

2 Chronicles 17 — The King Who Sent Teachers — Jehoshaphat Seeks Early, His Heart Lifted Up Rightly, and the Book of the Law Carried to Every City

2 Chronicles 17: Jehoshaphat son of Asa reigns over Judah, strengthens himself, and is established because the LORD is with him — he walks in the first ways of David, seeks not to Baalim but to the God of his father, and his heart is lifted up in the ways of the LORD; in the third year of his reign he sends princes, Levites, and priests through all the cities of Judah with the book of the law to teach the people, and the fear of the LORD falls on the surrounding kingdoms so that none make war against him; Jehoshaphat's reign, c. 873–849 BC (scriptural chronology), the reform in his third year.

Asa is buried, and the Chronicler turns the page to a son who will get one of the warmest reports in the book. The kings of Judah come to us in this record graded by a single question — did the man seek the LORD, or did he not? — and Jehoshaphat gets an answer most of them never earn: "the LORD was with Jehoshaphat" (v. 3). Four verses in, we already know the verdict. What follows is the Chronicler showing his work, laying out exactly what a God-sought reign looks like from the inside: not first a battle, not first a building program, but a king who walked in the old right ways, whose heart was lifted up in the ways of the LORD, and who then did the thing almost no other king in the Old Testament thought to do — he sent teachers.

Hebrew Word Studies

darash (H1875) (דָּרַשׁ) — **to seek, inquire, consult, resort to, make one's habitual recourse vv. 3, 4.** This is the verb the Chronicler uses to grade a king, and it is stronger than English "seek." *Darash* is what you do when you *go* somewhere with a real question — it is the word for consulting a prophet (1 Kgs. 22:5, later in Jehoshaphat's own story), for inquiring of the LORD, for the habitual direction a heart turns under pressure. So verses 3–4 are not measuring Jehoshaphat's private opinions; they are measuring his recourse. He "sought not unto Baalim" — Baal was precisely the god you *darashed* for rain and harvest — "but sought to the LORD God of his father." The whole Chronicler's theology of the kings runs on this one verb: "if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever" (1 Chr. 28:9), David's charge to Solomon. Later Chronicles will say of Rehoboam, damningly, that "he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD" (2 Chr. 12:14) — same verb, opposite verdict. The Book of Mormon carries the identical promise into the hands of every reader: "seek this Jesus of whom the prophets and apostles have written" (Eth. 12:41), and the Lord's own frame, "draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you; seek me diligently and ye shall find me" (D&C 88:63). The kingdom is established in the hand that seeks first — that is verse 5's whole logic, and *darash* is the hinge it turns on.

gabahh (H1361) (גָּבַהּ) — **to be high, exalted, lifted up — used of physical height, and of a heart raised in either courage or pride v. 6.** *Gabahh* is a neutral verb about elevation — it describes tall trees (Ezek. 31:5), high heavens (Ps. 103:11), and hearts that rise. Which is exactly why verse 6 is such a careful piece of writing. The identical construction, "his heart was lifted up" (*gabahh leb*), is the Chronicler's stock phrase for the pride that ruins a king: Uzziah, "when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (2 Chr. 26:16); Hezekiah, whose heart "was lifted up" until he humbled himself (2 Chr. 32:25–26). In the prophets it is the arch-sin: "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD" (Prov. 16:5); "the loftiness of man shall be bowed down... and the LORD alone shall be exalted" (Isa. 2:17). So when the Chronicler writes that Jehoshaphat's heart was *gabahh* and does not condemn him — the only such use in Kings or Chronicles — the redeeming clause is doing all the work: *in the ways of the LORD*. The verb is the same; the direction is opposite. It is the difference the Book of Mormon draws between the pride that "puffeth up" (cf. Alma 5:53) and the boldness of a Nephi or a Moroni who is exalted *toward* God, not above his neighbor. Height of heart is not the sin. Height of heart in your own ways is. Jehoshaphat's rose in the LORD's ways, and it came down swinging at idols.

lamad (H3925) (לָמַד) — **to teach, to train, to instruct — and, in another stem, to learn vv. 7, 9.** *Lamad* is the verb that frames the reform, opening verse 7 ("to teach in the cities of Judah") and bracketing verse 9 on both ends ("they taught... taught the people"). Its beauty is that the same root means both *to teach* and *to learn* — the teacher and the taught are grammatical cousins, because in Hebrew instruction is one connected motion, not a lecture handed down. It is the root behind *talmid*, a disciple, one who is being taught. So when Jehoshaphat sends men to *lamad* the people with the book of the law, he is not sending propaganda; he is making the whole kingdom into disciples — learners under the word. The great charge of Deuteronomy runs on this verb: "teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons" (Deut. 4:9–10), and "these words... thou shalt teach

them diligently unto thy children" (Deut. 6:6–7) — the home as the first schoolhouse. The Psalmist's prayer is the same word turned upward: "Teach me thy way, O LORD" (Ps. 27:11); "teach me to do thy will" (Ps. 143:10). And the Restoration makes *lamad* a two-way covenant: "teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118). Jehoshaphat understood what every teaching people relearns: a nation is only as covenant-keeping as its most recent lesson. So he taught — the whole people, in every city, out of the book.

***pachad* (H6343) (פָּחַד)** — **dread, terror, the fear that falls suddenly; also, by extension, reverent awe v. 10.** *Pachad* is not the tender "fear of the LORD" that means reverence and covenant loyalty — that is usually *yir'ah*. *Pachad* is heavier and more sudden: it is dread that *falls*, the terror that seizes an enemy when he realizes the God he is up against is living and awake. It is the word in the Song of the Sea — "fear and dread shall fall upon them" (Ex. 15:16) — and in Rahab's confession that "your terror is fallen upon us" (Josh. 2:9). So verse 10 is making a precise claim: the surrounding kingdoms did not admire Jehoshaphat; they were gripped by a dread of his God, and it kept their armies home. Notice what produced it — not Judah's military buildup, which the Chronicler describes only *afterward*, but the reform itself: the seeking, the cleansing, the law taught in every city. A people genuinely covenanted to a living God radiate something their neighbors can feel. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10) uses the gentler word for those inside the covenant; *pachad* is what the same divine reality looks like from outside it. The Book of Mormon knows the difference: the wicked are seized with "the fear of the Lord" as dread (cf. Alma 19:24–27; 3 Ne. 4:10), while the righteous grow in the awe that is love. One God; two fears; and Jehoshaphat's righteousness turned the dread outward and the reverence inward, so that Judah had peace on every side.

From the Chapter's Architecture

And the deliberate placement of the teaching program is the whole point. The Chronicler could have opened with the armies — a lesser historian would have. Instead he buries the muster rolls at the back and puts the schoolteachers at the center, in the third year, before the wars. He is telling us where a kingdom's strength actually lives. Not in its fenced cities, though Jehoshaphat had them; not in its three hundred thousand mighty men, though he mustered them; but in whether the word of the LORD is in the hands of the people in every town. Take away the teaching and the armies become Uzziah's — strength that lifts the heart to destruction. Keep the teaching and the same strength becomes a shield. The chapter is a lesson in what to build first, and Jehoshaphat, for one bright reign, built it in the right order.