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The Soul That Sins



It Shall Die



Issue 53 Fall 2021

Many of us are familiar with 2 Corinthians 5:10, *“for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he had done, whether good or bad.”* and Romans 14:10b, *“for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God,”* Such verses emphasize the concept of individual responsibility and accountability. Unfortunately this isn’t a popular paradigm. Perhaps you’ve heard the comedian Flip Wilson conclude his jokes with, “the devil made me do it.” While Flip Wilson used this gag-line to get a laugh, it also resonated with those who would duck individual accountability. Recently our daughter was involved in a fender-bender accident while stopped

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at a traffic light. The driver at fault tried to convince other drivers that she was the innocent victim, but failing that, she simply got into her vehicle and drove off before the police arrived.

Ezekiel chapter 18 also addresses this subject in considerable detail. Ezekiel was addressing a stubborn complaint of the Jews in Babylonian captivity that they were suffering unjustly because of the sins of their fathers. Their complaint is summed up in the misuse of this proverb, *"The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children's teeth are set on edge."* God wasn't impressed with their complaint. *"'As I live,' declares the Lord God, 'you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore.'"* Ezek 18:2-3 In other words, the Jewish captives complained that they were suffering unjustly for something they didn't (themselves) do.

The remainder of Ezekiel 18 is an in-depth rebuttal of this proverb and their objections. God's message was that the Jews in captivity were in fact suffering justly for their own sins. *"Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not right.' Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?"* Ezek 18:25 Over and over God's prophets had warned of impending punishment like the following words of Jeremiah, *"and the Lord has sent to you all His servants the prophets again and again, but you have*

not listened nor inclined your ear to hear, saying, 'turn now everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds, and dwell on the land which the Lord has given to you and your forefathers forever and ever; and do not go after other gods to serve them and to worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, and I will do you no harm.' 'yet you have not listened to Me," declares the Lord, "in order that you might provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm. Therefore . . . Because you have not obeyed My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north," declares the Lord, "and I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation." Jer 25:4-9 The devil didn't make them turn away from the Lord, but he sure deceived them and blinded them to their sins and its consequences. Many years later, Peter wrote, *"Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."* 1 Pet 5:8b He'll deceive us and blind us too, if we let him; the choice is ours.

Individual responsibility and accountability are clearly taught in Ezekiel 18:4 when he says, *"the soul who sins will die."* Ezek 18:4 The chapter ends with, *"I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord God. 'Therefore, repent and live.'"* Ezek 18:32 This publication issue considers examples of a righteous (or unrighteous) life from successive generations of David's lineage, who were all kings of Judah, plus a New Tes-

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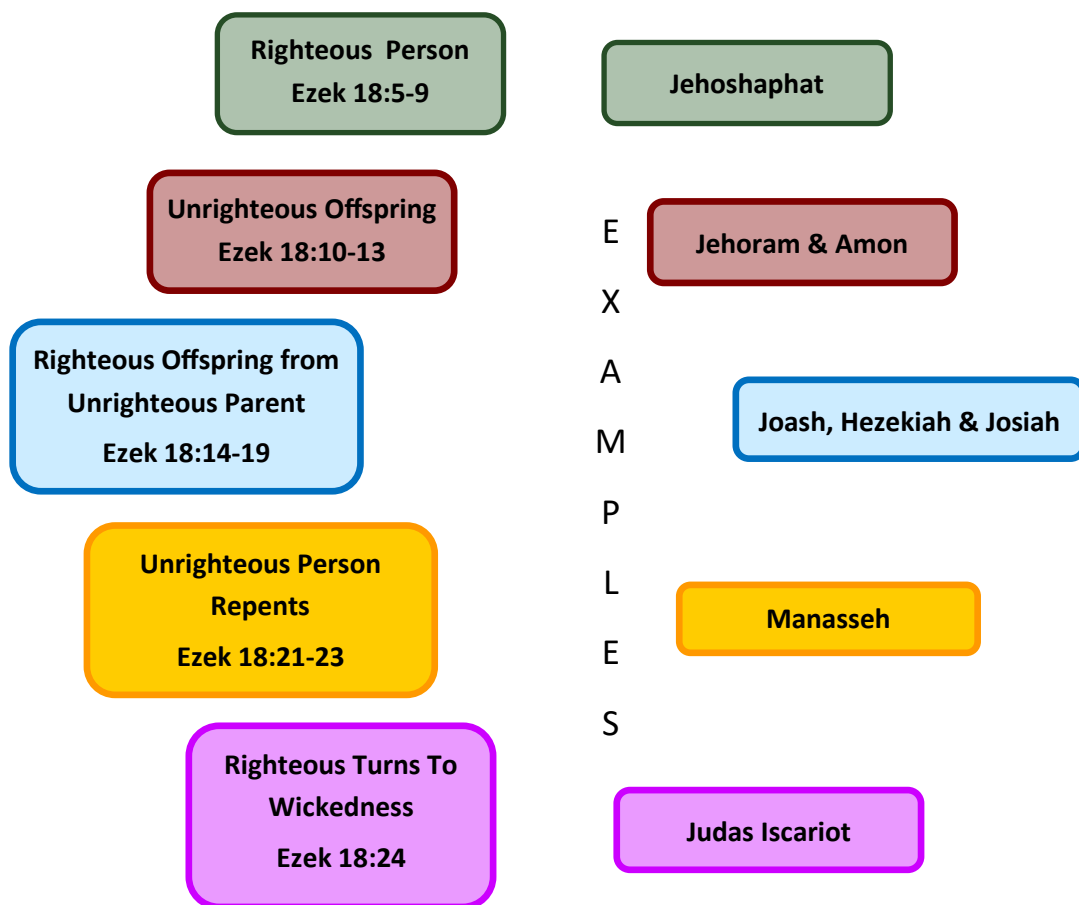
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tament example. In every case we note that the choice to follow or reject God was an individual choice. Free moral agency is a gift from our Creator, but each of us will be held individually accountable for our choices. As the choice was up to each individual, so also was the accountability for that choice. In Ezekiel 18:30a the Lord says, *“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct.”*

