

109: Chapter 24 (Part III) The Acquisition of the Threshing Floor

- Rav Amnon Bazak

THE BOOK OF II SHMUEL

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This week's shiurim are dedicated by Matt Tambor
in memory of Abraham Tambor z"l

LECTURE 109 CHAPTER 24 (PART III)

THE ACQUISITION OF THE THRESHING FLOOR

I. The Difference between the threshing floor of Aravna and the Makhpela cave

We saw in the previous *shiur* that the cessation of the plague depended on the fulfillment of God's command to David to build an altar at the threshing floor of Aravna. The account of the purchase of the threshing floor is somewhat surprising in its length:

(18) And Gad came that day to David, and said to him, “ Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshing floor of Aravna¹[1] the Yevusite.” (19)

1 [1] This name appears in a variety of forms. Already in v. 16, it appears in two forms – the *ketiv* and the *keri* – and both are preceded by the definite article (the letter *heh*): “And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Aravna (*ha-Orna [ketiv]*, *ha-Aravna [keri]* the Yevusite.” Here, the *ketiv* adds another form –

And David went up according to the saying of Gad, as the Lord commanded. (20) And Aravna looked forth, and saw the king and his servants coming on toward him; and Aravna went out, and bowed down before the king with his face to the ground. (21) And Aravna said, "Why is my lord the king come to his servant?" And David said, "To buy the threshing floor of you, to build an altar unto the Lord, that the plague may be stayed from the people." (22) And Aravna said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him; behold the oxen for the burnt-offering, and the threshing instruments^{2[2]} and the furniture of the oxen for the wood." (23) All this did Aravna the king^{3[3]} give to the

Arnaya, and in *Divrei ha-Yamim* 32, the name is always Ornan. The prevalent view is that the name is of Chori origin, from the Chori word "Or," which means "lord" (to which was added the letter *nun*). This explains the addition of the *heh* in verse 16. See also below, note 3.

2 [2] A *morag* is a tool that has sharp metal teeth and is used for threshing: "Behold, I make you a new threshing instrument (*morag*) having sharp teeth; you shall thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shall make the hills as chaff" (*Yeshayahu* 41:15).

3 [3] According to the plain sense, Aravna was the king. We have already seen (see above, note 1) that his name indicates lordship and importance, but this raises a certain difficulty: Surely David conquered the Yevusites!

The Radak answers: "He was the Yevusite king who lived in Jerusalem, for even in the days of David the Yevusites were in Jerusalem, as they were left there when it was conquered by the people of Judah...And levies were imposed upon them, and they had houses, and fields and vineyards, in exchange for the levy that they paid the people of Judah and the people of Binyamin...These Yevusites were not of the seven nations [which Israel was commanded to destroy], but from the Pelishtim, from the seed of Avimelekh...And it was permissible to let them live in the land, since they accepted upon themselves not to serve idols and the rest of the commandments applying to the descendants of Noach."

In theory, there is another possibility. As may be recalled, our chapter is one of the appendices to the book of *Shemuel*, which are not arranged in chronological order. If so it is possible that it describes an event that took place before the conquest of Jerusalem.

The possibility that Aravna was king may bestow additional significance to the term "the threshing floor of Aravna." For we might not be dealing with an ordinary threshing floor, but with the site of justice, as we find in connection with other kings: "Now the king of Yisrael and Yehoshafat the king of Judah sat each on his

king. And Aravna said to the king, "The Lord your God accept you." (24) And the king said to Aravna, "Nay; but I will verily buy it of you at a price; neither will I offer burnt-offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.^{4[4]} (25) And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings. So the Lord was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.

What is the significance of this wordiness? Why would it not have sufficed to briefly note the acquisition of the threshing floor (as at the end of v. 24) and erection of the altar?

It seems that in order to understand this lengthy account, we must consider the interesting correspondence between this story and the story of Avraham's acquisition of

throne, arrayed in their robes, in a threshing floor, at the entrance of the gate of Shomeron; and all the prophets prophesied before them" (I *Melakhim* 22:10).

On the other hand, in *Divrei ha-Yamim* we come across a detail that is not found in our chapter and that records behavior that is inappropriate for a king: "And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons that were with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat" (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 21:20).

In the Septuagint, the word "king" is missing, and it would seem that such a reading was found in the Hebrew sources as well, as it would appear from *Targum Yonatan* (cited in the continuation of the words of the Radak in the name of "Some versions of the Targum"): "Aravna gave the king what the king asked for."

R. Yona Ibn Janakh (*Sefer ha-Rikma*, chap. 270) writes that the verse should be understood to mean: "Aravna the slave of the king."

