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# Προσευχὴ Μανασση ▫ THE PRAYER OF MANASSEH

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## INTRODUCTION

While Eastern Orthodox communions consider the *Prayer of Manasseh* deuterocanonical, the Jews, Protestants and Roman Catholics do not. In some *LXX* manuscripts, it stands immediately following the Psalter, among a group of fourteen psalms or songs, under the heading ‘Odes’, (*Ὄδαι*); while not in the Psalter itself, these are, with the exception of this prayer (therein Ode 12) and one other, found in some other book of the Old or New Testaments (Ex 15, Dt 32, Lk 1, *et cetera*). In the Slavonic Bible, [this book](#) is included as an appendix to Second Chronicles (as Chapter 37).

## AUTHORSHIP AND DATES

Most scholars think that the Prayer was originally composed in a Semitic Greek, probably late in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE. King Manasseh is presented in 2K 21:1–18 as the worst possible sinner and the basic cause of the downfall of Judah. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles, while his wicked ways are not in any way denied, Manasseh is pictured as praying earnestly and humbly to God during Exile. His prayer was heard and God restored him to the throne in Jerusalem, where he instigated a reform program of true worship (2Ch 33:10–17); however, the Chronicler fails to record the prayer. Many ancient readers of the Chronicler’s account would have noted this lack and our author fills the obvious gap.

## Προσευχὴ Μανασση

- 1 Κύριε παντοκράτωρ, ὁ θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν,  
τοῦ Ἀβρααμ καὶ Ἰσαακ καὶ Ἰακωβ  
καὶ τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῶν τοῦ δικαίου,  
2 ὁ ποιήσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν  
σὺν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ αὐτῶν,  
3 ὁ πεδήσας τὴν θάλασσαν  
τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ προστάγματός σου,  
ὁ κλείσας τὴν ἄβυσσον καὶ σφραγισάμενος τῷ φοβερῷ  
καὶ ἐνδόξῳ ὀνόματί σου·  
4 ὃν πάντα φρίττει  
καὶ τρέμει ἀπὸ προσώπου δυνάμεώς σου,  
5 ὅτι ἄστεκτος ἢ μεγαλοπρέπεια τῆς δόξης σου,  
καὶ ἀνυπόστατος ἢ ὀργὴ τῆς ἐπὶ ἁμαρτωλοὺς  
ἀπειλῆς σου,  
6 ἀμέτρητόν τε καὶ ἀνεξιχνίαστον τὸ ἔλεος τῆς  
ἐπαγγελίας σου,  
7 ὅτι σὺ εἶ κύριος ὑψιστος,

## THE PRAYER OF MANASSEH

- 1 O Lord Almighty, God of our fathers,  
of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob  
and of their righteous offspring;  
2 you who made heaven and earth  
with all their orderly arrangement;  
3 who shackled the sea  
by your word of command,  
who confined the deep  
and sealed it with your terrible and glorious name;  
4 at whose power all things shudder,  
and tremble before your power,  
5 For, your glorious splendour is unbearable,  
and the wrath of your threat to sinners  
is irresistible;  
6 yet immeasurable and un-searchable  
is your promised mercy.  
7 For, you are the Lord Most High,

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### THE PRAYER OF MANASSEH

- 1 On 'God of our fathers', cf. Ex 3:15-16, Dn 2:23, Ac 3:13. The *Peshitta* adds 'God' at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> line.  
2 Alternative readings for 'orderly arrangement' are 'ordered decoration', 'ornamentation' or simply 'order' (as in the *NRSV*).  
3 After 'sea', the *Peshitta* adds 'and established it'; therein, the phrase 'by your word of command' reads 'by the command of your word'.  
4 The literal translation of 'at whose power' is 'from before your power', and that for 'shudder' is 'quiver'.  
5 The word here translated as 'unbearable' (ἄστεκτος) appears only here in the *LXX*; others translate as 'unendurable'.  
6 The literal translation of 'your promised mercy' is 'the mercy of your promise'.  
7 The *NRSV*, following the *Peshitta*, adds an extra 6 lines at the end of this verse, the first 2 of which are preserved in some later *LXX MSS*, and in some *MSS* of the *Vg* (the *WEBBE* includes some of this text as part of v. 8):

εὐσπλαγχνος, μακρόθυμος καὶ πολυέλεος  
 καὶ μετανοῶν ἐπὶ κακίαις ἀνθρώπων·  
 8 σὺ οὖν, κύριε ὁ Θεὸς τῶν δικαίων,  
 οὐκ ἔδου μετάνοιαν δικαίοις,  
 τῷ Ἀβρααμ καὶ Ἰσαακ καὶ Ἰακωβ  
 τοῖς οὐχ ἡμαρτηκόσιν σοι,  
 ἀλλ' ἔδου μετάνοιαν ἐμοὶ τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ,  
 9 διότι ἡμαρτον ὑπὲρ ἀριθμὸν ψάμμου θαλάσσης,  
 ἐπλήθυναν αἱ ἀνομίαι μου, κύριε, ἐπλήθυναν,  
 καὶ οὐκ εἰμι ἄξιος ἀτενίσαι  
 καὶ ἰδεῖν τὸ ὕψος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ  
 ἀπὸ πλήθους τῶν ἀδικιῶν μου  
 10 κατακαμπτόμενος πολλῶν δεσμῶν σιδήρου  
 εἰς τὸ ἀνανεῦσαί με ὑπὲρ ἁμαρτιῶν μου,  
 καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν μοι ἄνεσις,  
 διότι παρώργισα τὸν θυμὸν σου  
 καὶ τὸ πονηρὸν ἐνώπιόν σου ἐποίησα  
 στήσας βδελύγματα καὶ πληθύνας προσοχθίσματα.

of great compassion, long-suffering and very merciful,  
and you relent at human suffering.

