

דָּרַשׁ *dāraš* ‘seek’ in 1-2 Kings and 1-2 Chronicles

A note on a key term. 2018, rev. 2019. Peter Schmidt. – Quotes from NRSV.

1. Occurrences / Difference and synonymy between *drš* and *bqš*

דָּרַשׁ *drš* occurs 165x altogether. 41 of these cases appear in 1-2 Chronicles.¹ Thus it is a key term in this book. בָּקַשׁ *bqš* occurs 225x in total and 13x in 1-2 Chr. Within 1-2 Chr., both verbs occur together in the same verse in the following places, which may serve to illustrate some typical usages:

2Chr 22:9 He searched [*bqš*] for Ahaziah, who was captured while hiding in Samaria and was brought to Jehu, and put to death. They buried him, for they said, “He is the grandson of Jehoshaphat, who sought [*drš*] the Lord with all his heart.” And the house of Ahaziah had no one able to rule the kingdom.

bqš is the default word for “looking for sth./so.”; *drš* speaks of a spiritual and relational activity.

But both can also be used synonymously of spiritual seeking in a parallelism:

1Chr 16:11 Seek [*drš*] the Lord and his strength, seek [*bqš*] his presence continually.

In 1-2 Chr, “to seek the LORD (God)” is frequent; “to seek God” also occurs (e.g. 2Chr 19:3). In 1Chr 28:8, the object of seeking is *the commandments* of the Lord. In 2Chr 25:15/20, “to seek” is used of foreign gods.

2. The meaning of “seeking the LORD”

(Compiled from a survey of occurrences). “To seek the LORD” describes a lifestyle – an over-all attitude, and means longing for a good relationship with the Lord and striving whole-heartedly and humbly toward it, inquiring about the Lord, orienting oneself toward the Lord, consciously trying to find out what pleases him, and to do it. Put a bit simpler, it means **to care for God and his will**.

It can include asking for his will, going to his Temple, worshipping, praying, sacrificing, asking for forgiveness, requesting help, seeking refuge.

The opposite is “to forsake the LORD” – to not care about who the Lord is and what he wants.

“To find the LORD” means to receive outward welfare and inner peace.

The fact that “to seek the LORD” is sometimes described as an ongoing or repeated activity shows that it is not always about specific instructions in specific situations.²

Translation

In some receptor languages, the typical verb for “to look for sth./so.” might or might not work for the relational activity of “seeking God”. A rendering needs to be found that is suitable for expressing the attitude of “orienting oneself toward God”. An expression for “finding God” is also needed.

3. With מִן *min* ‘from’: “to enquire / consult (a prophet)”

In 1Ki-2Chr, *drš*, when it is used together with the preposition *min* ‘from’, refers to enquiring through a prophet (1Ki 14:5 Jeroboam’s wife > Ahijah; 22:7f. par. 2Chr 18:6f. Jehoshaphat > Micaiah; 2Ki 3:11 Jehoshaphat > Elisha; 8:8 Ben-hadad > Elisha).

The construction “to seek” *drš* + “from the LORD / from God” does not occur anywhere.

¹ In 1-2 Kings: 1Ki 14:5; 22:5/7/8; 2Ki 1:2/3/6/16(2x); 3:11; 8:8; 22:13; 22:18.

² *bqš*, when referring to the Lord, sometimes comes with the object מַנְהָה *pāneh* ‘face’ [of the Lord], sometimes not. *drš* never has the object *pāneh*. See both in 1Chr 16:11 (above).

When God is the object, then instead of *min* the accusative can be used (*et-YHWH*) (as in 2Ki 22:18) or the preposition *b⁹* (as in the parallel text 2Chr 34:26; *b⁹* is also used for seeking a pagan god).

4. Seeking the LORD in a specific situation or matter

There are occasions where a person is said to “seek God” (*drš* + YHWH / Elōhîm), but the phrase is used without any further complement, i.e. **it is not stated what the question or request is that the person poses to God**. Although the respective situation could give some clues, we cannot be certain. Looking for a fitting complement raises some questions. An example is 2Ki 22:13, where Josiah says:

Go, inquire [of] the Lord for me, for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us ...

CEV, for instance, says: “Go find out what the LORD wants us to do.” But Huldah’s answer does not contain a command about what to do!³ Huldah’s answer to Josiah contains a confirmation about the judgment, and a word of consolation:

¹⁶ Thus says the Lord, I will indeed bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants ... ¹⁸ But as to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall you say to him, ..., ¹⁹ because your heart was penitent, ..., I also have heard you, says the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore, ... your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring on this place.”

That is to say, she does not answer the potential question “What shall we do?”, but she tells the king “what will happen”. (However, Josiah’s question to the prophetess implies a willingness to “do something”.)

