

# Joshua 8:30

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Ebal,

## Analysis

**Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Ebal, 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.**

This altar construction fulfills Moses' explicit command in Deuteronomy 27:2-8, demonstrating Joshua's faithfulness to covenant stipulations. The timing is significant—immediately after major military victories, Joshua pauses conquest operations to establish proper worship. This priority sequence teaches that military success must not supersede spiritual devotion; Israel exists not merely to possess land but to serve Yahweh in holiness.

The Hebrew phrase mizbeach avanim shlemot (מִזְבֵּחַ אֲבָנִים שְׁלָמֹת) "altar of whole stones") specifies uncut stones untouched by iron tools. This requirement (Exodus 20:25) preserves the altar from human craftsmanship that might introduce idolatrous associations or human pride. The altar must be wholly God's provision—even the stones are His creation, unaltered by human hands. This principle extends to Reformed soteriology: salvation is entirely God's work, accepting no human contribution.

The combination of "burnt offerings" (olot, נִזְבָּת) and "peace offerings" (shelamim, שְׁלָמִים) represents two essential aspects of covenant relationship. Burnt offerings

express complete consecration—the entire animal consumed, symbolizing total dedication. Peace offerings celebrate fellowship—portions eaten by worshipers, signifying restored relationship. Together they point forward to Christ's perfect sacrifice.

## Historical Context

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Mount Ebal (940 meters) and Mount Gerizim (881 meters) form a natural amphitheater with ancient Shechem between them. Acoustics at this location are remarkable—sound carries clearly across the valley, allowing the covenant reading (verses 33-35) to be heard by the entire assembly. Archaeological surveys confirm ancient sacred sites on both mountains.

Shechem held profound patriarchal significance: Abraham built his first altar in Canaan there (Genesis 12:6-7), Jacob purchased land and erected an altar (Genesis 33:18-20), and Joseph's bones were buried there (Joshua 24:32). By conducting covenant renewal at this location, Joshua connects the conquest to patriarchal promises, demonstrating continuity in God's redemptive plan spanning centuries. The command to use unhewn stones reflects ancient Israel's distinction from Canaanite worship practices with their elaborate carved stones associated with fertility cults.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**James 2:17** — Faith and works

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

## Study Questions

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1. What does Joshua's pause from military success to establish worship teach about our priorities when experiencing victories?

2. How does the requirement for uncut stones illustrate the principle that salvation cannot be improved by human effort?
3. In what ways do burnt offerings (total consecration) and peace offerings (fellowship) reflect our relationship with God through Christ?

## Interlinear Text

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וַיְבִנֵּה יְהוָה אֶת מִזְבֵּחַ לְיְהוָה בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

H227      **built**      Then **Joshua**      an **altar**      unto the **LORD**      **God**      **of Israel**  
H1129      H3091      H4196      H3068      H430      H3478

עַל־**עַלְבָל** בְּרֵגֶת

in **mount**      **Ebal**  
H2022      H5858

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