The four kings shown in the green and blue shaded boxes below are generally regarded as righteous kings. We should note

however, that they were not perfect individuals. Paul reminds us in Romans 3:23 that we all sin. But these “good” kings also remind us that we cannot continue in sin. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* 1 Jn 1:9

The soul that sins will in fact die spiritually, but thankfully we don’t have to remain separated from God and His grace. *“Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit, for why will you die, O house of Israel.”* Ezek 18:31





Jehoshaphat

Aaron Lumpkin

Our deeds matter. Not because we can achieve righteousness by the things we do, but because they represent what's actually in our hearts. In the simple words of Jesus, *"For there is no good tree that bears bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree that bears good fruit."* Lu 6:43 This concept is fundamental to pleasing God. It's a lesson that Jesus spends his final moments with all twelve of his disciples trying to demonstrate. After Jesus, the Master, humbles Himself and washes His disciples' feet, He tells them, *"For I gave you an example that you should do as I did to you."* Jn 13:15 But even that powerful example pales in comparison to the fateful events that follow, as He sacrifices Himself on the cross in the ultimate act of service: *"Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."* Tit 2:14 Being zealous for good deeds is not optional, but essential if we hope to reach our heavenly home. Jesus makes it clear that in the final day, when He separates the nations as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, that the dividing factor is not merely believing, but acting on that belief by serving Him through deeds (Mt 25:31-46). Our deeds matter!

This concept was not a new idea that Jesus introduced as He preached about the kingdom. On the contrary, it's a principle we see throughout Scripture. God, through His prophet Ezekiel, relates this very message to

captive Judah, one which they seem to have forgotten. In defining who He considers righteous, God declares, *"If he walks in My statutes and My ordinances, so as to deal faithfully – he is righteous and will surely live."* Ezek 18:9 This statement immediately follows a sample listing of behaviors that God expected His people to do or not do (18:5-8), things that Judah was guilty of either doing or neglecting to do, which resulted in their Babylonian captivity. Had their hearts actually been righteous, it would have shown in their deeds. This was not the case, however, thus God's punishment which they were enduring was just.

Consider King Jehoshaphat of Judah in light of this correlation between being righteous in God's eyes and doing righteous deeds. Jehoshaphat may be less familiar to some, even though Chronicles spends more time describing Jehoshaphat's reign than almost any other king of Judah (only *slightly* more is recorded about Hezekiah). His tenure is a high point in Judah's history and a direct result of his godly character and passionate leadership. Scripture compares Jehoshaphat's deeds to King David, an honor only 4 of Judah's 20 rulers receive (Asa, Hezekiah, and Josiah being the others). The impetus for Jehoshaphat's virtuous actions was his great regard for God. *"He took great pride in the ways of the Lord,"* 2 Chron 17:6 and *"He set [his] heart to seek God."* 2 Chron 19:3b This deliberate and ongoing pursuit of righteousness results in God blessing him and Judah mightily.

Almost all of what we read about Jehoshaphat, however, deals with the great deeds that stem from his righteousness rather than

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his righteousness itself. After purging Judah of idols, Jehoshaphat removes the high places, where improper worship of the Lord often took place. 17:6 Even his godly father Asa had been unable to accomplish this! Next, he organizes his officials, as well as priests and Levites, to go throughout all of his cities teaching the people how to follow God. 17:7-9 Jehoshaphat then overhauls the judicial system of the land, appointing judges in each city, with the High Priest filling the role of a Supreme Court. Jehoshaphat charges these judges: *“Consider what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the Lord who is with you when you render judgment. Now then let the fear of the Lord be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the Lord our God will have no part in unrighteousness, or partiality or the taking of a bribe.”* 19:6-7 In 19:4 we read that Jehoshaphat personally *“went out again among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim and brought them all back to the Lord.”* When Judah is invaded by a massive army in a sneak attack, Jehoshaphat summons all Judah to the Temple, proclaims a fast, and leads his people in prayer to their God. *“We are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You,”* Jehoshaphat prays. 20:12 He then personally leads his army in battle, charging his soldiers: *“Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, put your trust in the Lord your God and you will be established. Put your trust in His prophets and succeed.”* (20:20). After God wins this battle for Judah, Jehoshaphat leads his people right back to the Temple to gratefully praise the

God who has just delivered them (20:26-28).

In his zeal to be a good king, we also read that righteous Jehoshaphat makes some foolish choices. He makes peace with the northern kingdom of Israel, Judah’s main enemy for the last century. Jehoshaphat goes even farther by allying with Israel’s wicked king Ahab, and then also both of Ahab’s sons who reign after him. This may have been a politically savvy move, but one which was displeasing to God because of Israel’s idolatry and unfaithfulness (19:2). Tragically, Jehoshaphat even marries his son and heir Jahoram to Ahab and Jezebel’s wicked daughter Athalia, who will later wipe out the royal family of Judah and seize the throne for herself, ushering in a whole new era of idolatry in Judah. Despite the subsequent failings of his son Jahoram and future generations of Judah, and the evil of those he allied with, Scripture makes it clear that Jehoshaphat is considered a righteous individual. Late in Jehoshaphat’s life, as he and Israel’s evil king Jehoram jointly consult the great prophet Elisha, where Elisha told King Jehoram, *“As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not look at you nor see you.”* 2 Kgs 3:14

Scripture preserves King Jehoshaphat’s many deeds, not just to record history, but also as proof of his righteous character. God did not regard him as good because of his godly father Asa, nor did the Lord punish him because of the failings of his sinful son Joram, but rather because he *“sought the God of his father [and] followed His commandments.”* 2 Chron 17:4 Likewise, if we earnestly seek the

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same God and follow His commandments, our deeds should be a testimony of our righteousness. *"For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."* Psa 1:6 Our deeds matter!



