

# Exodus 20:25

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.

## Analysis

**And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.**

Even stone altars must be unhewn (לא-תבנה אֶת־מִזְבֵּחַ, lo-tivneh ethen gazit)—natural stones, untouched by human tools. Why? 'Lift up thy tool...polluted it' (הנִפְתָּח) — human shaping defiles. The word for 'tool' is literally 'sword' (charbekha)—instruments of violence shouldn't touch God's altar. The altar receives blood for sin; adding human craftsmanship suggests we contribute to atonement. We don't. Salvation is God's work alone. Hewn stones represent human achievement; unhewn stones represent divine provision. The gospel is 'not by works of righteousness which we have done' (Titus 3:5). God provides the altar and the sacrifice.

## Historical Context

Joshua later builds an altar of unhewn stones as commanded (Joshua 8:30-31). Solomon's temple used cut stones but the altar foundation was unhewn. The principle emphasizes God's sufficiency—human contribution doesn't improve divine provision.

## Related Passages

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**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

**James 2:17** — Faith and works

## Study Questions

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1. Why does human craftsmanship 'pollute' the altar—what does this teach about works-based religion?
2. How does the command for unhewn stones illustrate salvation by grace alone, apart from human works?

## Interlinear Text

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וְאִם	מִזְבֵּחַ	אֶבֶןִים	תַּעֲשֶׂה	לֹא	
H518	me an altar	H4196	H68	ו	H3808
	of stone		And if thou wilt make		
			H6213		
תַּבְנֵה	אֶת	כִּי	סְרִבְבָּן	הַנּ	
thou shalt not build	H853	it of hewn stone	H3588	thy tool	for if thou lift up
H1129		H1496		H2719	H5130
עַל	יְבָשָׂה				
H5921	upon it thou hast polluted	H2490			

## Additional Cross-References

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**Joshua 8:31** (Sacrifice): As Moses the servant of the LORD commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings.