

# Finishing The Course

In this lesson I'd like to take a look at two different characters in the Bible. These two men made very different decisions and led very different lives. Both of them have an important lesson to teach us, if we'll take the time to listen.

In the New Testament there's a person named Demas. This man is one of the most obscure characters in the Bible! He only appears in three verses – but those verses have a story to tell.

The first time Demas is mentioned is in Colossians. The apostle Paul mentions him in passing:

**Colossians 4:14:** "Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you."

This letter was written while Paul was being held in prison in Rome. Despite the dire circumstances Paul wasn't alone; Luke and Demas were with him. Demas was willing to work alongside Paul even though he was in jail! That's impressive. It shows the sort of person that Demas was. The fact that Demas was mentioned by Paul is no small matter either. (How would you like for *your* name to be mentioned in one of Paul's letters?) We don't know much about Demas but we do know he was a good man. After all, he was standing at Paul's side in spite of his imprisonment!

Demas is mentioned again in Paul's letter to Philemon:

**Philemon 1:24:** "Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers."

Like Colossians, this letter was also written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome. Once again, despite the terrible circumstances, Demas was there at Paul's side. The apostle even calls him a fellow laborer, which is high praise! Demas was

working alongside Paul while he was in prison. He was helping the apostle in his time of need.

There's one more mention of Demas in the Bible, and it can be found in 2 Timothy. When that letter was written the apostle was once again in prison. This time, though, things were different. Paul knew that he was going to be executed. This letter was probably the last one Paul ever wrote, and it was written shortly before his death in 67 AD.

In that letter Paul said this about Demas:

**2 Timothy 4:10:** "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia."

Demas – the man who stood by Paul during his first imprisonment – had now abandoned him, just when Paul's need was the greatest. Paul was about to be executed but Demas was nowhere to be found. The apostle explained why Demas did this: he abandoned Paul because he loved this world. When death approached and Demas had to make a choice, he chose this world over God. He did exactly what the apostle John said *not* to do:

**1 John 2:15:** "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Each of us have a choice: to love this world or to love God. The apostle Paul chose to love God. It cost him his life, but it saved his soul. However, Demas made a different choice. He chose to love this world (which cost him his soul). Demas abandoned God and turned to the delights that this world had to offer.

Demas seemed like a man of God but he wasn't. The reason we know this is because when things became dangerous he abandoned God to save himself. The Bible tells us that people

who do this never knew God at all:

**1 John 2:19:** “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

John is saying that true Christians go the distance. They don't fall away when hard times come and they don't leave when things become dangerous! Those who abandon God are showing that they never knew Him at all. Their religion was phony and they were just pretenders. Real Christians pass the test; false ones fall away.

Demas started out with great promise but when things became dangerous he fell. He started the race but failed to finish it. When it counted most he abandoned his post and walked away, leaving the apostle Paul to die alone. He chose the riches of this world over the sufferings of Christ. It may have saved his life, but it cost him his soul.

Now that you've heard the story of Demas, I'd like to take a look at Manasseh. He was the son of King Hezekiah and he ruled over the land of Judah. Although Hezekiah had served the Lord, Manasseh decided to live a life of total wickedness. The crimes that he committed were horrifying. He worshiped Baal:

**2 Kings 21:1-3:** “Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hephzibah. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel. For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up

altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.”

He polluted the temple with idols:

**2 Kings 21:4-5:** “And he built altars in the house of the Lord, of which the Lord said, In Jerusalem will I put my name. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord.”

He burned his sons alive as an offering to false gods:

**2 Kings 21:6-8:** “And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger. And he set a graven image of the grove that he had made in the house, of which the Lord said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever: Neither will I make the feet of Israel move any more out of the land which I gave their fathers; only if they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them.”

