

The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 21: Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Josiah

2 Chronicles 32:1–35:27

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Two great doctrines stand at the center of this lesson, and they reinforce each other. The first is the depth of God's mercy to the genuinely penitent. Manasseh is the test case that closes every loophole: if God could receive the king who set an idol in His temple and burned his children in the fire, then no humble penitent is beyond His reach. This must be taught carefully, however, so it does not slide into 'once saved, always saved' or cheap grace. God's mercy met Manasseh's genuine humbling; mercy is offered freely but received through real repentance, and the same Scriptures warn that Christians can fall away (Hebrews 6:4–6). The second doctrine is the authority of God's word. Josiah's reform was not driven by a king's vision but by a rediscovered book; the word exposed the nation's sin and dictated the shape of its return. For a people committed to the New Testament pattern, this is bedrock: reform follows Scripture, not sentiment.

These doctrines are not abstractions; they aim straight at the student. Manasseh's story is meant to reach the person in the room who has quietly concluded that their past disqualifies them from grace, and to tell them plainly that it does not. Josiah's story is meant to confront the person who has let the word grow distant and comfortable, and to invite them back under its searching authority. And Hezekiah's pride warns the one currently riding high on blessing to guard the heart. The transformational aim is that each student leave either more assured of mercy, more humbled in success, or more submitted to the word, and ideally all three, pointed in every case to Christ, in whom mercy and the living word meet.

Question 1

Student Question:

What does Hezekiah's response to Sennacherib's invasion, going up to the house of the LORD to pray with Isaiah, teach us about where God's people are to turn when threatened by overwhelming forces?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Sennacherib invaded Judah around 701 B.C., and Chronicles compresses the account to highlight its theology. The Assyrian king and his servants spoke against the LORD God and against Hezekiah, mocking the God of Judah as no better than the gods of the nations they had conquered (32:13–19). The threat was both military and spiritual; it aimed to destroy faith as much as walls.

Hezekiah's response is the model. After taking sensible defensive measures, he encouraged the people that with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles (32:7–8), and then he and Isaiah the prophet prayed and cried out to heaven (32:20). Faith here is neither passive nor frantic; it is active trust that turns first to God.

God answered decisively. The LORD sent an angel who cut off the mighty warriors of the Assyrian camp, and Sennacherib returned home in disgrace and was killed by his own sons in the temple of his idol (32:21). The contrast is pointed: the God Assyria mocked delivered His people, while Sennacherib's god could not even protect him in his own house.

The enduring principle is where God's people turn under pressure. The temple and prayer, not alliances or self-reliance, were Hezekiah's refuge. For the Christian, the parallel is plain: we cast our cares on God in prayer (Philippians 4:6–7; 1 Peter 5:7) and stand in the strength He supplies.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Threats against God's people are often spiritual as well as physical.
- Faith acts wisely and prays earnestly; it is neither passive nor frantic.
- Deliverance belongs to God, who answers the prayers of His people.
- The God the world mocks is the God who actually saves.

Discussion Prompts

- What did Sennacherib attack besides Jerusalem's walls?
- How did Hezekiah balance preparation with prayer?
- Where do you turn first when overwhelmed?

Question 2

Student Question:

What is the 'Sennacherib' currently shouting threats at your faith, and what would it look like to take it to God in prayer rather than facing it on your own?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question identifies the student's own besieging threat: a fear, a temptation, an opposition, a crisis that taunts their faith. Naming it specifically is the first step to taking it to God.

Hezekiah's example teaches a rhythm: do the wise, responsible thing, then pray as though everything depends on God, because it does. Prayer is not a substitute for action, nor action for prayer.

Encourage students to actually pray about the threat in the class or this week, not merely to discuss prayer. The lesson lands when the besieged heart goes up to the house of the LORD.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Naming our threats honestly is the first step to surrender.
- Wise action and earnest prayer belong together.
- Prayer is meant to be practiced, not merely admired.

