

# **RUMINATIONS OF A FORMER HEATHEN**

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**Tender Heart**

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W. Arcel e-mail, [gen315@charter.net](mailto:gen315@charter.net)

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Chapter 34 of II Chronicles begins with King Josiah of Judah; he was eight years old when he began to reign. He was a good king and grew up with some knowledge of God. He knew, for instance, that idolatry was very bad and he destroyed many places of heathen worship and false gods. But it is clear that what he knew of God was not much. What he knew had probably been transmitted to him by his elders who themselves did not know God all that well. Apparently the Law, the written Law that God gave to Moses, had been lost for sometime at this point in history. However, Josiah was a good king and followed the traditions of the day. In the eighteenth year of his reign, he ordered a big cleanup and repair of the temple, which had been neglected for several years during the reign of both his idolatrous father (Manasseh, who later repented and turned back to God) and older brother (Amon). The temple was a mess (with leftover idols, images, which God abhors) and needed to be cleaned up and restored. And, to pay the workers, who would do the repair work, a sufficient amount of money had been collected in the temple in previous days. II Chronicles, 34:14, “And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the LORD given by Moses.” In the process of cleaning up the temple, a book of the Law had been found. II Chronicles, 34:18 “Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. When the king heard the words of the Law, he rent his clothes.”

Josiah recognized immediately that they, he and his people, had been transgressing for a long time against the things that were written by God in the Law. Instantly, he became very alarmed for fear, because he believed in the words of the book. He believed that the book that was found was actually the word of God, and all the curses described therein for disobedience to, and forsaking God, were going to fall on them. He became very agitated and said to the small delegation who brought him the book (II Chronicles, 34:21), “Go, enquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us,

because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according to all which is written concerning us.”

So, Hilkiah the priest and Shaphan the scribe, besides others whom the king appointed, went to Huldah the Prophetess to enquire of the LORD. And she answered them in II Chronicles, 34:23, “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, tell ye the man that sent you to me,

34, 24, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah:

34, 25, Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with the work of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched.

34, 26, And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to enquire of the LORD, so shall you say unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel concerning the words which thou hast heard;

34, 27, Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place,..., and didst rent thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD.

34, 28, Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same. So they brought the king word again.”

This is what God pointedly said: Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place,... and didst rent thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the LORD.

Behold, I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered to thy grave in peace, neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same.

God gave to Josiah the assurance that he would not see the suffering to come. The criteria for God to give Josiah this peace (that he would not have to go through the suffering), seems to be the tenderness of Josiah’s heart. God says, because your heart was tender..., I have heard you..., you shall go to the grave in peace..., etc. Because Josiah’s heart was tender, receptive, because he believed

that the words in that book were the actual words of God, God gave him peace in his lifetime. The question is, if part of the miracle of saving is tenderness of heart on our part, how does one's heart become tender? Was Josiah's heart tenderness a particular condition of Josiah or did God intervene to make Josiah's heart tender? Did God use one of those little hammers that people use to tenderize meat? Perhaps sometimes he has to do that, put people through a lot of travails and pounding before they soften up and recognize him. But I know I was not tender toward him. There is no question that my heart was not tender, my heart was hard toward God, the only true God, the God of the Bible. Yet, I don't remember being chastised by him, he protected me, he loved me, even when I threw him behind my back. He did not make me more tender by travail. How did he make my heart more tender? I don't know, I have no idea. Perhaps he exhausted me in my quest to find a key to manipulate the invisible world. He convinced me that he is the one, that he is the ruler of the invisible world. What I do know is that when I was lost I didn't know I was lost. There is no way I would have even tried to obtain the sure pardon. I would not have known to ask for it, I could not have been saved by my own awareness and decision.

What, then, should be the prayer? God make my heart tender, more tender so that I can perceive my wickedness and my absolute need of Christ? That's a good prayer, but how can we pray to God if our heart is so hard that we despise him, if we are estranged from him?

No one can know God except by self-revelation on the part of God. God cannot become visible to us except by self-revelation. Unless God would reveal himself to a person, that person would never see him. God has to elect the person to whom he is going to reveal himself. Is this the calling of God, come back to me, come back to me? Where is God revealed? How can we know God? What we can know of God is found in the Bible, yet it is God himself who elects people to become interested in the Bible. At every step of the way, there is some level of election. Election is the means by which God saves us. But if it is by election, and it is, why spread the Gospel? Those who were not chosen to be saved would never be interested in nor would they understand the information. But the answer to the question, why spread the Gospel? is, because there are people out there who belong to God and don't know it. Those are the lost sheep. The sheep belong to somebody, but they are wondering around without knowing who or where they are.

The spreading of the Gospel is the feeding of those sheep, they need nurturance in a world full of rules that cannot be followed. The Gospel is simple, nobody can really say that it is too hard to understand: 1) Everybody is a sinner; 2) The soul that sinneth it shall die; 3) The Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world has paid for the sins of anyone who appropriates that payment. That's it. It's a bargain. Anyone passing this up could be considered a fool, the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.

God does all the choosing and all the calling, but at the end there is a tiny measure of our own free will: we surrender to him or we reject his entreaties, we run away from him. Even in a deathbed, some among us will resist God, and God with much sorrow will have to let them go.

He reveals himself to many people but not all of them get saved. Perhaps this is where another small (very small) measure of free will comes in; he wants people to be curious, as Moses was with the burning bush. This was something very strange, a bush that was on fire but was not being consumed. Moses moved with free will to look closer at that bush, he wanted to see this bush, why this bush was on fire, it was not natural that it was on fire and not being consumed. God wants people to come in and be curious, have a chat, reason together with him, and eventually, perhaps see the hopelessness of their situation. God gave me a poem a long time ago, when I was still a heathen. It was a poem that highlighted how dire my situation was:

I'm on a stump in the swamp,  
The stump is sinking,  
The crocs are snapping.  
What's in the future?

When I wrote that poem, I had no idea that that was God showing me how bad off I was. The future under those conditions was, I'm going to be eaten by the crocodiles. I am so close to being eaten. Being eaten by the crocs is a picture of hell. Who can deliver me out of that? Only God himself can protect me from hell. And he has set a sure foundation to accomplish that. There is a deliverance. There is a way out of the fire. There is a sure way into eternal life. It is my Jesus, our kinsman redeemer, who has bought us back, who has paid for our sins. His death and shedding of blood has secured for us the sure pardon. This act, this sacrifice, gives us the privilege of coming to God directly, Christ is the entrance to the Holy

of Holies, where God the Father meets with us on the Mercy Seat.