

2 Chronicles 15 — The God Who Is Found — Azariah's Word to Asa, the Covenant to Seek with the Whole Heart, and the Courage to Reform One's Own House

2 Chronicles 15: The Spirit of God comes upon Azariah son of Oded, who meets King Asa returning from battle with the covenant conditional — the LORD is with you while ye be with him, found of you if ye seek him, gone if ye forsake him. Asa takes courage, purges the abominable idols, renews the altar, and gathers Judah, Benjamin, and defectors from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon into a sworn covenant to seek the LORD with all their heart; he even deposes his own grandmother Maachah for her idol. Asa's reign c. 911–870 BC, this reform in his fifteenth year, c. 895 BC (scriptural chronology; scholars often say c. 897 BC).

Asa has just come home from the largest deliverance of his reign. In the chapter before this one, a Cushite army of a million men and three hundred chariots marched on Judah, and Asa prayed one of the great outnumbered prayers of scripture — "LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power" (2 Chr. 14:11) — and the LORD broke the invaders before him. He is riding back to Jerusalem with the spoil of a routed empire. This is exactly the moment a king is most likely to forget the God who won the battle and start believing the arm that swung the sword.

Hebrew Word Studies

***darash* (H1875) / *matsa* (H4672) (דָּרַשׁ / מָצָא) — to seek, inquire after, resort to, care for / to find, attain, be found vv.**

2, 4, 12, 13, 15. These two verbs are the chapter's covenant machine, and they always turn together — seek, and be found. *Darash* is not a casual glance around the room; it is the word for consulting an oracle, inquiring of the LORD, tracking something down because you must have it. It is the verb Ezra "prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD" with (Ezra 7:10), and the verb behind the Chronicler's own verdict on kings — the good ones *sought* the LORD, the ruined ones did not. Paired with it is *matsa*, "to find," and the chapter is careful to make the finding the reliable half of the equation: "if ye seek him, he will be found of you" (v. 2); "sought him... he was found of them" (v. 4); "they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them" (v. 15). Three times the same result, because the Chronicler wants no reader to leave uncertain whether God can be located. The Savior gathered both verbs into one promise — "Seek, and ye shall find" (Matt. 7:7) — and Alma turned *darash* into an experiment anyone can run: plant the word, "nourish it with great care," and it will grow into a tree whose fruit proves the seeking was never in vain (Alma 32:37–43). The God of this chapter is not playing hide-and-seek. He is waiting to be found.

***shuv* (H7725) (שׁוּב) — to turn, return, turn back, restore v. 4.** *Shuv* is the Old Testament's great word for repentance, and it hides a mercy in its grammar. Literally it means only "to turn, to go back" — and Azariah uses it for the hinge of Israel's whole history: "when they in their trouble did turn [*shuv*] unto the LORD God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them" (v. 4). The turning is the entire condition; the finding follows on its heels. What makes *shuv* the most hopeful verb in Hebrew is that it runs in both directions at once. The same word that describes the sinner turning *back* toward God describes God returning *to* the sinner — "Turn ye unto me... and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 1:3; Mal. 3:7). Repentance, then, is not the anxious labor of climbing back into favor; it is one turn that heaven immediately matches with a turn of its own. This is the verb beneath the father in the parable who "ran" while the prodigal was "yet a great way off" (Luke 15:20) — the turning son and the running father meeting on the same road — and beneath the Book of Mormon's tireless invitation to "return unto the Lord with all your hearts" (Hel. 13:11; cf. 3 Ne. 10:6). Notice, too, *when* this generation's fathers turned: "in their trouble." *Shuv* is often what trouble is *for* — the drought, the enemy at the gate, the vexation of verse 5 that finally points a wandering people back toward home. The mercy is that the God at the far end of the turn is the same whether you reach it in peace or in trouble: already facing you, already moving toward you, waiting to be found.

***chazaq* (H2388) (חָזַק) — to be strong, firm, resolute; to take hold, seize, harden; to strengthen, encourage vv. 7, 8.** This is the verb the whole reform pivots on, and it appears twice at the hinge. In verse 7 the prophet commands it — "Be ye *strong* therefore, and let not your hands be weak" — and in verse 8 Asa performs it: he "took *courage*." Same root. The word Azariah spoke, Asa became. *Chazaq* is a muscular, physical verb — it means to grip something and not let go, to be firm under load. It is the word God repeats over Joshua like a drumbeat at the edge of the promised land ("be strong and of a good courage," Josh. 1:6–9), and the word Paul reaches for at the very end — "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be *strong*" (1 Cor. 16:13). Notice that courage in Hebrew is not first a feeling; it is a grip. Asa did not wait to feel brave before purging

the idols — he took hold, the way you take hold of a thing too heavy to lift timidly. The counsel to a discouraged people in every age is the same imperative: "Wait on the LORD... and he shall *strengthen* thine heart" (Ps. 27:14), and the Lord's own charge to the Restoration, "be not weary in well-doing... out of small things proceedeth that which is great" (D&C 64:33). Reform is not for the faint of hand; it is for those willing to grip.

levav (H3824) / nephesh (H5315) (לֵבָב / נֶפֶשׁ) — heart — the inner self, mind, will, resolve / soul, life, breath, the whole living person vv. 12, 15, 17. The covenant of this chapter is made "with all their *heart* and with all their *soul*" (v. 12) — *levav* and *nephesh*, the two Hebrew words that together mean the entire inner person with nothing held back. *Levav* (the fuller form of *lev*) is not merely the seat of emotion the way the English "heart" is; in Hebrew it is the center of thought, will, and decision — the place where you actually make up your mind. *Nephesh* is the breath-life, the animating self, the word first used when God breathed into Adam and "man became a living *soul*" (Gen. 2:7). To seek God with heart *and* soul is to seek him with your deciding-self and your living-self at once — the whole of you, thinking and breathing. And the chapter closes the loop on *levav*: "the *heart* of Asa was perfect all his days" (v. 17) — *shalem*, whole, complete, undivided. That is the same wholeness the covenant demanded, now predicated of the king himself. It is the standard the Lord names to the Restoration: "let every man learn his duty, and to act in the office in which he is appointed, in all diligence" (D&C 107:99), and the standard Alma preaches — the word must "enlarge my soul" (Alma 32:28), the *nephesh* stretched by what it has taken in. God does not want a corner of the heart. He asks for the whole *levav*, and he gives the whole of himself in return.

From the Chapter's Architecture

And the chapter is bound together by an inclusio of seeking and finding. It opens with the promise — "if ye seek him, he will be found of you" (v. 2) — and pays it off in full — "they... sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them" (v. 15). Between those verses lies the entire mechanism of the covenant: hear the word, take courage, tear down the idols, rebuild the altar, bind yourself with the whole heart, and reach even the idol you love. Do that, and the promise is not merely hoped for; it is fulfilled in the text, and its reward — rest round about — is handed to a nation that only had to turn and look.