

David Builds an Altar

Second Samuel 24:18-25 and First Chronicles 21:18-30

DIG: After the plague, David built an altar. Where was it? Why there? What did David's prayer have to do with that (2 Samuel 24:17; First Chronicles 21:16-17)? Why did David want to buy Araunah's threshing floor? For what price? What results? Why should God's messages go through Gad? From this story, what do you learn about the Angel of the LORD? About God? About David's relationship with God? About people who suffered, or lost loved ones? What would have happened here if, instead of repenting, David had gotten stubborn, resentful or bitter? Do you know anyone like that?

REFLECT: Are you ready to say to your King, "Take whatever pleases you?" What freebies would you willingly give up? What costly items do you fear He might take that you want to keep? What does this story say about the link between sin and suffering? Between sin and sacrifice? Between wrath and mercy? What bearing does this have on your confidence that God brings good out of the trials we endure? How is that true for you? YHVH accepted David and his sacrifice. Has ADONAI accepted you?

The last four chapters of Second Samuel serve as an appendix to David's career. These events occurred earlier in the king's life but are presented here to show the other kinds of problems David had to face - famine and plague (Chapters 21 and 24) - the men David relied on to fight his battles (Chapter 23), and how the king learned to praise God through his trials (Chapter 22 and Psalm 22).

After the fiasco of the census and the plague (see Ek - [David Counts the Fighting Men](#)), the prophet Gad once again appeared on the scene, but this time with a message of hope. On that day Gad went to David and said: Go up and build an altar to ADONAI on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite or Mount Moriah, which doubtless was located on an elevated spot exposed to the wind. So David went up, as YHVH had commanded through Gad. When Araunah looked and saw the king and his officials coming down toward him, he went out and bowed down before the king with his face to the ground, his acknowledged superior (Second Samuel 24:18-20; First Chronicles 21:18-19). If Araunah had himself once been the Jebusite king of Jerusalem, he was then merely another servant of the Israelite king of Jerusalem.⁴⁹⁵

While Araunah was threshing wheat, he turned and saw the Angel of the LORD, and his four sons who were with him ran and hid themselves. Then David approached, and when Araunah saw him, he left the threshing floor and bowed down before David with his face to the ground (First Chronicles 21:20-21).

Araunah said, somewhat afraid because the Jebusites had been defeated and were living amongst the Jews in peace: **Why has my lord the king come to his servant? "To buy your threshing floor,"** David answered, **"so I can build an altar to the LORD, that the plague on the men of Isra'el may be permanently stopped. Sell it to me at full price"** (Second Samuel 24:21; First Chronicles 21:22). David could have seized the property, or even borrowed it, but he insisted on buying it. He knew how much his sin had cost, and he refused to give ADONAI something that had cost him nothing.

Then Araunah said to David, **"Take it! Let my lord the king do whatever pleases him. Look, here are oxen** (although they usually worked as draft animals, oxen were also commonly sacrificed as burnt offerings and fellowship offerings) **for the burnt offering, and here are the threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood. Your Majesty, Araunah gives all this to the king."** Araunah also said: **May the LORD your God accept you.** It would seem that Araunah the Jebusite was deliberately distancing himself from what he considered to be an Israelite deity (Second Samuel 24:22-23; First Chronicles 21:23).

The conversation between David and Araunah is reminiscent of the one between Abraham and Ephron (see the commentary on **Genesis Fu - Abraham said: I am an Alien Among You, Sell Me Some Property So I Can Bury My Dead**), and David's situation is just as desperate as Abraham's had been. When Araunah said: **Take it, I give all this to the king,** we have what appears to be a free offer of the threshing floor. But this was not to be taken seriously. That was the way things were done in the ancient Near East negotiations. David understood this was just a polite way of starting the negotiations. Then we have David's counter offer. **But King David replied emphatically to Araunah, "No! I insist on paying the full price. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing."** As custom would have it, then Araunah would cleverly give his actual asking price. But David's offer was so forceful and overwhelming that no counter was needed. **Therefore, David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver, and he bought the whole site (Hebrew: *hammaqom*) of Mount Moriah for six hundred shekels of gold** (Second Samuel 24:24-25a; First Chronicles 21:24-25a).

David built an altar to ADONAI there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. From that point on Mount Moriah became the only place of acceptable sacrifice. God let the king know that it was the place where He wanted the Temple to be built (see Em

- **His Anger is For a Moment, But Joy Comes in the Morning**). He called on the LORD, and God answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of the burnt offering. Then ADONAI spoke to the Angel of the LORD, and He put His sword back into its sheath. At that time David saw that YHVH had answered him on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite and the plague of Isra'el was stopped (**Second Samuel 24:25b; First Chronicles 21:26-28**). The sacrifices that David offered averted God's wrath by means of the burnt offerings (see my commentary on **Exodus Fe - The Burnt Offering**) and fellowship offerings (see my commentary on **Exodus Fg - The Peace Offering**). Those sacrifices satisfied every claim of God's holiness and justice, so that He was free to act on behalf of David and the nation of Isra'el.

The spread of an inexplicable, incurable and fatal disease was, and is, a dreadful thing. And the image of the angel of ADONAI bringing death, but stopping at Jerusalem door provides a vivid picture of intense fear suddenly relieved. David's city was to be spared, as it happened again in the time of Hezekiah (see my commentary **Isaiah Gw - Then the Angel of the LORD Put To Death a Hundred and Eighty Five Thousand Men in the Assyrian Camp**), so giving rise to the popular belief that the Temple and City were inviolable (see my commentary on **Jeremiah Cc - False Religion is Worthless**).⁴⁹⁶

The Tabernacle of the LORD (see the commentary on **Exodus Eq - Christ in the Tabernacle**), which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the bronze altar (see the commentary on **Exodus Fa - Build an Altar of Acacia Wood Overlaid with Bronze**) were at that time on the high place at Gibeon. But David could not go before it to inquire of God, because he was afraid of the sword of the Angel of the LORD (**First Chronicles 21:29-30**).

Although David appeared content to simply build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, his son Solomon would eventually build the Temple there (**First Chronicles 22:1**) on a hill called Moriah (**Second Chronicles 3:1; Genesis 22:2**). At the same site where Abraham once held a knife over his son (see the commentary on **Genesis Fm - Take Your Only Son Isaac, and Sacrifice Him as a Burnt Offering**), David saw the Angel of the LORD with sword ready to plunge into Jerusalem. In both cases death was averted by sacrifice. The Temple was established there as the place where Isra'el was perpetually reminded that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (**Hebrews 9:22**). Death for Isaac was averted because the sword of divine justice would ultimately find its mark in the Son of God (**John 19:33**). Small wonder, then, that the Brit Chadashah should begin with the genealogy of Yeshua the Messiah the son of David, the son of Avraham (**Mattityahu 1:1 CJB**).⁴⁹⁷