

2 Chronicles 20 — Our Eyes Are Upon Thee — The Fast, the Model Prayer of the Outmatched, the Battle That Belonged to God, and the Singers Sent First

2 Chronicles 20: A confederacy of Moab, Ammon, and Mount Seir marches on Judah from beyond the Dead Sea; Jehoshaphat fears, proclaims a fast, and prays in the temple court the prayer of a people who do not know what to do; the Spirit falls on Jahaziel the Levite, Judah is told to stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, singers are sent before the army, and the enemy destroys itself in the wilderness of Tekoa near En-gedi; the reign of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, c. 853–849 BC.

For nineteen chapters the Chronicler has been building a case, and it is not the case a modern reader expects. He is not writing a war history; he is writing a theology of the temple, told through the kings who either trusted the God who lived in it or did not. Jehoshaphat has been one of the good ones — he sent teachers with the book of the law through every city of Judah (2 Chr. 17:9), and "the fear of the LORD fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about" (2 Chr. 17:10). But he has also just come home from a near-fatal misadventure: he yoked himself to wicked Ahab at Ramoth-gilead, nearly died for it, and got a prophet's rebuke on the road back — "shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD?" (2 Chr. 19:2). Chapter 20 opens on a king who has recently been humbled, recently reminded whose side he is supposed to be on.

Hebrew Word Studies

***darash* (H1875) (דָּרַשׁ)** — **to seek, resort to, inquire of, consult with care vv. 3, 4.** The verb under Jehoshaphat's whole response. *Darash* is not a casual glance in God's direction — it means to seek with effort, to search out, to make inquiry the way you would investigate a matter you cannot afford to get wrong. It is the word for consulting a prophet ("Is there not here a prophet of the LORD, that we might *inquire* of the LORD by him?" 1 Kgs. 22:7 — the very question that got Jehoshaphat rebuked one chapter earlier) and the word for the heart's pursuit of God ("With my whole heart have I *sought* thee," Ps. 119:10). The Chronicler loves this verb; it is nearly his signature — again and again a king either "sought the LORD" or "sought not," and everything hinges on which. Here the same king is caught doing both across two chapters: he sought the wrong counsel at Ramoth-gilead and nearly died; now he sets himself to *darash* the LORD and is delivered without lifting a sword. The promise attached to it never expires: "if thou *seek* him, he will be found of thee" (1 Chr. 28:9), and the risen Christ would give the Nephites the same standing invitation — "seek, and ye shall find" (3 Ne. 14:7). Seeking is the one move the outmatched can always make.

***yada'* (H3045) / 'ayin (H5869) (יָדָע / עָיִן)** — **to know / eye v. 12.** The verse's power is in two words held against each other. "Neither *know* we what to do" — *yada'*, the deep verb of knowing, the same word for knowing God, knowing good and evil, knowing by intimate experience. Judah's knowing has run dry; the reservoir of competence is empty. And then, at the very end of the sentence, the pivot to a different faculty entirely: "but our *eyes* ('*ayin*) are upon thee." When *knowing* fails, *looking* takes over. The eye that is lifted to God is a recurring posture in Israel's prayers — "Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens" (Ps. 123:1–2), where servants watch their master's hand for the smallest signal; "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help" (Ps. 121:1). This is not the closed eyes of resignation but the fixed gaze of expectation — the look of someone watching for a rescue they cannot yet see but are sure is coming. The move from *we do not know* to *our eyes are upon thee* is the move from strategy to trust, and it is available in every crisis where the knowing gives out.