- 8 Therefore, you, O Lord, God of the righteous,  
have not appointed repentance for the righteous,  
for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,  
who did not sin against you,  
but you have appointed repentance for me, a sinner.
- 9 For, my sins outnumber the sand of the sea;  
my iniquities are multiplied, Lord, multiplied!  
I am not worthy to look up  
and see the height of heaven  
because of the multitude of my iniquities.
- 10 I am weighted down with many an iron fetter,  
so that I am rejected because of my sins,  
and I have no relief;  
for I have provoked your wrath  
and have done what is evil in your sight,  
setting up abominations and multiplying offences.

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"O Lord, according to your great goodness | you have promised repentance and forgiveness  
 to those who have sinned against you, | and in the multitude of your mercies  
 you have appointed repentance for sinners, | so that they may be saved."  
*tu autem Domine, secundum bonitatem tuam | promisisti paenitentiam remissionis peccatorum.*

8 On the appointment of repentance for sinners, cf. Mk 2:17, Lk 5:32, 15:7, 18:13, 1Tm 1:15.

9 Codex Alexandrinus lacks 'Lord, multiplied' at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> line.

10 In place of 'I am rejected', some MSS read, 'I cannot lift up my head'; the literal translation is 'I throw the head back'. The meaning here is rather unclear; some consider the text corrupt and suggest inserting a negative before the infinitive, a reading that is supported by Codex Turicensis. This change yields the translation: "I am bowed down ... so that I cannot lift up my head" (cf. Peshitta). Some MSS omit 'because of my sins'. After the 5<sup>th</sup> line, the WEBBE adds, "I didn't do your will, neither did I keep your commandments."

<sup>11</sup> καὶ νῦν κλίνω γόνυ καρδίας  
 δεόμενος τῆς παρὰ σοῦ χρηστότητος  
<sup>12</sup> Ἠμάρτηκα, κύριε, ἡμάρτηκα  
 καὶ τὰς ἀνομίας μου ἐγὼ γινώσκω.  
<sup>13</sup> αἰτοῦμαι δεόμενός σου  
 Ἄνες μοι, κύριε, ἄνες μοι,  
 μὴ συναπολέσης με ταῖς ἀνομίαις μου  
 μηδὲ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα μηνίσας τηρήσης τὰ κακά μοι  
 μηδὲ καταδικάσης με ἐν τοῖς κατωτάτοις τῆς γῆς.  
 ὅτι σὺ εἶ, κύριε, ὁ θεὸς τῶν μετανοούντων,  
<sup>14</sup> καὶ ἐν ἐμοὶ δείξῃς τὴν ἀγαθωσύνην σου·  
 ὅτι ἀνάξιον ὄντα σώσεις με  
 κατὰ τὸ πολὺ ἔλεός σου,  
<sup>15</sup> καὶ αἰνέσω σε διὰ παντός  
 ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς ζωῆς μου.  
 ὅτι σὲ ὑμνεῖ πᾶσα ἡ δύναμις τῶν οὐρανῶν,  
 καὶ σοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.  
 αμην.

<sup>11</sup> Now, I bend the knee of my heart,  
 imploring you for your kindness.  
<sup>12</sup> I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned,  
 and I acknowledge my transgressions.  
<sup>13</sup> I earnestly implore you,  
 forgive me, Lord; forgive me!  
 Do not destroy me with my transgression!  
 Do not be angry with me forever, reserving evil for me;  
 do not condemn me to the depths of the earth.  
 For you, Lord, are the God of those who repent;  
<sup>14</sup> and, in me, you will manifest your goodness;  
 for, you will save me,  
 though I am unworthy of your great mercy,  
<sup>15</sup> and I will praise you continually  
 all the days of my life.  
 For, all the host of heaven sings your praise,  
 and yours is the glory forever.  
 Amen.

<sup>11</sup> 'Knee of my heart' is an expression indicating special depth of feeling (see Jl 2:13).

<sup>12</sup> On the 2<sup>nd</sup> line, cf. Ps 19:12.

<sup>13</sup> The *Peshitta* does not repeat 'forgive me' (ἄνες μοι), here following the *LXX*. The 'depths of the earth' probably means Sheol (Ps 63:9, 88:5–6).

<sup>14</sup> In place of 'manifest', some English translations have 'demonstrate'.

<sup>15</sup> For the 3<sup>rd</sup> line, here following the *LXX*, the *Peshitta* reads: "and to you they sing forever and ever."