Jehoram

Caroline Craig

This son of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah and son-in-law of Ahab, King of Israel, *"walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done."* 2 Kgs 8:18 Such was the damning epitaph of King Jehoram, fifth king of Judah. While his father Jehoshaphat *"took great pride in the ways of the Lord,"* 2 Chron. 17:6 Jehoram took no interest in the ways of the Lord, whatsoever. The juxtaposed stories of righteous Jehoshaphat and his unrighteous son Jehoram in the Kings and Chronicles illustrate the Lord's unbiased judgment of the individual

Ezekiel 18:10-13 states that if a father is righteous, he will live, and if a son is evil, he will *"surely be put to death; his blood will be on his own head."* Thus, while the Lord blessed Jehoshaphat with peace, He ultimately condemned Jehoram to an excruciating and undignified demise. The writer of Kings indicates that Jehoram ruled alongside Jehoshaphat for a time (2 Kings 8:16). However, Jehoram lived a wicked life like Ahab because Ahab's daughter, Athaliah, was his wife (2 Kings 8:18). Jehoram murdered his six brothers to secure his throne (one can only hope Jehoshaphat had already died).

Fratricide and familicide are common in the histories of rulers. Athaliah would later repeat this hideous crime, executing her own grandchildren to usurp the throne of David and secure her illegitimate queenship of Judah.

Jehoram was king only by virtue of birth order, not character, and the Lord judged that Jehoram's brothers were better men than he was (2 Chron. 21:13). Jehoram's reputation is evil enough to warrant the Chronicler's explanation to readers for why his lineage is even allowed to continue at all: *"the Lord was not willing to destroy the house of David, because of the covenant he had made with David, and since he had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever."* 2 Chron 22:7 His rebellion against the Lord led to civil unrest. The city of Libnah, given to the Levites when Joshua divided the land among the twelve tribes of Israel (Joshua 21:13; 1 Chronicles 6:57) revolted against Jehoram's rule, *"because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers."* 2 Chron 21:10 Readers can infer from the text that Jehoram was unable to quash this rebellion, which occurred at the same time as a revolt by the Edomites.

When discussing a king's righteousness, or lack thereof, the books of Kings and Chronicles consistently comment on the particular king's involvement in the existence of "high places" in the land. High places were unholy because they were either the sites of idolatrous worship (2 Kings 21:3) or the sites of unauthorized worship of the Lord (2 Chron 33:17). Jehoram's father, Jehoshaphat, was a righteous man whose reign was blemished by the fact that *"the high places, however,*

were not removed.” 2 Chron 20:32-33 Jehoram, meanwhile, *“made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot and led Judah astray.”* 2 Chron 21:11 Elijah the prophet delivers God's verdict on King Jehoram via a letter: *“Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father and the ways of Asa [Jehoram's grandfather] king of Judah but instead led Judah astray into idolatrous worship and murdered his brothers ‘who were better than you,’ the Lord would bring punishment against Jehoram's household, and would bring a particularly gruesome death penalty upon Jehoram himself: ‘you will suffer a severe sickness, a disease of your bowels, until your bowels come out because of the sickness, day by day.’”* 2 Chron. 21:12-16 The punishment against his family came first: Philistines and Arabs invaded Judah and took away all of Jehoram's possessions, wives, and children, and left only his youngest son, Jehoahaz, who would later succeed him.

Stripped of his possessions and family, Jehoram became gravely ill with the prophesied disease. Historians and medical scholars alike muse over the nature of Jehoram's illness, suggesting everything from colorectal carcinoma to rectal prolapse. Whatever the exact nature of his disease, two years later, his, *“bowels came out because of his sickness and he died in great pain.”* 2 Chron 21:19 The ignoble death befitted the man's character. No one mourned his passing. Judah made no fire for the deceased king, and they didn't even bury him in the tombs of the kings. Jehoram passed away *“with no one's regret”* 2 Chron 21:20



Amon

Austin Caldera

In Ezekiel chapter 18, the Lord delivers a powerful message about each soul's individual accountability for his or her own sins. This discourse by God was based at least in part upon a Jewish proverb stating that, *“the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge,”* perhaps stemming from the Jews living at the time of Babylonian captivity perceiving that they were paying for the sins of their forefathers. Verses 10 through 13 of that chapter describe all manner of ungodliness and depicts the fate of anyone who engages in it: *“shall he then live? He shall not live. He has done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon himself.”*

One example of a man who lived in such a wicked fashion is that of King Amon, son of King Manasseh. Scripture devotes very few words to his reign (see 2 Chronicles 33:21–25 and 2 Kings 21:19–25), but makes its point abundantly clear: King Amon *“did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as Manasseh his father had done.”* 2 Kgs 21:20 He *“sacrificed to all the images that Manasseh his father had made, and served them.”* 2 Chron 33:22 Notably, he did not follow the limited good example his father had provided, as the writer of 2 Chronicles tells us that *“he did not humble himself before the Lord, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself, but this Amon incurred guilt more and more.”* 2 Chron 33:23

From the perspective of learning from one's father, King Amon found himself in a

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very unique position: he was the son of a wicked king who later repented at least partially from his wickedness. Additionally, 2 Chronicles 33:21 and 2 Kings 21:19 reveal that, *“Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign . . .”* While Scripture is silent as to the exact time periods of Manasseh’s varying conduct, it therefore seems likely that King Amon would have had at least some exposure to his father during the latter’s wicked days and comparatively righteous days, giving him a front-row seat as to how things would have gone for former King Manasseh during those periods. Ezekiel 18:14–17 poses a question applicable to the crossroads at which Amon would have stood during this time, *“Now suppose [a wicked] man fathers a son who sees all the sins that his father has done; he sees, and does not do likewise . . . he shall not die for his father’s iniquity; he shall surely live.”* In other words, regardless of his father’s exceedingly great wickedness, King Amon had the same opportunity as anybody else to live righteously and profit from doing so. Not only that, though, but he was in an even more advantageous situation than the righteous son to whom those verses refer because he had (probably) seen how his father had fared while committing all of his abominations and after turning from them.

