly corrupted youth. At just that age when by the natural laws of youth he should have found it easiest to have given himself wholly to the service of God, he gave himself with fearful earnestness to a life of sin.

### THE DEBAUCHING OF A NATION

The brief account of the first period of Manasseh's reign gives us a very inadequate idea, unless we can expand it in imagination and supply the details, of the state of things which he brought about in the nation. He inaugurated a veritable carnival of corruption, in many respects even more repulsive and horrible than the excesses of the so-called Age of Reason in the history of France. The lesson chiefly describes the way in which he introduced the abominations of idolatry into the country. The villainess of much of the idolatry of the kind referred to such as to forbid its being described. And extreme excess in the ways of idolatry, for it is said that he made the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do worse than the heathen themselves whose religious customs were adopted. He out-Heroded Herod in the deep defilement which he brought upon the nation.

### A REIGN OF TERROR

But all this corrupting of a nation and the overthrow of the true worship was attended with the deadliest persecutions. It was not permitted to be done without opposition and burn-