

2 Chronicles 16 — The King Who Forgot How He Won — Asa's Alliance, Hanani's Rebuke, the Eyes That Range the Earth, and the Slow Hardening of a Good Man

2 Chronicles 16: In the thirty-sixth year of his reign Asa king of Judah, threatened by Baasha of Israel fortifying Ramah, strips silver and gold from the house of the LORD to hire Ben-hadad of Syria instead of relying on the God who once delivered him from a million-man army; Hanani the seer rebukes him, Asa jails the seer and oppresses the people, and in his thirty-ninth year is diseased in his feet yet seeks physicians and not the LORD, dying in his forty-first year; c. 875–870 BC (secular chronology c. 871–870 BC).

Two chapters ago, this same king stood on a battlefield outnumbered past hope and prayed one of the great prayers of the Old Testament. Zerah the Ethiopian had come against Judah with "an host of a thousand thousand" — a million men — and Asa cried, "LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude" (2 Chr. 14:11). And the LORD smote the Ethiopians. Asa knew, better than almost any king in scripture, what it felt like to win a war he had no business winning, on nothing but reliance.

Hebrew Word Studies

sha'an (H8172) (שׂ. א. נ.) — **to lean, to prop or support oneself, to rely vv. 7, 8.** This is the verb the whole chapter turns on, and its physical picture is the sermon. *Sha'an* is not abstract "trust" — it is the bodily act of putting your weight on something so that if it gives way, you fall. It is the staff a tired man leans on (the "staff of bread," the thing that holds you up, comes from this same family of imagery), the wall a hand rests against. Hanani uses it three times: Asa "*relied* on the king of Syria, and not *relied* on the LORD thy God" (v. 7), and once "thou didst *rely* on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand" (v. 8). The tragedy is not that Asa stopped believing God exists — it is that he shifted the weight. He took the full press of his fear off the LORD and set it on Damascus. It is the verb behind Solomon's warning, "*lean* not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5), and behind Isaiah's rebuke of the Judah that "*stay upon*" (same root) Egypt's horses "and look not unto the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 31:1). The Nephites diagnosed the same disease as the deep failure of the last days: "Wo be unto him that... shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough!" (2 Ne. 28:29) — the settled man, leaning on what he already has, propping his weight on his own arrangements. Asa did not need less strength than at Zerah's battle. He needed to remember which staff bears weight.

shalem (H8003) (שׁ. ל. מ.) — **complete, whole, sound, undivided; at peace, wholly devoted v. 9.** The King James "*perfect*" heart misleads a modern ear, because *shalem* is not about flawlessness — it is about *wholeness*. It is the sibling of *shalom*, peace: a *shalem* heart is a heart that is all in one piece, undivided, entirely turned toward God with nothing held back and nothing propped elsewhere. It is the opposite, precisely, of a heart that leans partly on the LORD and partly on Damascus. This is the exact charge in the parallel account of Asa's whole reign: "the heart of Asa was *perfect* [*shalem*] all his days" (2 Chr. 15:17) — his lifelong bent was wholehearted, which is what makes this late fracture a fracture and not a character. God does not scan the earth for the sinless; He scans it for the *undivided*, because a whole heart is the only surface His strength can rest on without slipping. It is what David begs for himself — "unite my heart to fear thy name" (Ps. 86:11) — a heart made one instead of many. And it is the Book of Mormon's whole invitation to consecration: "come unto Christ, and be perfected in him... love God with all your might, mind and strength" (Moro. 10:32) — *all*, not most; whole, not hedged. The double-minded man, James says, is "unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8) — unstable because a divided heart is a wobbling staff, and God will not lean His omnipotence on a prop that shifts.

darash (H1875) (ד. ר. שׁ.) — **to seek, to inquire, to consult, to resort to with care v. 12.** *Darash* is one of the great verbs of Old Testament devotion — it means to seek diligently, to inquire after, to go looking for someone with the whole of your attention, the way you *resort to* a person you depend on. It is the word for consulting the LORD through a prophet, seeking Him in prayer, tracking Him down as the object of your deepest need. And it is the word that once *defined* Asa: the covenant of his good years was that all Judah would "*seek* [*darash*] the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul" (2 Chr. 15:12), with the promise attached that "if ye *seek* him, he will be found of you" (2 Chr. 15:2). So verse 12 is not a neutral medical note — it is the collapse of Asa's own founding word. In his disease "he *sought* [*darash*] not to the LORD, but to the physicians": the seeking king, at the last, seeks in every direction but the one that made him. The Chronicler measures every reign by this verb — Rehoboam did evil because "he prepared not his heart to *seek* the LORD" (2 Chr. 12:14)

— and it is the same seeking the risen Lord commands the Nephites and Alma presses on every heart: "seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written" (Eth. 12:41); "cry unto him... let all thy doings be unto the Lord" (Alma 37:36). Asa proves the terrible corollary of the promise: the God who is *found* of those who seek Him is not found by a man who has finally stopped looking.

From the Chapter's Architecture

But there is a deliberate frame the chronicler wants us to feel, and it is the frame of two battles. Chapter 14's Zerah and chapter 16's Baasha are set as opposites on purpose: the impossible enemy met with reliance and beaten, the manageable enemy met with scheming and — in the only sense that matters — lost. Between them stands chapter 15's covenant, where Asa gathered the nation to seek God with a whole heart. So the arc across three chapters is faith proven (14), faith vowed (15), faith fractured (16) — and the fracture comes not under the greater pressure but the lesser. That is the architecture's quiet thesis: it is rarely the million-man crisis that breaks a faithful heart. It is the border fort, the ordinary trouble small enough that we think we can handle it ourselves. The eyes of the LORD are still ranging the earth in chapter 16 exactly as they were in chapter 14, looking for the same whole heart to be strong for. The only thing that changed is where Asa put his weight.