On this point, it is worth noting that King Amon’s father was not just an ordinary wicked man, or even an ordinary extraordinarily wicked man. To the contrary, King Manasseh was so excessively evil that Scripture itself states that Judah’s eventual fall to Babylon and ensuing captivity was due in large part to his actions. The divinely inspired author

writes in 2 Kings 24:1–3 of Nebuchadnezzar’s oppression of Judah in the days of King Jehoiakim, *“And the Lord sent upon [King Jehoiakim] bands of the Chaldeans and bands of the Syrians and bands of the Moabites and bands of the Ammonites, and sent them against Judah to destroy it . . . Surely this came upon Judah at the command of the Lord, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and also for the innocent blood that he had shed.”* In other words, Amon’s father was to the kingdom of Judah what King Jeroboam, the institutor of the golden calves at Dan and Bethel (see 1 Kings 12:25–33, as well as one example of Scripture’s condemnation of King Jeroboam’s actions in 2 Kings 17:21–23), was to the kingdom of Israel. Afterwards, however, King Manasseh humbled himself before the Lord and lived, if not righteously, at least less wickedly than he had earlier in his reign. What an opportunity king-to-be Amon had before him, then, to witness the consequences of sin and the rewards of righteous living!

Unfortunately, as Scripture records, King Amon either did not learn or learned all the wrong lessons from his father. He did not heed the instruction the Lord succinctly restated in Ezekiel 18:32: *“So turn, and live.”* In the end, just like everyone else who has ever lived, is alive today, or will ever live, King Amon chose his own course of conduct (a wicked one) and stands accountable to God for it. (As an aside: if you ever need an immediate dose of motivation to walk the Christian walk, merely consider what it would be like to stand in the shoes of Jehoram, Manasseh, or Amon on the final day

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of judgment. 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Matthew 24:36–51 are also instructive on this issue.)

Chapter 18 of Ezekiel is not the first time Scripture contemplates the value of a child learning from his or her parents. By way of one example, the book of Proverbs weaves the concept all throughout its wisdom, starting in Proverbs 1:8: *“Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.”* The book of Proverbs then goes on to indicate that learning from righteous parents can provide an observant and obedient child with a massive head start in learning true wisdom, while avoiding Satan’s snares laced in everything from prostitution, to drunken carousing, to adultery to laziness to careless speech. Additionally, while Scripture elsewhere teaches that the physical cost of faithful service to God can be high in this life, Jesus tells us in Matthew 11:25–30 that we can have true peace in both this life and the next through Him: *“Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”* Unfortunately, King Amon and the Jews as a whole picked the crushing yoke of sin rather than the easy yoke of the Lord, and for that poor decision they reaped the ironclad yokes of the Assyrians and Babylonians.

Chapter 18 of Ezekiel, then, is both an encouraging and discouraging passage. Those from sinful backgrounds, either of their own making or their ancestors’, can

take heart in the availability of repentance, peace, and future eternal life to all who would serve God faithfully until (or, if necessary, unto) death. However, those who willfully engage in sin, whether learned from their parents or selected out of association with the world, face the unnerving certainty that even the most righteous father cannot atone for their child’s misdeeds. King Amon, for whatever reason or reasons, fell into the latter category. It is our duty as servants of the Lord, and to our temporal benefit in this life and eternal benefit in the next, to ensure we qualify as the former.



Joash

Sarie Jones

One great truth revealed in God’s word is this: we are all responsible for our own actions. Ezekiel 18 demonstrates this through examples of the offspring of both the righteous and the unrighteous. One man who fell into the latter category was King Joash of Judah.

Joash’s father was King Ahaziah. He was only king for one year, but during that time he did evil in the sight of the Lord. A main factor in his decision to act this way was the influence of his mother, Athaliah. She was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel and carried on their wicked ways. After Ahaziah died, his mother Athaliah wanted to seize power for herself and set out to destroy all of the royal offspring of the house of Judah. This meant killing her own grandchildren! Thankfully, she was not entirely successful.

Jehoshabeath, the king’s sister, took

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Joash as a one year old baby and hid him without Athaliah's knowledge. Jehoshabeath was married to Jehoiada the priest and they were able to keep Joash hidden inside the temple for six years. When Joash was seven years old, Jehoiada assembled a large group together to rise up against the rule of Athaliah. Joash was officially crowned king and Athaliah was put to death. Clearly, Joash had a wicked family history to contend with.

When Joash ascended to the throne he was only seven years old and therefore needed a lot of guidance to be able to rule over Judah. Providentially his mentor and guardian, the priest Jehoiada, was there to advise him. Ezekiel 18:14 reads, *"Now behold, he (the wicked king) has a son who has observed all his father's sins which he committed, and observing does not do likewise."* Joash is an interesting example to study because he was only a baby when his father died and was hidden in the temple during his grandmother's usurpation, so it's unclear how much he actually "observed." What we do know for sure is that he had righteous examples in Jehoiada and Jehoshabeath.

During the revolt against Athaliah, Jehoiada also took it upon himself to destroy the houses of Baal and restore the Levites to take charge of the temple. Remember that Joash was only a small child when this was happening and had been quite sheltered from the world around him. His more formative years in the king's house would have been after the worship of Baal had been abolished and things set back to how God wanted them to be. It was in this environment that a now-grown Joash decided to restore the temple.

The temple had been damaged and defiled during the time of Athaliah and Joash realized that the priests had not been doing their duty to collect taxes from all over Israel as Moses had commanded them. He sorted this out and he and Jehoiada collected a large amount of money to repair the temple and make new utensils for it as well. This was a good service to the Lord and the priests were able to use the utensils to offer sacrifices continually.

