

Joshua 8:31

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

An altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron (מִזְבֵּחַ אֶבֶןִים)—the requirement for unhewn stones (Exodus 20:25, Deuteronomy 27:5-6) preserved the altar's purity from human craftsmanship. Iron tools symbolized human warfare and violence, forbidden from touching what mediated peace with God. The altar at Mount Ebal fulfilled the Mosaic command for covenant renewal upon entering Canaan.

Burnt offerings (עַלְיוֹת, olot) and **peace offerings** (שְׁלָמִים, shelamim) together represented complete consecration to God and fellowship communion. This worship preceded the reading of the law (v. 34), establishing that Israel's obedience flowed from covenant relationship, not mere legalism. The uncut stones pointed forward to Christ, the 'stone which the builders rejected' (Psalm 118:22), whose unbroken body secured eternal peace.

Historical Context

Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim flanked the city of Shechem, the geographical heart of Canaan where Abraham first received God's promise (Genesis 12:6-7). Moses commanded this covenant ceremony before his death (Deuteronomy 27),

and Joshua faithfully executed it immediately after conquering Ai. Archaeological excavations on Mount Ebal have uncovered an altar structure from this period.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the prohibition against using iron tools on God's altar challenge our tendency to improve God's plan with human methods?
2. What does the sequence of worship before law-reading teach about the foundation of biblical obedience?
3. In what ways does Christ fulfill the symbolism of the unhewn stone altar as the undefiled mediator between God and humanity?

Interlinear Text

בָּנִים אֶת בְּנֵי אֱשֹׁשׁ רְצִוָּה מֶשֶׁךְ עָבֵד לְיהוָה מֶשֶׁךְ הַיְלָדָה
commanded As Moses the servant of the LORD of the children

אֶבֶן יָמָן מִזְבֵּחַ לְיַשְׁרָאֵל
stones an altar as it is written in the book of the law of Moses

בְּרִזְקָן לְעֵלִים | בָּנִים יְשִׁיבָה
over which no man hath lift up any iron

תִּלְבַּחַ וְלְיַהְוָה עַל יְהִי עַל
and they offered thereon burnt offerings of the LORD and sacrificed

שְׁלָמִים:
peace offerings

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