When we look at more cases where the text says that people “consulted the LORD”, then we see the following: **The answer is always about what will happen** (Gen 25:22f. Rebekah’s children: “the one shall be stronger than the other”; 1Ki 22:8ff Micaiah about Ahab’s battle: “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains”; 2Ki 22:13ff. Huldah responding to Josiah: “I will indeed bring disaster on this place ... [but] your eyes shall not see all the disaster ...”); **at times it includes instructions about what they should do** (1Sam 9:9ff. Saul in search of donkeys: “go up before me to the shrine, ...”; cf. 1Ki 14:12, but with a slightly different construction in Hebrew); rarely is it only the latter (Ex 18:15f. Moses judging the people: “I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God”). Besides the predictions and the instructions, **sometimes the answer includes God’s explanation or perspective** on things (Gen 25:23 “Two nations are in your womb”; 1Ki 22:20 “And the Lord said, ‘Who will entice Ahab ...’”; 1Sam 9:20 “And on whom is all Israel’s desire fixed, if not on you ...?”).

Translation

Therefore, in translating places like the above, where Josiah commands his messengers to seek the LORD, one should not be too specific, and avoid wordings like “ask what he wants me to do / what will happen”. In this case of 2Ki 22:13, several English versions speak of “enquiring about ...”. An alternative is “to consult the LORD”. These are unspecific, but fitting, and might be applicable in other places to. Another possibility is REB: “seek guidance ... about ...”. The phrase “to turn to the LORD (for ...)” also captures the idea quite well.

5. A special case: 2Chr 1:5

2Chr 1:5 is difficult, we can only quote some resources here. The verse reads:

Moreover the bronze altar that Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, had made, was there in front of the tabernacle of the Lord . And Solomon and the assembly inquired at it.

The *Handbook* says:

³ NLT tries to deal with the vague verb by adding “Go to the Temple and speak to the LORD for me ...”, but v. 14 says that the messengers “went to the New Quarter of Jerusalem to consult with the prophet Huldah.”!

Sought the LORD is literally “sought it/him.” The Hebrew text does not have **the LORD**. Rather, there is only a singular pronoun, which may be understood as referring either to the altar or to Yahweh. Because of this ambiguity in the Hebrew text, NRSV says “inquired at it,” indicating that they inquired at the altar. Other versions that follow this interpretation are REB, NJPSV, and SPCL. But many versions take the pronoun as referring to Yahweh (so GNT, CEV, NIV, NJB, NAB, LPD). Either interpretation is possible and acceptable. Translators must simply choose one meaning unless the receptor language allows for the same ambiguity as the Hebrew. ...

... Since the verb **sought** may be misunderstood in the sense of looking for something that is lost, a different verb should probably be used in many languages. However, the verb chosen will be determined by the way in which the pronoun is interpreted. If the pronoun is taken as referring to Yahweh, then the verb may be “consulted” (NJB, NAB, FRCL) or “worshiped” (GNT, NCV). This interpretation is preferable, since 1-2 Chronicles often speaks of “seeking the LORD” or “seeking God.” However, if the pronoun is taken as referring to the altar, then it will be better to say “resorted to” (REB) or “inquired at” (NRSV). ...

Commentaries are divided: Japhet (OTL, 1993):

Since v. 5 is in fact a single compound sentence, the object of *wayyidr^ošēhû* (‘sought’) is the subject of the opening clause, i.e. ‘the altar’.

Selman (TOTC, 1994):

Although it is not entirely clear whether he sought ‘the Lord’ or ‘it’, i.e. the altar (... in favor of the former is that nowhere else in the Bible is an altar sought, and Chronicles almost always has God as the object of this verb [*Footnote:* On the other hand, ‘seeking the altar’ is supported by LXX and Vulg., by the idea of ‘seeking the ark’ possibly found in 1Chr 13:3; 15:13, and by the use of various diverse direct object for *dāraš* such as places, God’s words or commands, or peace.]), ‘seeking God’ is a standard by which Chronicles measures the faith of Israel’s leaders.

Above, we saw that when someone consults the LORD, the accusative can be used. Here, this would favor the interpretation “sought the LORD”. For the interpretation “inquired at it [i.e. the altar]”, one would like to see other examples where the locative meaning “at” is present without any preposition being used. If the pronoun means “it” and refers to the altar, then the translation should be “sought it”. But Elberfelder seems to get it right by saying “suchten ihn <dort> auf” (= sought him <there>).

6. Phrases like “Setting one’s heart to seek ...”

In a few verses one needs to bring out the intention or resolution that somebody makes. 2Chr 11:16 – **using the verb *bqš*** – speaks of “those who had set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel”. The *Handbook* says:

Since the heart in Hebrew thought was the place of the will and thought as well as of feeling and emotion, **had set their hearts** may be translated “sincerely wanted” (GNT, NLT) or “had made up their minds” (Mft).

Similar wordings **with *drš*** are found here:

2Chr 19:3 and [you] have set your heart to seek God (*also:* 30:19)
2Chr 20:3 he set himself [*liter.:* gave his face] to seek the Lord

Translation

An expression has to be found that captures **determination** in seeking the LORD.

Literature

For further studies, see: Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament (THAT). Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (eds.). Vol. 1. Chr. Kaiser Verlag München / Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1984. S.v. “**דָּרַשׁ** *drš* fragen nach”, col. 460-467.