Unfortunately, things were about to take a turn for the worse in Joash's life. At the age of one-hundred and thirty, Jehoiada passed away and Joash no longer had him to lean on for counsel. Back at the beginning of Joash's story we are told an interesting bit of information, *"And Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest."* 2 Chron 24:2 Notice that this verse doesn't say that Joash did what was right all the days of his life. It states that he did what was right all the days of Jehoiada's life. Remember how Ezekiel 18 talks about how we are all responsible for our own actions? Joash had to be responsible for his own decisions as King of Judah. He could no longer rely on the judgment of someone else.

This void left by the death of Jehoiada was soon filled by those with less-than-pure motives. Soon officials from around Judah came and Joash easily listened to them. These officials convinced him to turn away from God and have the people begin worshipping idols as his family before him had done. Of course, God was very angry with them, so He sent prophets to try to turn them back to God. He even sent Jehoiada's

son Zechariah to prophesy to them, but these unrighteous advisors conspired with Joash and he had Zechariah stoned to death. The son of the man who raised him! Another time, the king of Aram was preparing to attack Jerusalem, so Joash gave him the gold and sacred treasures of the temple as a ransom to leave them alone.

These officials of Judah were obviously a terrible influence on the life and reign of King Joash, but as we know, he, like all of us, was in charge of his own actions. It seems evident that Joash never fully learned how to problem solve and make wise decisions for himself. He likely leaned far too much on Jehoiada and therefore when Jehoiada died, he was ill-equipped to rule wisely by himself. This left him wide open to be taken advantage of by anyone around him. For we know, *"Do not be deceived, 'bad company corrupts good morals.'"* 1 Cor 15:33

King Joash serves as an example to us today. The actions of our family and their past behavior don't have to dictate ours. We are all touched by the influences and environments that we grow up in, but we get to choose how we let that affect us. Are we going to perpetuate that environment for our children or other children in our orbit? Maybe the answer is yes, if you were blessed enough to live in a Christian home, or maybe it's no, but you can control your destiny. Secondly, who are we surrounding ourselves with? Are they righteous people like Jehoiada that are going to help make us better people, or are they more like the wicked officials of Judah? *"Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."* Prov 27:17 Lastly, are we making good decisions and relying on

our own knowledge of right and wrong? We all have the tools to make the right decisions in matters through prayer and diving into the Word of God. Just like Joash, we will all answer for our own actions, so let us all make sure that we do what [is] right in the eyes of the Lord."



Hezekiah

Ron Gray

When Saul, the first king of Israel, had "done foolishly" by offering a burnt offering to the Lord on his own rather than waiting for Samuel, he was told that his "kingdom shall not continue." *"The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart... to be prince over his people."* 1 Sam 13:14 If Saul had followed the commandments of God, "the Lord would have established [his] kingdom over Israel forever." Sin had put an end to a dynasty as it was just beginning!

God replaced Saul. *"I have found in David the son of Jesse, a man after my heart who will do all of my will."* Acts 13:22 Thus, the Lord set up a new dynasty under David and his lineage. As we see in this publication the sons of David were a patchwork of faithfulness, unimaginable sin, and everything in between.

Hezekiah, the subject of this article is the 11th-great-grandson of David. King Hezekiah was the son of King Ahaz of Judah. We will examine the differences in father (Ahaz) and son (Hezekiah) as they ruled and reigned

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over Judah, the remnant of David's empire.

Ahaz, Hezekiah's father, began his reign over Judah at the age of 20 and reigned for 16 years. The descriptions of Ahaz from 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28 leave no room for us to doubt that he ignored the commandments of the Lord and followed his own paths. *"And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God, as his father David had done, but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even burned his son as an offering, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree."* 2 Kgs 16:2b-4.

In times of distress, Ahaz did not turn to God for help, but became even more faithless to the Lord! When the Syrians defeated him, he assumed that the power of their gods had given them the victory, so he reasoned, *"Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel."* 2 Chron 28:23

In final acts of desperation, Ahaz defaced the vessels of the house of God, shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and built altars to idols in Jerusalem and high places in every city of Judah.

Looking at the reign of Ahaz and the reign of his son Hezekiah, consider that Ahaz was 20 as he began his reign and reigned 16 years; Hezekiah was 25 as he began his reign and reigned 29 years. Therefore, Hezekiah was definitely old enough to have witnessed the ways in which his father *"did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father*

David had done." 2 Chron 28:1

Hezekiah had to make decisions about his life, whether to follow the example of his father, or to look to the patriarch of his family. David, was the standard of faithfulness that the Lord had set for David's heirs to the throne. Hezekiah obviously saw no future in following the devastating example that Ahaz left for him. He quickly went to work restoring Judah to faithfulness. Ezekiel penned the word of the Lord which details the guilt for sin of one such as Hezekiah's father, Ahaz. Clearly the Lord says that Hezekiah bears no responsibility for the sins of his father.

"Now suppose this man fathers a son who sees all the sins that his father has done; he sees, and does not do likewise: he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife, does not oppress anyone, exacts no pledge, commits no robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, withholds his hand from iniquity, takes no interest or profit, obeys my rules, and walks in my statutes; he shall not die for his father's iniquity; he shall surely live. As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother, and did what is not good among his people, behold, he shall die for his iniquity. Yet you say, 'Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?' When the son has done what is just and right, and has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live." Ezek 18:14-19

Hezekiah, king of Judah who reigned 29 years. *"He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done."* 2 Kgs 18:3 Then beginning in

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2 Kings 18:4-8 Hezekiah's attributes are listed, which include: removing the high places, cutting down the Asherah, and destroying the bronze serpent that Moses had made, because the people of Israel had made offerings to it, making it an idol. He trusted in the Lord, so that there were no kings of Judah like him, before or after him. He held fast to the Lord and did not depart from following him. He kept the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses. The Lord was with him; wherever he went, God prospered him. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him. He struck down the Philistines.

The gold and silver from the Temple was taken to pay a huge ransom to Sennacherib the king of Assyria. But, the Assyrian king was set upon conquering Jerusalem and all of Judah. Emissaries from Assyria railed against the people there and mocked God saying that all of the other gods could not save the kings whom they had conquered; inferring therefore that the God of Israel could do nothing to save Hezekiah and his people from Assyria.

