

Who was Araunah the Jebusite?

Araunah the Jebusite was a Canaanite who sold King David a site and supplies to make a sacrifice to the Lord, even though he himself does not appear to have been a believer in the God of Israel. The land purchased from Araunah was eventually used as the site of the temple in Jerusalem.

The story of Araunah and his threshing floor is linked to that of David's sinful census in 2 Samuel 24. King David ordered a census of the fighting men of Israel; this census was contrary to God's will. (Perhaps the census was a source of pride or a sign that David was relying upon the strength of his men rather than the strength of the Lord.) As a result of David's sin, God gave David a choice: three years of famine, three months of fleeing before his enemies, or three days of pestilence. David picked the last one as he explains in verse 14: "I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man." Therefore, God sent a plague upon the people, and 70,000 men of Israel died (thus significantly weakening the fighting force that had just been counted). Toward the end of the third day, the Angel of the Lord is about to destroy Jerusalem but relents. At the time the plague stops, the Angel of the Lord was standing at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite (verse 16).

Second Samuel 5 gives the account of David's capture of Jerusalem, which originally belonged to the Jebusites. For the first seven years of his kingship, David reigned in Hebron over Judah and Benjamin. But after all the tribes united under him, he wanted to found a new capital. He chose Jerusalem, a stronghold of the Jebusites, some of the original Canaanite inhabitants of the area. David defeated them and took the city. Although God had commanded that all the Canaanites be exterminated because of their

great sin (Leviticus 18:24- 25), this had never happened, even in David's day. Throughout the history of Israel in the Old Testament, we read of Canaanites interacting with and even living among the Israelites. It appears that Araunah may have been one of the remaining Jebusites who lived there, or at least had a threshing floor near Jerusalem.

A threshing floor like that sold by Araunah would have been a large, open, elevated area to facilitate threshing and winnowing. First, the outer husk over the grain would have to be cracked so that the grain could be separated. This could be done by beating the grain or by using a threshing sledge, an arrangement of heavy boards with abrasive material (e.g., sharp rocks) on the bottom side. The sledge was pulled by draft animals back and forth across the grain to separate the tough outer husk from the kernel. Then the grain would be tossed into the air and the wind would blow away the outer husk (the chaff—see Psalm 1:4) and the heavier grain kernel would fall back to the ground.

The prophet Gad, who had been communicating God's will to David during this whole ordeal, told David to build an altar to the Lord on Araunah's threshing floor. David went to Araunah and told him what he intended and offered to buy the threshing floor. Araunah instead offered to donate the site as well as oxen for the offering and the threshing sledges for wood. This offer is significant because these articles represent the whole of Araunah's livelihood. He is very respectful of David, but speaks of "the LORD your God" (2 Samuel 24:23, emphasis added), perhaps indicating that Araunah was not a believer in the God of Israel himself. David refuses his offer and explains in verse 24: "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." David has it right—a sacrifice that costs us nothing is not a real sacrifice. Araunah sells the site to David as well as the supplies for the

offering, and the plague is stopped (verse 25).

First Chronicles 21 is the parallel passage to 2 Samuel 24, but we learn nothing new about Araunah there except that he was also called Ornan the Jebusite. There are a number of reasons why this might be. If Araunah was a Canaanite, not a Hebrew, his name would have to be translated or transliterated into Hebrew, and this can result in some variation of spelling, especially since 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles were written several hundred years apart. It is also possible that Araunah is a title rather than a proper name. There are quite a number of instances in Scripture where a person has two names or variations in spelling of the same name. This does not indicate any error in the text but the normal variation for that age and type of literature.