Discussion Prompts

- What is currently shouting threats at your faith?
- What would taking it to God in prayer look like this week?
- Where are you tempted to face it on your own?

Question 3

Student Question:

Hezekiah's heart was lifted up in pride after his great deliverance (32:25); what does this warn us about the spiritual dangers that come with success and blessing rather than hardship?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After the great deliverance, Hezekiah's heart was lifted up, and wrath came upon him and Judah (32:25). The danger arrived not in the crisis but in the aftermath of success. This is a crucial and often overlooked spiritual truth: blessing can be more spiritually perilous than hardship.

Chronicles notes that God left him to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart (32:31), in connection with the Babylonian envoys. Prosperity exposes the heart; what we do with success reveals what we truly love and trust.

The redemptive note is that Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, he and the people of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in his days (32:26). Even pride can be repented of when it is recognized and confessed.

Apply this to the church and the individual. We brace for trials but relax in good times, and that is exactly when self-reliance and pride creep in. Deuteronomy 8:11–18 warns the same lesson: when you are full, beware lest you forget the LORD.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Pride often ambushes us in success, not in suffering.
- Prosperity tests and exposes the true condition of the heart.
- Even pride can be repented of when honestly recognized.
- The danger of forgetting God when we are full (Deuteronomy 8).

Discussion Prompts

- Why is success spiritually more dangerous than hardship can be?

- How did Hezekiah's pride show itself?
- What does it mean that God 'left him to test him' (32:31)?

Question 4

Student Question:

In what season of blessing or success are you most tempted toward pride or self-reliance, and how can you, like Hezekiah, humble yourself before judgment becomes necessary?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns Hezekiah's pride toward the student's own seasons of blessing. Most of us guard against discouragement in trials but drop our guard in success, which is precisely backward.

Help students identify their personal arena of success: career, family, ministry, reputation, where they are most tempted to take credit or trust themselves. Pride hides best where we feel strongest.

The remedy is proactive humility: humbling oneself before judgment forces it (1 Peter 5:5-6). Encourage practical habits, gratitude, accountability, generosity, that keep success from inflating the heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We are often least guarded in our seasons of strength.
- Pride conceals itself in our areas of success.
- Proactive humility forestalls the need for corrective judgment.

Discussion Prompts

- In what area of blessing are you most tempted to self-reliance?
- What habits keep success from inflating the heart?
- How can you humble yourself before correction becomes necessary?

Question 5

Student Question:

Manasseh led Judah into terrible evil, yet in captivity he humbled himself greatly and God was moved by his entreaty (33:12-13); what does this reveal about the conditions on which God extends mercy and the genuineness He looks for in repentance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Manasseh's wickedness is catalogued in stark terms: he rebuilt the high places, erected altars to the Baals, made his sons pass through the fire, practiced soothsaying and sorcery, and set a carved image in the house of God, seducing Judah to do more evil than the nations God had destroyed (33:1-9). By every measure he was the worst.

Yet the turning point is genuine and specific. When Assyria captured him and bound him with hooks and bronze chains and carried him to Babylon, in his affliction he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers (33:12). Note the words: entreated, humbled himself greatly. This was no shallow regret.

God's response is the heart of the passage: he prayed to Him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem (33:13). Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God. Mercy met genuine repentance, and the restored king proved it by removing the idols and restoring true worship (33:15-16).

Teach the doctrine with precision. God's mercy is vast, but it is received through real repentance, not presumed upon. This is not 'once saved, always saved'; Manasseh had to humble himself, and his repentance bore fruit. Mercy is free, but it is grasped by the truly penitent (Acts 3:19; 2 Corinthians 7:10).