Hezekiah resisted the taunts of the Assyrians and prayed that God would show them that He was the true God. Isaiah brought word that God had heard the blasphemies against Him and would indeed prove His power over kings, nations, and men. God would defend the city of Jerusalem.

That night the angel of the Lord destroyed 185,000 men of the Assyrian army. King Sennacherib went home defeated to Nineveh where he met death in the house of his "god" at the hands of his own sons.

"In those days Hezekiah became sick and

was at the point of death." 1 Kings 20:1. The prophet Isaiah came to the king's deathbed and told Hezekiah, *"Thus says the Lord, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover.'"* Hezekiah wept bitterly and prayed.

Before Isaiah had gotten very far, the Lord told him to return to Hezekiah with a new message from God. *"I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you."* God would add fifteen years to Hezekiah's life and save him and would save the city of Jerusalem from the king of Assyria.

After he recovered, Hezekiah was tested by the Lord (2 Chronicles 32:31) in the matter of showing all the great treasures with which God had blessed him to some envoys of the princes of Babylon. Because of this foolish display of pride, Isaiah told Hezekiah that all that was stored up by him and his fathers would be carried off to Babylon and nothing would be left. We can see here that all of the kings are guilty of sin, just as we Christians are today. Even King David sinned and he was the *yardstick* by which the kings of Judah were measured.

Looking at the differences between these kings David and Hezekiah were humble toward God, and desired to serve Him and Him alone. They maintained the ability and willingness to repent and turn to the Lord their God. Hezekiah, like his ancestor David was ready, willing, and able to do these things and to be personally judged by the life that he lived. Ahaz failed at every juncture to do any of these things and relied solely on his own selfish heart for guidance, which left him to face this warning from God, *"behold, he shall die for his iniquity."* Ezek18:18b



Josiah

Steven D. Baxley

The primary texts for information about Josiah's life and reign are 2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chronicles 34-35. Josiah is known for being one of a handful of righteous kings descended from David who reigned in Judah.

Josiah was born in the latter period of the Kingdom of Judah, in about 640 B.C. He was made king after the conspirators who had assassinated his father Amon, had themselves been executed. Amon's short but evil reign was characterized by the record that he *"incurred guilt more and more."* 2 Chron 33:23 Josiah was 8 years old when he began to reign. He reigned 31 years.

Beyond the young age at which he became king, Josiah is also remarkable for his decision to seek God early in his life. The Chronicler tells us: *"For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father."* 1 Chron 34:3 This is conspicuous especially when it is clear from the Biblical record that many, probably the majority, of his subjects were completely uninterested in seeking God at all. They were far too busy chasing after the false gods whose worship had been practiced in Judah off and on for decades. This was true across the board, encompassing all major groups in Judahite society (noble, priestly, and common). Idolatry was the order of the day.

It was in this situation, that Josiah's search for God produced tangible change in Judah. Beginning when he was 20 years old, Josiah began to purge idolatry from the land: *"in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah*

and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, and the carved and the metal images."

1 Chron 34:3 The extensive details of this monumental effort are given in the primary texts concerning Josiah's reign (listed in the first paragraph above). His efforts were not limited only to the kingdom's territory, but also extended into areas that had been a part of the northern kingdom of Israel prior to its being carried off into captivity in Assyria. Josiah recognized that there could be no compatibility between seeking God and allowing idolatry to continue among God's people.

Six years later, Josiah ordered that the Temple in Jerusalem undergo repairs after a long period of neglect. During these repairs, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law. Shaphan the secretary then read this book to Josiah, whose response was to tear his clothes and seek information from God concerning the things that had been read. He recognized that, *"great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book."* 2 Chron 34:21 Huldah the prophetess was consulted, and the word from God was that his wrath would be poured out on Jerusalem, but that because Josiah had humbled himself before God, disaster would not come during his lifetime (2 Chronicles 34:27-28). Josiah had the elders of the land assemble so that the book could be read to them as well. Apparently, the discovery of the book led to another, possibly more extensive, wave of purging the land from any vestiges of idolatry.

It was during this same year that the

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Passover was observed again (2 Chronicles 35:10). The Passover was originally commanded as a yearly observance, but as Israel and Judah sank deeper into the worship of false gods, its observance had become less regular and certainly less spectacular. Josiah determined to reverse that course, and not in a minor way. In fact, 2 Chronicles 35:18 records: *"No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet. None of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah..."* Large numbers of animals were sacrificed as a part of this observance, including thousands provided by Josiah himself for the people, as well as thousands of others provided by the officials.

The other significant event in the life of Josiah takes place at his death. Pharaoh Neco of Egypt took his army north to confront the Babylonians at Carchemish. Josiah moved to stop him at the Megiddo Pass. Pharaoh warned Josiah that he was doing what God had commanded him to do, and that Josiah should not stand in the way. Josiah disregarded this advice, was wounded in the battle, and then died of his wounds in Jerusalem at the age of 39. This is particularly interesting because the writer of 2 Chronicles confirms the claim that Pharaoh made: *"he [Josiah] did not listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God."* 2 Chron 35:22 This stands in marked contrast with the younger Josiah who had sought repeatedly to carry out God's will. The one time where he didn't feel a need to consult God resulted in his death at an untimely young age.

It is unlikely that either his father Amon or grandfather Manasseh had any kind of

major impact in the development of Josiah's character and his decision to follow God. He would have been about six years old when Manasseh died, and eight years old when Amon died. At the end of his life, Manasseh had humbled himself before God, but Josiah's memories of that would likely have been incomplete, keeping in line with his very young age at his grandfather's death. Amon would have undoubtedly been an influence for evil, had he lived longer while Josiah grew up. Most likely, it was Josiah's mother Jedidah (2 Kings 22:1) who had an influence on Josiah during his early childhood. Later, once on the throne, Shaphan the secretary may well have exercised a great amount of guidance both political and spiritual to the young king (Shaphan had at least three sons who were involved in some way with Jeremiah's ministry). Not to be left out is the possibility that Huldah the prophetess and/or Hilkiah the high priest had some role in educating Josiah about the God of Israel. All of these people are mentioned in the text, and with the exception of Jedidah, it is made clear that they were people who were interested in doing what was right. Perhaps it was the influence of all of these godly role-models, as well as others associated with the court or the Temple, that helped Josiah make the decision to seek God.

