

2 Chronicles 19 — Good Things Found in Thee — The Rebuke That Names the Good, and the King Who Turned Correction into Reform

2 Chronicles 19: Jehoshaphat returns to Jerusalem in peace after the near-fatal alliance with Ahab at Ramoth-gilead; Jehu the seer meets him with a rebuke that is also mercy, and the king answers not with resentment but with reform — going out again among the people and instituting a landmark judicial charge to judges 'for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment'; Judah under Jehoshaphat, c. 853 BC.

The last chapter nearly killed him. Jehoshaphat had gone up to Ramoth-gilead beside Ahab, wearing his royal robes into a battle where Ahab went disguised, and the Syrian captains — under orders to fight only with the king of Israel — mistook the man in the robes and closed in on him. "And it came to pass, that, when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, It is the king of Israel. Therefore they compassed about him to fight: but Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him" (2 Chr. 18:31). He should have died wearing another man's war. He lived because he cried out and heaven answered. And now, in the very first verse of chapter 19, he comes home:

Hebrew Word Studies

tov (H2896) (טוֹב) — **good, pleasing, morally good — and the very first word God speaks over creation vv. 3, 11.** "There are *good things* found in thee." *Tov* is the word God pronounces over the light on day one — "and God saw the light, that it was *good*" (Gen. 1:4) — the divine verdict of approval, the thing that is as it ought to be. Jehu, standing at the gate with a rebuke already delivered, reaches for this word: whatever is wrong in the king, God has still *seen* something *tov* in him and named it. And the chapter closes on the same root — "Deal courageously, and the LORD shall be with the *good*" (v. 11), *ha-tov*, the good ones, those whose hearts are set right even when their hands falter. So the word frames the whole chapter: it opens by finding the good *in* a corrected king and ends by promising the LORD's presence *to* the good who will judge His people. "O taste and see that the LORD is *good*" (Ps. 34:8); "there is none good but one, that is, God" (Matt. 19:17). The good things in Jehoshaphat were not his own manufacture — they were God's *tov* reflected in a prepared heart, which is exactly why Jehu could point to them as grounds for hope rather than grounds for pride."

shaphat (H8199) (שָׁפַט) — **to judge, govern, vindicate, decide a case vv. 5, 6.** "Judges in the land... ye *judge* not for man." The root *shaphat* is deeper than a courtroom verb — it means to set right, to govern, to defend the wronged. It is the word behind the *shophetim*, the "Judges" who ruled Israel before the kings, who were as much deliverers as magistrates. To *judge* in Hebrew is not merely to decide who wins; it is to restore the true order of things, to make crooked cases straight. That is why Jehoshaphat can say the judges judge "*for the LORD*" — because God Himself is the great *Shophet*: "Shall not the *Judge* of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25); "the LORD is our *judge*, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king" (Isa. 33:22). The human judge is a small mirror held up to that. When the mirror is clean — no bribe, no partiality — it reflects the God who sets all things right; when it is smudged, it lies about Him. So the office is not a delegation of power downward but a stewardship answerable upward. Every righteous *shaphat* is a rehearsal for the day the true Judge sets the whole earth right at once."

yir'ah (H3374) / pachad (H6343) (יִרְאָה / פָּחַד) — **fear, reverence, awe — the reverent dread that steadies rather than paralyzes vv. 7, 9.** "Let the *fear* of the LORD be upon you" (v. 7, *pachad*) and "do it in the *fear* of the LORD" (v. 9, *yir'ah*). This is not the fear that runs away — it is the fear that holds still and does right. Biblical *yir'ah* is reverence with weight: the awareness that God is present and watching, which is precisely what a judge needs when the bribe is on the table and no human would ever know. Scripture calls it the ground floor of all wisdom — "the *fear* of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10), "the *fear* of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7) — because until a person reckons with an unseen Judge, nothing else about their judgment can be trusted. Note the paradox the chapter builds: this same fear is what *frees* the judge to "deal courageously" (v. 11). The man who fears God rightly has nothing left to fear from men — not the powerful plaintiff, not the lost bribe, not the unpopular verdict. So the fear of the LORD does not make cowards; it makes the only truly brave judges there are, because they answer to a court no earthly power can reach. "The *fear* of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe" (Prov. 29:25). Put the right fear on the bench, and the wrong fears lose their grip."

masso panim (H4856 / H6440) / shachad (H7810) (מַסּוֹ פָּנִים / שָׁחַד) — **lifting of faces (partiality, "respect of persons") / a gift, a bribe v. 7.** "Nor *respect of persons*, nor taking of *gifts*." The Hebrew for "respect of persons" is literally *masso panim* — a *lifting of faces*, the picture of a judge who raises his eyes to see *who* is standing before him and lets the man's rank tilt the verdict. Scripture's answer is blunt and repeated: God does no such thing. Peter learns it at Cornelius's

house — "God is *no respecter of persons*" (Acts 10:34) — and the Restoration says it in God's own voice: "for I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance; nevertheless... I the Lord am *no respecter of persons*" (D&C 1:31, 35). Moroni presses it to its tenderest edge, insisting that to imagine God partial is to slander Him: "God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being" (Moro. 8:18) — the little children need no baptism because "*respect to persons* is an abomination unto him" (Moro. 8:12). And *shachad*, the bribe, the "gift" that is no gift — "a *gift* doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous" (Deut. 16:19). Jehoshaphat forbids to his judges exactly the two things God will never do, because a judge who lifts faces or takes gifts is not merely unjust — he is *misrepresenting the character of God* at the bench where he was stationed to reflect it. The court is meant to be a small model of the last judgment, where no face is lifted and no gift changes a thing."

From the Chapter's Architecture

There is one more piece of architecture worth naming, and it is the frame. The chapter opens with the LORD's mercy found in a failing king — "good things found in thee" (v. 3) — and closes with the LORD's presence promised to the faithful judge — "the LORD shall be with the good" (v. 11). Between those two verses, ha-tov, the good, is the thread: God finds the good in the corrected, and God stands with the good who serve Him. The chapter that begins by refusing to let a man's failure be the last word ends by refusing to let a judge do right alone.