The application is liberating and sobering at once. No sinner is too far gone for God's mercy if he will genuinely turn, and no one may treat that mercy as a license for sin. Manasseh shows both edges of the same truth.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- No sin is too great for God's mercy when there is genuine repentance.
- True repentance humbles itself and bears fruit (33:12-16).
- Mercy is received through repentance, not presumed upon ('faith only' and 'once saved, always saved' excluded).
- God's mercy never licenses continued sin (Romans 6:1-2).

Discussion Prompts

- What words in 33:12 show the depth of Manasseh's repentance?
- How does his story guard us from despair and from presumption at once?
- What proved his repentance was real (33:15-16)?

Question 6

Student Question:

Is there a sin or season in your past that you secretly believe places you beyond God's forgiveness, and how does Manasseh's restoration speak to that fear?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question reaches the student haunted by a past they believe is unforgivable. Manasseh is God's answer: if mercy reached him, it can reach you. The same truth shines in Saul of Tarsus becoming Paul (1 Timothy 1:15–16).

Distinguish guilt that drives us to God from shame that drives us from Him. Genuine repentance brings the sin to God for cleansing; corrosive shame hides it and despairs. Manasseh brought his to God.

Reassure without cheapening grace. The point is not that sin does not matter but that no penitent is beyond mercy. Encourage anyone burdened to bring their sin honestly to God and, where wise, to a trusted brother for prayer (James 5:16).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Believing oneself beyond forgiveness is a lie; repentance dispels.
- Guilt brings sin to God; shame hides it in despair.
- Confession and prayer open the door to assurance (1 John 1:9).

Discussion Prompts

- What past do you secretly think God cannot forgive?
- How does Manasseh's restoration speak to that fear?
- What would it look like to bring it honestly to God this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

When the rediscovered Book of the Law was read, Josiah tore his clothes and led the nation back to covenant (34:19–33); what does this teach about the authority and power of God's word to expose sin and direct genuine reform?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Josiah began to seek God as a young man and to purge Judah of idols, and while the temple was being repaired, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the LORD given by Moses (34:14). The word had been so neglected it was literally lost in God's own house. That detail is haunting and instructive.

When the book was read to the king, he tore his clothes (34:19), recognizing how far the nation had fallen short of God's covenant. The word did what nothing else had done: it exposed the true condition of the people and stirred genuine grief and reform.

Josiah then gathered the people, read the covenant in their hearing, and made a covenant to follow the LORD and keep His commandments with all his heart and soul, and he caused all

present to stand to it (34:29–32). Reform flowed directly from the word, shaping its content and its commitments.

This is a prime text on the authority of Scripture. The standard for reform was not the king's preference or the people's tradition but the written word of God. The principle abides for the church: genuine reform is reform back to the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16–17; Hebrews 4:12). The word, not human vision, must direct the people of God.

Apply the haunting detail: a book can be neglected even in the house of God. Churches and Christians can drift not by denying the word but by quietly setting it aside. Recovery begins, as with Josiah, when the word is opened and read again.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's word can be neglected even within the house of God.
- Scripture exposes sin as nothing else can (Hebrews 4:12).
- Genuine reform is reform back to the written word, not human vision.
- The authority of Scripture must direct the people of God (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the Law was lost in the temple itself?
- Why did the word produce grief and reform when nothing else had?
- How did Scripture shape the content of Josiah's covenant?

Question 8

Student Question:

How regularly do you place yourself under the reading of God's word in a way that can actually confront and reshape you, rather than merely confirm what you already think?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question asks the student how they handle the word personally. Many read Scripture defensively, seeking confirmation, rather than submissively, allowing it to confront them as it confronted Josiah.

Encourage exposure to the word in settings that can actually correct: faithful preaching, mutual study, and reading the hard passages, not only the comforting ones. The Bereans examined the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11).

Press for honesty. When did Scripture last change the student's mind or behavior? If the answer is 'never recently,' that itself is a finding worth bringing before God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We can read Scripture to confirm rather than to be confronted.
- Submitting to the word means letting it correct us, not only comfort us.
- Regular, honest exposure to the word keeps the heart pliable.

