

WHY FREEDOM?

A Devotional Meditation on Terumah (Offering)

Exodus 25:1-27:19; 1 Kings 5:12-6:13, 12:1-19;
2 Samuel 20:1-26; Matthew 26:47-54; Romans 11:29; Hebrews 8:8-12

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What are we to think about the fact that the man who drafted workers to build Solomon's Temple was stoned to death when Solomon's son took the throne?

The man's name was Adoniram. We read of him in the account of Solomon's public works projects, of which the Temple was the beginning:

King Solomon drafted forced labor out of all Israel, and the draft numbered 30,000 men. And he sent them to Lebanon, 10,000 a month in shifts. They would be a month in Lebanon and two months at home. Adoniram was in charge of the draft. Solomon also had 70,000 burden-bearers and 80,000 stonecutters in the hill country, besides Solomon's 3,300 chief officers who were over the work, who had charge of the people who carried on the work. At the king's command they quarried out great, costly stones in order to lay the foundation of the house with dressed stones.

1 Kings 5:13-17 ESV

We first read about Adoniram in 2 Samuel 20, which tells us he held that same position as the man in charge of forced labor under King David. If we wonder why such a position was necessary in the kingdom ruled by the man after God's own heart, we need only read what happened in the previous chapters. All was not perfect in David's kingdom. His son, Absalom, raised a rebellion that nearly toppled David from the throne, and no sooner had that been put down then a Benjaminite named Sheba renewed the rebellion. That's the context in which we read of how David organized his kingdom in the latter part of his reign, with his cousin Joab as commander of the army, Benaiah as commander of the foreign mercenaries, and Adoram (which is Adoniram) in charge of the forced labor – along with Zadok and Abiathar as high priests, and Ira as David's personal priest.

Even in David's reign, Israel was organized and functioned just like the other kingdoms of the earth, although still retaining special status as God's chosen nation. After all, the gifts and the callings of God cannot be revoked. That doesn't mean those who walk in God's gifts and callings are immune from human failings. Individuals and nations remain susceptible to temptation and diversion from God's perfect way if they are not wary.

That's how Israel's Golden Age featured a man whose job was to compel God's Chosen People to do the work not only of building his Holy Temple, but whatever other public works projects seemed wise to the monarch. For about fifty years, Adoniram was the face of the realm for the masses who had to send their sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers to serve for a month at a time at labors dictated by far away bureaucrats in Jerusalem. Did those Israelites consider how closely their lives resembled the lives of their ancestors who were compelled to give their labor to projects dictated by officials in



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Pharaoh's service? No wonder they rebelled and split the kingdom when Solomon's son Rehoboam chose to harden his heart just as Pharaoh had when Moses confronted him.

Lest we blame those ancient Israelites too quickly, we should recall our own history. There is no such thing as an everlasting utopia of human making. However splendid our creations, they are sown with the seeds of their own destruction. When those seeds sprout and mature, they bring the downfall of families, institutions, businesses, nations, and global orders. It's the inevitable result when God is removed from the throne.

It's ironic that the Creator of the universe steps aside when anyone, including his redeemed children, decide to do what only he can do. When the people of Israel rejected him and demanded a human king, he had Samuel the Judge warn them what would happen, and then let them proceed. Adoniram's career was merely the fulfillment of that solemn warning. The people traded the God who asked them to choose him of their own free will and opted for a human government that ran roughshod over their free will. That's the difference between the Tabernacle in the wilderness, where God specified that people be given the choice to contribute their material goods and labor to its construction, and the Temple, where the labor (and perhaps the materials as well) were levied as taxes.

Our Creator made his universe to function through relationships. People are supposed to align with him and with one another through love freely given and freely received. Alignment can be achieved temporarily through coercion, but such enforced alignment cannot endure. In time, those whose love is forced from them will find ways to change the equation, perhaps by seizing the reins of power themselves and starting the cycle all over again.

This is why God must be king over us, and why we must choose him of our own free will. That's the outcome promised in the New Covenant, when we won't have to tell people to get to know the Lord because we will all know him. He won't force himself upon us. That much we know from Messiah's example, when he chose not to call legions of angels to rescue him, but willingly laid down his life for our sakes. God can do this because he holds all the cards. He is the God who kills and makes alive, who wounds and heals – not because he is cruel and capricious, but because he is perfecting a creation populated by his image bearers.

If we have learned anything from these thousands of years of our collective story, it is that we humans fail. We can't even pass our values from one generation to the next without corruption. If we want to survive, we really have no choice but to submit to the unchangeable, incorruptible Being who alone is capable of ruling over us. Eventually we'll make that choice freely and willingly. How much more pain we must endure before then depends largely on us.*

* Dr. Douglas Hamp provided inspiration for this commentary from his forthcoming book, [*The Relational Universe: Why Relationship, Not Matter, Comes First*](#) (New York: Staten House, September 15, 2026).