He was so bad that he persuaded Israel to be more evil than the ancient Canaanites who once inhabited the land:

**2 Kings 21:9:** “But they hearkened not: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel.”

Manasseh was incredibly wicked. Because of the tremendous evil of this man, God said He was going to judge the nation of Judah. In fact, God promised to destroy the entire nation and hand it over to its enemies:

**2 Kings 21:10-15:** “And the Lord spake by his servants the prophets, saying, Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols: Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab: and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down. And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies; Because they have done that which was evil in my sight, and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even unto this day.”

God said that He was going to wipe away Jerusalem the way one wipes a dish. He was going to utterly devastate the country.

However, Manasseh didn't care. He continued to murder

innocent people:

**2 Kings 21:16:** “Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.”

Manasseh filled the land with innocent blood. He was a murderer, an idolator, and he practiced human sacrifice. His life was an abomination to God.

God did exactly what He said He would do. Decades after Manasseh died, the Lord sent the king of Babylon to destroy Jerusalem:

**2 Kings 24:1-4** “In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him. And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servants the prophets. Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the Lord would not pardon.”

King Nebuchadnezzar demolished Jerusalem. He burned the city, tore down its walls, destroyed the temple, looted its treasures, and carried away its people. This passage tells us that all of these things were done because of the terrible sins of

Manasseh. God was so angry at what he had done that He pulverized the nation.

But that's not the end of the story! There's one more piece to consider. You see, when Manasseh wouldn't repent, God sent the Assyrians against him. They carried him away and put him in prison:

**2 Chronicles 33:10-11:** “And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken. Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.”

At this point something very interesting happened. When Manasseh lost everything and was at the lowest point in his life, he sincerely repented of what he'd done. The Lord heard his prayers and rescued him:

**2 Chronicles 33:12-13:** “And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.”

When God returned Manasseh to Judah, the king continued to serve the Lord. He removed the idols from the land and commanded the nation to serve God:

**2 Chronicles 33:14-16:** “Now after this he built a wall without the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entering in at

the fish gate, and compassed about Ophel, and raised it up a very great height, and put captains of war in all the fenced cities of Judah. And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the Lord, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the Lord, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel.”

Manasseh changed. He truly repented! He abandoned all of his former wickedness and sincerely sought after God, and he found forgiveness. He spent the rest of his life serving God and urging the rest of the nation to do the same.

Now, there were still consequences for what he had done. Decades after he died, God still sent the Babylonians against Jerusalem. They utterly destroyed the city, just as He had promised. God forgave Manasseh but He kept His promise. The sins which Manasseh committed led to the destruction of his nation – but Manasseh himself was forgiven *because he repented*.

The story of these two men illustrate an important truth. Demas turned from doing what was right and chose to abandon God. Therefore, as Ezekiel had warned centuries earlier, Demas lost his soul:

**Ezekiel 18:26:** “When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die.”

Demas turned away from righteousness and chose the world over God. That may have saved his life but it cost him his eternity.



Manasseh made a very different choice. He repented of his wickedness and cried out to God for forgiveness. Despite all the evil things he had done, he found forgiveness and died a righteous man:

**Ezekiel 18:27-28:** “Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.”

The reason I say all of this is because it's *extremely* important to finish well. It's not enough to serve God in your youth; you must finish the course! *You must keep the faith*. When times get hard you can't abandon God and walk away. Instead you must remain with Him until the very end. *The way that you finish your life makes all the difference*.

As long as you're alive there's still time to change your course. You can still repent of sins and seek forgiveness from God. You can still repent, as Manasseh did, and end your life differently. Don't follow the example of Demas and join him on his road to Hell! Repent and change, while there is still time.

For those of you who are marching onward toward Heaven: don't stop! Instead continue to follow the example of the apostle Paul:

**2 Timothy 4:5-8:** “But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous

judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

What choice will you make? Are you going to fight the good fight and finish the course? Are you going to keep the faith, or will you abandon it? The decision that you make will matter for all of eternity. As Jesus said, those who forsake Him and try to hold onto their life will lose it, but those who give up their life for His sake will find everlasting life (Matthew 10:39).