4 [4] *Divrei ha-Yamim* records a different price: "So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight." Rashi on our chapter explains that David collected fifty shekels from each tribe, so that in total he collected from all the tribes six hundred shekels. The *Metzudat David* writes that David first paid fifty shekels for the threshing floor, and when he saw that this was the site of God's house (as will be discussed at length in the next *shiur*), he also purchased the entire field that surrounded it for six hundred shekels.

the Makhpela cave ([Bereishit 23](#)). This correspondence finds expression in, among others, the following ways:

1. In both stories, a certain person wishes to purchase land from a non-Jew:

“ If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat for me to Efron the son of Tzohar, that he may give me the cave of Makhpela, which he has, which is in the end of his field.”
([Bereishit 23:8-9](#))

And Aravna said, “ Why is my lord the king come to his servant?” And David said, “ To buy the threshing floor of you.” ([II Shmuel 24:21](#))

2. In both stories, the seller proposes to transfer the property for nothing in return:

“ The field give I to you, and the cave that is therein, I give it to you; in the presence of the sons of my people give I it to you.” ([Bereishit 23:11](#))

And Aravna said to David, “ Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him.” ([II Shmuel 24:22](#))

3. In both stories, the buyer refuses this offer and insists on paying for the land in full:

“ But if you will, I pray you, hear me: I will give the price of the field; take it of me, and I will bury my dead there..” And Abraham weighed to Efron the silver, which he had named in the hearing of the children of Chet.
([Bereishit 23:13](#), 16)

And the king said to Aravna, “ Nay; but I will verily buy it of you at a price; neither will I offer burnt-offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen. ([II Shmuel 24:24](#))

4. In both sales, mention is made of the precise amount of money that was paid:

Four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant. ([Bereishit 23:16](#))

For fifty shekels of silver. ([II Shmuel 24:24](#))

The similarity is strengthened by the parallel passage in *Divrei ha-Yamim*. David's request is worded there: " Give me the place of this threshing floor, that I may build thereon an altar unto the Lord; for the **full price** shall you give it me...! And king David said to Ornan, ‘ Nay, but I will verily buy it for the **full price**’ " (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 21:22, 24). The repetition of the expression "full price" alludes, of course, to the only other place in Scripture where it appears: "That he may give me the cave of Makhpela, which he has, which is in the end of his field; for the full price let him give it to me in the midst of you for a possession of a burying-place" ([Bereishit 23:9](#)).

The linguistic similarity to the account of the purchase of the Makhpela cave is also evident in the verbs that describe the purchase in *Divrei ha-Yamim*. In the story of the acquisition of the Makhpela cave, the root *n-t-n* ("give") repeats itself seven times, in the manner of guide words ("Give me a possession of a burying-place...that he may give me the cave of Makhpela...for the full price let him give it to me...the field give I to you, and the cave that is therein, I give it to you; in the presence of the sons of my people give I it to you...But if you will, I pray you, hear me: I will give the price of the field; take it of me"). In the story of the purchase of the threshing floor of Aravna in the book of *Shmuel*, it is the root *k-n-h* ("buy") that repeats itself ("And David said, ‘ To buy the threshing floor of you...Nay; but I will verily buy it of you at a price...! So David bought the threshing floor"). In the book of *Divrei ha-Yamim*, the root *n-t-n* is once again frequently used, and it comes in place of the root *k-n-h* in the book of *Shmuel* ("Then David said to Ornan, ‘ Give me the place of this threshing floor...for the full price shall you give it me...lo, I give you the oxen for burnt-offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meal-offering; I give it all...! So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight").

What does this correspondence come to teach us? It seems that this correspondence, like many other correspondences that we dealt with in the book of *Shmuel*, comes to emphasize the difference between the two stories. First and foremost, what stands out is the literary contrast between them. In both stories, we read of bowing down in the course of the negotiation, but in opposite directions. In the purchase of the Makhpela cave, it is Avraham, the buyer, who bows before the people of the land.

And Abraham rose up, and **bowed down** to the people of the **land (*ha-aretz*)**, even to the children of Chet...And Avraham **bowed down** before the people of the **land (*ha-aretz*)**. ([Bereishit 23:7](#), 12)

In contrast, in the purchase of the threshing floor of Aravna, it is the seller who bows down before David:

And Aravna went out, **and bowed down** before the king with his face to the **ground (*artza*)**. ([II Shmuel 24:20](#))

This symbolic difference expresses the huge difference in standing between Avraham and David. Avraham comes to the children of Chet and presents himself as a foreigner: "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you" ([Bereishit 23:4](#)). He is received in a respectful manner, but despite Efron's readiness to give him the land for free, Avraham does not trust gifts, and prefers to pay the full price in order to avoid challenges to his ownership in the future.^{5[5]}

5 [5] This is the impression that we get from the wordiness at the end of that account: "So the field of Efron, which was in Makhpela, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the border thereof round about, were made sure unto Avraham for **a possession** in the presence of the children of Chet, before all that went in at the gate of his city...And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Avraham for a possession of a burying-place by the children of Chet" ([Bereishit 23:17-20](#)). So too, later in the book of *Bereishit*, we find repeated emphasis of the sale and the seller, in order to express the clear validity of the deal: "And Yitzchak and Yishmael his sons buried him in the cave of Makhpela, in the field of **Efron the son of Tzochar** the Chitite, which is before Mamre; the field which Avraham **purchased** of the children of Chet; there was Avraham