In any case, following Josiah, there were no more godly kings in Judah. God had decreed judgment, and there were none left to forestall it by seeking God as Josiah had done.



Manasseh

Gary Mangus

King Manasseh was an infamous example of an evil king from David's lineage who **late in life** repented and turned back to God. Manasseh was 12 years old when he began to reign and reigned for 55 years (697 BC – 642 BC) in Jerusalem. Unlike his righteous father Hezekiah, Manasseh initially did not acknowledge God and chose an evil life. *"He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel."* 2 Kgs 21:2

Actions speak louder than words! The following activities and the types of people he sought, show us that he thought he could predict what was going to happen without asking God and that maybe his nation would be blessed by one or all of these false gods that he worshiped. Instead of turning to God, he: rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah had destroyed; erected altars to Baal; built alters in the house of the LORD where the LORD had said "In Jerusalem will I put my name;" built altars to all the host of heaven (such as the sun, stars, moon) and served them; made a carved image of Asherah, as did Ahab king of Israel, and placed in the courts of the temple burned his sons as offerings in the Valley of Hinnom, used fortune-telling and omens, sorcery and dealt with mediums and wizards (2 Chron 33:3-7, 2 Kgs 21:3-7).

"The LORD spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they paid no attention. Therefore, God sent 'the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who captured Manasseh with hooks and bound him with chains of bronze

and brought him to Babylon.'" 2 Chron 33:10-11

The once proud king probably thought he would soon die and humbled himself before God in prayer, *"when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God."* 2 Chron 33:12-13

At this point Manasseh realized and accepted that only Jehovah was God. Like the Gentiles, who walk *"in the futility of their minds through ignorance that is in them,"* Eph 4:17-18) Manasseh turned to God and became the recipient of Divine mercy. His experience in dealing with Jehovah – so different from that he had been acquainted with in serving idols – convinced him that these were nothing; Jehovah alone was God!

God's answered to his prayer by returning Manasseh to his throne in Jerusalem. We now see the actions of a faithful King. (2 Chron 33:14-17) He made Judah more secure from attack by the following two actions: *"He has built a wall outside the City of David on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate; and it enclosed Ophel, and he raised it to a very great height. He put commanders of the army in all the fortified cities in Judah."*

Manasseh reformed and changed his ways and served God: *"He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built on the mountain of the house of the LORD*

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and in Jerusalem, and he threw them outside of the city. He also restored the altar of the LORD and offered on it sacrifices of peace offerings and of thanksgiving, And he commanded Judah to serve the LORD, the God of Israel. Nevertheless, the people still sacrificed at the high places, but only to the LORD their God."

As Christians, we are saved by the grace of God freely given by our Savior Jesus Christ through His sacrifice on the cross and through our continued faithful living. We are servants of God and can fall away and die by our sin if we shun God by continuing in our sins. Sin separates us from God (Isa 59:2). In the moment, we are enticed to please a friend, a parent, a brother, or sister — brushing off any hesitation to enjoy what we want to do, even doing things that are wrong and not pleasing to God. Thus, having sinned, and being enticed in our daily life, and as time passes, we are more like the world. Our light that is to shine is out! We have been seduced by sin are now lost!

The prophet Ezekiel was instructed by God to deliver this warning message to the people of Israel, *"Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die."* Ezek 18:4 — we would do well to listen to God's warning! We have to answer to God for our own sins.

Everyone can be saved! Ezekiel relayed God's message to the ones who live in sin: *"But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions that he has committed*

shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? Ezek 18:21-23

In spite of all the evil abominations Manasseh did, God forgave him and extended His grace that his sins would not be remembered as stated in Ezekiel 18:21-23 and thus Manasseh was saved.

If Manasseh can be saved, then anyone can be saved! If they repent and turn back to God and follow the plan of salvation, staying faithful to God, they will be rewarded with a home in Heaven! We also have the example conversion of Saul, who was persecuting Christians and even approved of the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58-60, 8:1). *When Jesus appeared to him in a bright light, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."* Acts 9:4-6 Following the instructions later Saul recovers his sight, is baptized and becomes the Apostle Paul in the New Testament.

Although Manasseh had been saved by God's answer to his prayer; the consequences of his sins continued after his death and would ultimately be paid for by the entire nation of Judah. 2 Kings 21:16 records: *"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."* Though there have been

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evil kings before King Manasseh, none of them had provoked God as did Manasseh. God spoke by His prophets that He would bring evil upon the kingdom as He has done to the northern kingdom of Israel: *“And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria, and the plumb line of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. And I will forsake the remnant of my heritage and give them into the hand of their enemies, and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies.”* 2 Kgs 21:10-15 However, this destruction and cleansing did not occur during King Manasseh’s reign.

After Manasseh’s death, during the days of Jeremiah, God still remembered King Manasseh’s sins against the Kingdom of Judah. In fact, God spoke by Jeremiah that because of what King Manasseh did, He would make the inhabitants of the kingdom of Judah go into exile like what He has done to the northern kingdom of Israel. He said: *“And I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.”* Jeremiah 15:4

Later when the nation continued their evil ways and refused to repent, God would not relent His judgement, and sent Judah into 70 years of captivity. The first group was taken captive in 605 BC, a larger second in 597 BC and final group in 586 BC after the siege, fall, and destruction of Jerusalem. (see 2 Chronicles 36:17-21, Jeremiah 15, 25, & 39).

Sin, even though forgiven, has lingering consequences.