Discussion Prompts

- When did God's word last change your mind or behavior?
- Do you read to be confirmed or to be confronted?
- How could you place yourself more fully under the word?

Question 9

Student Question:

Holding together Manasseh's restoration and Josiah's reform, what do these chapters teach about the depth of God's mercy to the truly penitent and the supreme authority of God's word in directing His people, and how do both find their fullness in Christ, in whom God shows mercy to the worst of sinners and through whose word the church is called to genuine reform?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal climax, holding together the two great themes. Manasseh displays the depth of God's mercy to the genuinely penitent; Josiah displays the supreme authority of God's word to expose sin and direct reform. The two belong together: mercy receives the penitent, and the word shows the penitent what to turn from and toward.

On mercy, Manasseh closes the door on despair. If the king who defiled the temple and burned his children could be received when he humbled himself greatly (33:12–13), then mercy is wide enough for any true penitent. But keep the doctrine sound: this is not unconditional eternal security but mercy met by genuine repentance. The New Testament holds the same balance, offering mercy to the foremost of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15–16) while warning that those who fall away after knowing the truth face grave danger (Hebrews 6:4–6; 10:26–31). Mercy is free, received through faith that repents, and not to be presumed upon.

On the word, Josiah teaches that reform is never self-styled; it is recovery of and submission to Scripture. The rediscovered Book reset the entire nation. So today, the authority over the church's faith and worship is the inspired word (2 Timothy 3:16–17; Hebrews 4:12), not tradition, preference, or vision. A people who want to please God return to what is written.

Both themes find their fullness in Christ. The mercy that reached Manasseh is the very mercy poured out at the cross, where God justifies the ungodly who come to Him through Jesus (Romans 5:6–8). And Christ is the living Word made flesh (John 1:1, 14), whose teaching through the apostles is the final authority by which the church is to be reformed and held (John 12:48; Ephesians 2:20). In Him, mercy and authority meet: He saves the worst who truly turn, and He governs His people by His word.

The application unites the lesson: rest in mercy wide enough for your worst, and submit to the word authoritative enough to reform your best. Do not despair of grace, and do not despise the Scriptures. Both are God's gift, and both are perfected in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's mercy reaches the worst sinner who genuinely repents (33:12–13; 1 Timothy 1:15–16).
- Mercy is received through repentance, not presumed; Christians can fall away (Hebrews 6:4–6).
- Scripture holds supreme authority to expose sin and direct reform (2 Timothy 3:16–17).
- Genuine reform returns to the written word, not human tradition or vision.
- Mercy and authority meet in Christ, who saves the penitent and governs by His word (Romans 5:6–8; John 12:48).
- The kingdom is established now in Christ and His church, governed by His word, not a future political program.

Discussion Prompts

- How do Manasseh and Josiah illustrate mercy and authority together?
- How does this passage guard us from both despair and presumption?
- How do mercy and the authority of the word meet in Christ?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across the prayers of Hezekiah, the repentance of Manasseh, and the reforms of Josiah, name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to humble you, to assure you of mercy, or to bring you back under His word.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers three men and three lessons: Hezekiah's prayer and pride, Manasseh's repentance, Josiah's submission to the word. Each student likely needs one of these more than the others right now.

Invite specificity. Is Jesus humbling you in a season of success, assuring you of mercy in a season of shame, or calling you back under His word in a season of drift? Name the one that fits, and name the response.

Close on Christ, in whom all three converge: He teaches us to pray and to humble ourselves, He is the mercy that receives the worst penitent, and He is the living Word that reforms His people. Let students leave surrendering one concrete thing to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Different students need humbling, assurance, or the word most right now.
- Transformation requires naming the one specific response God is asking.
- Prayer, mercy, and the word all converge in Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- Which of these three men speaks most to your season right now?
- What is the one specific response Jesus is asking of you?
- How will you act on it this week?