***'amad* (H5975) (עָמַד)** — **to stand, take one's stand, stand firm, endure, remain vv. 5, 9, 13, 17, 20, 21.** This is the quiet keyword the chapter is stitched together with — the verb *stand*, and it appears at every turning point. Jehoshaphat *stood* in the congregation to pray (v. 5); the people *stand* before the house in the day of evil (v. 9); all Judah *stood* before the LORD with their little ones (v. 13); God commands them to *stand* still and see (v. 17); Jehoshaphat *stood* to charge them the next morning (v. 20); he *appointed* — the same verb, *'amad*, "caused to stand" — the singers before the army (v. 21). Trace *'amad* and you find the whole spiritual posture of the chapter: these people do not run, and they do not charge; they *stand*. The verb means to take a position and hold it, to remain when remaining is hard. It is the word for standing before the LORD in service ("the priests which *stand* to minister," Deut. 18:5), and Paul's whole armor of God is built to one end — "having done all, to *stand*" (Eph. 6:13). In a chapter about a battle no one fights, the decisive military act is simply to keep standing where God put you. The stripling warriors of the Book of Mormon are the same posture in different armor: "they would not suffer themselves to

be taken... but would rather die" and stood their ground trusting the God their mothers taught them (Alma 56:47). To stand still and see is not to do nothing — it is to do the one hardest thing.

'aman (H539) (אָמַן) — to be firm, faithful, sure, established; (Hiphil) to believe, trust, rely on v. 20. The most important word in the chapter, and one of the most important in the Bible. 'Aman is a construction word before it is a religious one — it means to be firm, solid, reliable, the way a pillar is reliable or a foundation is firm; the noun 'omnah is even used for a doorpost, the fixed thing a whole wall hangs on. From this root come three of the deepest words in scripture: 'emunah, "faithfulness"; 'emet, "truth"; and 'amen, the word we still say at the end of every prayer, which means *let it be firm, let it stand, so it is*. Jehoshaphat's verse turns the root twice: "*believe (ha'aminu) in the LORD, so shall ye be established (te'amenu)*." Same root, cause and effect — you *aman* God, and you become *aman*, firm. Belief is not passive assent; it is the act of transferring your weight onto something, and in doing so being steadied by it. This is precisely Isaiah's warning to a later, faithless king of Judah using the identical wordplay: "If ye will not *believe*, surely ye shall not be *established*" (Isa. 7:9) — the tragic photo-negative of Jehoshaphat's promise. And it is the root Abraham earns his righteousness by: "*he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness*" (Gen. 15:6). To believe, in Hebrew, is to say *amen* with your feet — to march out singing before you can see the victory, because you have put your whole weight on the word and found it holds.

barak (H1288) / berakah (H1294) (בָּרַךְ / בֵּרַךְ) — to kneel, to bless, to praise; (noun) a blessing, benediction v. 26.

The verb *barak* originally pictures the body: *to kneel*, to bend the knee. From that posture comes its towering meaning — to bless, to invoke good, to praise. To bless God is, at root, to kneel before Him; the word carries the bent knee inside it even when the kneeling is only of the heart. The noun *berakah* is the blessing itself — the thing invoked, the good conferred — and it is the name Judah leaves on the valley: *the valley of blessing*. There is a beautiful reciprocity buried in this root. When God *baraks* us, He confers good; when we *barak* Him, we kneel and confer praise — the same word runs both directions between heaven and earth, a current of blessing that flows down as gift and back up as worship. Judah names the valley *Berachah* not because they were blessed there (they were, enormously) but because *there they blessed the LORD* — the emphasis falls on their upward act, not their received windfall. It is the same instinct as the leper who, of ten healed, was the one who "turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God" (Lk. 17:15). The spoil was in their hands, but the blessing they chose to memorialize was the one they gave, not the one they got. A grateful people marks the map with the places it stopped to kneel.

From the Chapter's Architecture

And notice the symmetry the Chronicler built into the frame. The chapter opens with fear in Jehoshaphat's heart (v. 3) and closes with the fear of God on all the surrounding kingdoms (v. 29) — the same word, but relocated. The fear that started inside God's people, driving them to their knees, ends up outside among the nations, driving them to keep their distance. That is what deliverance does: it takes the fear you brought to God and hands it to your enemies. Between those two fears stands a fast, a prayer, a prophet's word, a song — and a valley that got a new name.