

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 אֲבָנִים שְׁלֵמוֹת, mizbeach avanim shlemot)—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 (עֹלוֹת, 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

בְּנֵי יִ	אֶת	לַיהוָה ה	עֶבֶד	מֹשֶׁה ה	צִוָּה	כָּאָשׁ ר
the children	of the LORD	the servant	As Moses	commanded		
H1121	H853	H3068	H5650	H4872	H6680	H834
אֲבָנֵי יִם	מִזְבֵּחַ	מֹשֶׁה ה	תּוֹכַת	בְּסֵפֶר	כִּכְתוּב	יִשְׂרָאֵל ל
stones	an altar	As Moses	of the law	in the book	as it is written	of Israel
H68	H4196	H4872	H8451	H5612	H3789	H3478
בִּרְזָל ל	עָלֶיהָ ו	הִנֵּי יָף	לֹא	אָשׁ ר	שְׁלָמֹת	וֹת
any iron	over which no man hath lift up					
H1270	H5921	H5130	H3808	H834		H8003
וְזָבַח ו	לַיהוָה ה	עֲלוֹת	עַל יו	וְעָל ו		
and sacrificed	of the LORD	thereon burnt offerings		and they offered		
H2076	H3068	H5930		H5927	H5921	
שְׁלָמִים:						
peace offerings						
H8002						