Ephriam C. Davis

Perceived Lifetime of Unrighteousness

Many of us have the perception that Judas Iscariot had an entire lifetime of wickedness. How many of us can say that we know someone named Judas? It is a name that carries a reputation that’s so bad, it is almost never given to any newborn child.

We know little about Simon, his father. (John 12:4) Was he righteous or unrighteous? If he was righteous, he would have striven to teach and influence Judas to be likewise. (Duet 6:4-9) Consider this phrase, ***“God has no grandchildren.”*** This phrase was frequently used by Joseph Holland, a former elder of the Palm Beach Lakes congregation in Palm Beach County, FL and it embodies the level and depth of the knowledge, understanding, and ultimate wisdom found in Ezek 18. While occurrences of the word “grandchildren” can be found in some bible translations, nowhere throughout scripture, are phrases like “Grandchildren of God” or “God’s grandchildren” ever used. However, we can find 9 occurrences, of the phrase “children of God” in the ESV for example. We can also find phrases like “God’s children” and “sons of God” among other regularly used bible translations. However, these biblical phrases are always used in the broader context of God’s ultimate purpose.

We all must always recognize the need for spiritual growth in the knowledge and

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understanding of God's word by digging deeper and meditating more on its truth. We will examine 3 Reality Phases in the life of Judas.

Reality 1: The Righteous Phase

Jesus Christ selected and loved Judas just as much as the other 11 disciples who also were specifically named apostles. Judas was given the same abilities to have *"...power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease."* Mt 10:1-4 He heard and evidently received the same instructions for a missionary journey to preach to the *"lost sheep of the house of Israel" about the pending coming of the...kingdom of heaven.*" Mt 10:5-7 These instructions included details about: miracles to perform, that would confirm their preached message; what to take and not to take on the journey; what households to enter and how to interact with respective occupants; warnings about the need for wisdom about the message to speak and potential adverse consequences from the hearers, as motivation to continue to move on to next city to preach to others; the fact they should preach and not fear because they are servants the Son of Man seeking to accomplish the Father's will who values them more than the rest of His creation; to boldly confess and not deny Christ before others, so that Christ would confess rather than deny them before the Father in heaven; and finally to recognize and expect that even family members would be divided as a result of individuals who choose rather to prioritize God above family and strive daily throughout their lives to accept and follow His absolute truth and serve others. (Mt 10:8-42) At this point there is no

evidence showing that Judas responded any differently to Christ's instructions than the other 11 apostles. (Mt 11:1) All 12 apostles, including Judas, righteously undertook this missionary journey. (Mk 6:12-13)

Reality 2: The Reversion Phase

Deterioration in the righteousness of Judas is documented when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper. This was also the town of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus and they were apparently at this supper for Jesus. (Mt 12:6, Mk 14:3, & Jn 11, 12:1-3) The Matthew and Mark accounts both document this supper and highlight the fact that *"a woman"* came in to anoint Jesus with this very costly fragrant oil in preparation for His pending burial. Both identify a plurality of disciples present, as well as others, and that she was indignantly criticized by Judas for not selling this oil and giving the proceeds to the poor, instead of wasting it on Jesus. (Mt 12:7-13, Mk 14:4-9) John's account uniquely identifies Judas and no other disciples present, to show that he was most likely the one who asked, *"Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?"* That evidently influenced many of the others present to join in the criticism of Mary. Finally, John's account uniquely points out that Judas' real motivation was, *"not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take (steal) what was put in it."* Jn 12:4-8

Reality 3: The Ultimate Sin

Among the evidence of the sins of Judas, including his ultimate betrayal of Christ, we recognize that our God consistently extends

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a free will to all mankind, to choose between good and evil. We also, “*know that **God causes** all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*” Rom 8:28 Even when Judas chose evil, the death of Christ was purposed for our salvation. However, that never justifies any choice to sin. “*For the wages of sin is death.*” (spiritual separation from God) Rom 6:23 Jesus Christ loved and died for the forgiveness of the sins of Judas, and ultimately everyone that ever lived. (Jn 3:16, Eph 1:5-7, Acts 2:38)

So, were any of the sins of Judas unforgivable? The bible is very clear, “*...whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.*” Mk 3:29 Other than possibly violating his conscience when he chose to do evil, there is no evidence of him explicitly speaking against the Holy Spirit. However, Judas did commit suicide or self-murder. Murder is sin, and one might conclude that any suicide is therefore undeniably unforgivable. Before we accept that, consider Samson, one of the Judges over the children of Israel. His life ended in suicide after a series of victories and failures in his interactions with their enemy, the Philistines. He had lost his hair, vision, great strength, and more importantly, “*the LORD had departed from him*” after his final failure. In his humiliation, he evidently repented, and his hair had begun to re-grow. He prayed to the LORD, for the return of strength sufficient to take vengeance upon the Philistines. “*Let me die with the Philistines,*” and the LORD answered accordingly. (Judges 16) Samson’s name was ultimately included in Hebrews 11:32 as proof of his faithfulness and restoration at death, even

though it was effectively suicide. Thankfully, our God is just and knows more about each of us individually than we know about ourselves:

Physically – “*But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*” Mt 10:30

Spiritually – “*... God, ... is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*” Heb 4:12

A Final Look at Judas, and Missed Restoration Opportunity - Mt 27:3-5

3 Then **Judas**, His betrayer, **seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver** to the chief priests and elders,

4 saying, “**I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.**” And they said, “What is that to us? You see to it!”

5 Then **he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed**, and went and hanged himself.

Judas was undeniably remorseful, and penitent in heart with at least some corresponding actions. Evidently, his attempt to return the 30 pieces of silver to the unrighteous Jewish leaders did not eliminate his overwhelming personal grief. Why did Judas choose suicide? Did he think his sins were unforgivable? Why didn’t he first realize that he could and should have opted to seek God’s forgiveness in the spirit of **The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant?** (Mt 18:21-35) While we may never find answers to all these questions, since he failed to seek God’s forgiveness, we can sadly conclude the soul of Judas was lost at his death, when Christ said “*...woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born.*” Mk 14:21