David, on the other hand, arrives as the king, and Aravna regards his very visit as a show of honor to him. David's refuses to accept the land without paying for it, not out of any concern, but on principle:

And the king said to Aravna, " Nay; but I will verily buy it of you at a price; neither will I offer burnt-offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing." ([II Shmuel 24:24](#))

This story, with which the book of *Shmuel* comes to an end, expresses more than anything else the great change that took place during David's lifetime. From a state of strangers and foreigners in the land, the people of Israel reached full sovereignty over *Eretz Yisrael*. The book of *Shmuel* is dedicated to an account of Israel's political and spiritual consolidation, which reached its climax in the days of David. The book's epilogue well illustrates that the people of Israel and their king are the lords of the land.^{6[6]}

buried, and Sara his wife" (ibid. 25:9-10); "Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of **Efron the Chitite**, in the cave that is in the field of Makhpela, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Avraham **bought** with the field from **Efron the Chitite** for a possession of a burying-place... The field and the cave that is therein, which was purchased from the children of Chet" (ibid. 49:29-32); "For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Makhpela, which Avraham **bought** with the field, for a possession of a burying-place, of **Efron the Chitite**, in front of Mamre" (ibid. 50:13).

Concerning Avraham's refusal to receive the field *gratis*, R. Joseph Soloveitchik writes as follows (Out of the Whirlwind, 2003, pp. 40-41): "Acquisition of goods without investing one's labor, the sweat of the brow, is morally objectionable. In such a case, a property right is not perfect. When I buy goods, I exchange my labor for those goods. Money represents labor, the sweat and fatigue of the worker. Therefore the goods I buy are absolutely mine, while a gift which I received, lacking the catharsis of work and exhaustion, lacks the redemptive quality... [Abraham] certainly did not want Sarah to be put to her eternal rest in a grave which was given to him as a present, a gratuity, a grave which was not hallowed by the sweat and the fright."

6 [6] Perhaps there is room to add that the verse, "And Aravna looked forth (*va-yashkef*) and saw the king and his servants coming on toward him; and Aravna

Without a doubt, this conclusion is also important for the book of *Melakhim*, and for the most important event recorded in that book: the building of the Temple. Until now, the political situation had been one of the chief obstacles to the building of the Temple, as we learned in the vision of Natan (see chapter 7), and as was stated also by Shelomo:

You know how that David my father could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until the Lord put them under the soles of my feet [his foot (*ketiv*)].^{7[7]} But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary, nor evil occurrence. And, behold, I purpose to build a house for the name of the Lord my God.” ([1 Melakhim 5:17-19](#))

This seems to be the essence of the comparison between the purchase of Aravna's threshing floor and the acquisition of the Makhpela cave: highlighting Israel's possession of the land. In this way Scripture lays the groundwork for the beginning of the golden period of the people of Israel, both politically and economically, this being a condition for the resting of God's *Shekhina* in the Temple.

went out, and bowed down before the king with his face to the ground" also corresponds to the verse in the book of *Bereishit*: "And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Avimelech king of the Pelishtim looked out (*va-yashkef*) at a window, and saw, and, behold, Yitzchak was sporting with Rivka his wife" (26:8). There too the pressure which the patriarchs were subject to from the kings of the land is evident: The Pelishti king's looking out at Yitzchak and what followed from that demonstrate the king's rule over his land. In our story, in contrast, Aravna (the king?) looks out and sees David, and immediately goes out and bows down before him.

7 [7] The difference between the *keri* ("my feet") and the *ketiv* ("his foot") has importance regarding the question whether David at the end of his life achieved full dominion over his enemies, or whether this was reached only in the days of Shelomo. See Radak.

II. Burnt-offerings and peace-offerings

Now we can return to the matter with which we dealt in the previous *shiur*. We saw that David repented twice over the course of the chapter: the first time, when his heart smote him for the sin that he committed by conducting a census of the people; and the second time, when he understood that he had erred when he chose a punishment that would hurt all of Israel, and not only himself and the house of his father. The full repair of these two sins found expression in the offering of the special sacrifice in the threshing floor of Aravna, which completed the process of repentance and atonement.

We find a similar phenomenon in a different story in which David mended his ways – the account of the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem (see chapter 6). In both stories, the repair involves the bringing of sacrifices:

And David offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the Lord.
(6:17)

And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt-offerings
and peace-offerings. (24:25)

As was noted there, the combination of burnt-offerings and peace-offerings has special significance. A burnt-offering, which is offered wholly to God, expresses the fear of God and the distance between God and man. A peace-offering, where the priests and the sacrifice's owner eat from God's table, expresses the love of God and closeness to Him. In the two cases in which David sinned because of insufficient fear – despite the love which he expressed – it was necessary to emphasize that burnt-offerings come before peace-offerings, and that the fear of God must always come before the love of God.

(Translated by David Strauss)

