

The Altar Found on Mount Eival (Ebal) – Can We Learn Practical Halacha from It?

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Complete Stones for the Altar – The Majority Position and the Minority Position

In Deuteronomy (chapter 27, verse 6), it is stated: "You shall build an altar to Hashem your L-rd of complete stones..."

There are two approaches to what the term "complete stones" means, from which the altar is built. The majority of later authorities hold that the meaning of "complete stones" is smooth stones, without defects like a slaughtering knife¹. There is a minority view that holds that smooth stones are not required, but rather stones that certainly have not been altered by humans using any metal (such as silver or brass), and it is possible that according to this approach, it is forbidden on the altar to use stones altered by humans even without metal².

¹ As written in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Chullin, 17b: "Rav Huna bar Rav Katina said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish: There are three types of defects: a defect in the bone for the Passover offering, a defect in the ear for the firstborn, and a defect in the sanctity of consecrated animals. Rav Chisda said: Also a defect in the slaughtering knife. And the other? It (namely, the statement) does not refer to the non-sacred. And for all of them, their defect is equivalent to a defect in the altar." It should be noted that in Yoreh De'ah, section 18, the Beit Yosef, the Gra, and the Shach state that in practice, we are stringent regarding slaughtering knives, disqualifying them for even a defect smaller than the size of a nick that holds back a fingernail. Therefore, one cannot draw a proof from modern slaughtering knives to disqualify a stone for the altar. I found many stones on the shore of Netanya, near Kiryat Tzanz, which may be valid according to this opinion. However, I later saw in Kaf HaChaim that some later authorities hold that even for altar stones and slaughtering knives, any defect disqualifies them. Rabbi Avigdor Neventzal remarked to me: "Who said the altar is less stringent than a slaughtering knife? Perhaps, since it involves atonement for all Israel and the Divine Presence depends on it, we should be stricter with the altar?" Thus far his words . According to Rabbi Hillel ben Shlomo: "The altar stones are intended for the public and are made by the court, so there is reason to be more lenient with them than with slaughtering knives, which are entrusted to individuals (and I brought sources for this in my article in *Ma'alim BaKodesh* 18").

² The Rashash was among those who supported this opinion. In his commentary on Tractate Middot, chapter 3, mishna 4, he writes: "And with a defect in any matter. This implies that we require the defect to occur through some action, even if not by iron. However, if they were found defective, under virgin soil, where it is known that they grew that way, they are not disqualified. What it says at the beginning, 'complete stones,' as written in Deuteronomy (27), this only excludes stones that were diminished after being extracted from their source. Therefore, I am astonished at the Tosafot in Chullin (104a) who questioned where one would find stones without any defect ". Additionally, I found in the Ya'avetz (his words are cited in the *Yalkutim* within the Frankel edition of the Rambam, on the order of *Avodah*) that he holds that any action to remove material from the stone to smooth it disqualifies it. According to him, it is impossible to smooth altar stones even with a *shamir* (a worm-like creature said to cut stones), as he believes the *shamir* also diminishes the stone's wholeness .

However, it is difficult to accept his opinion, as even the Tanna who is stringent in defining the concept of a "complete stone" (namely, Rabbi Yehuda) permits cutting the stone with a *shamir*, as written in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sotah, 48b:

It should be noted that in my humble opinion, even Rambam (Maimonides) holds that complete stones are smooth stones. For in the Laws of Beit Habechira (the Chosen House), chapter 1, Rambam ruled: "And they do not split the building stones on the Temple Mount, but rather split and chisel them outside and then bring them in for building, as it is said: 'large stones, costly stones, to lay the foundation of the house with hewn stones' ('**gazit**' in Hebrew, 1 Kings 5:31)."

And what is the meaning of "hewn stones"?

I found in the Responsa of Rambam, section 153: "And 'gevil' is the name of the thing that has not been smoothed nor has anything been removed from it to straighten and level it, and therefore they call unhewn stones 'gevil,' and hewn stones '**gazit**'."

And even though they "split and chisel them outside," these stones are defined as "complete", according to 1 Kings chapter 6, verse 7: "And the house, when it was in building, was built of complete stone carried from the quarry; and there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building."

In the Mekhilta on Exodus 20:22, it is explained why building with hewn stones is permitted in the Sanctuary and the Holy of Holies despite the prohibition mentioned at the end of Parashat Yitro which states: "And if you make for me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones" (Exodus 20:22).

Comments the Mekhilta, "You shall not build it of hewn stones" – in **it** (the altar) you shall not build (from hewn stones), but you may build in the Sanctuary and the Holy of Holies (from hewn stones)... And how do I fulfill "and there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building" (1 Kings 6) – in the house it is not heard, but outside it was heard.

*"The Sages taught: The *shamir*—with which Shlomo (Solomon) built the Temple, as it is was stated (1 Kings 6): And the house, when it was in building, was built of complete stone carried from the quarry ' the words are as written, these are the words (that is to say, the opinion) of Rabbi Yehuda ".*

Rabbi Hillel ben Shlomo remarked to me: "Indeed, from the plain meaning, it seems there is no distinction between the completeness required for the stones of the courtyard and those of the altar regarding the extent of the defect. However, some later authorities hold, at least according to the Rambam, that a distinction should be made between them".

In another article, I proposed several solutions to satisfy both opinions for building an altar, and I will mention them very briefly.

A] To build an altar where the inner layer is made of pearls, which according to the sources I brought in that article, have the status of stones. And for the outer layer, make the altar from other materials that are not stones, which are permitted on the altar, which are resistant to high temperatures, salts, acids, sulfates, and water.

B] To adopt the solution of Rabbi Menachem Burstein, shlit"a, to cut the stones to be smooth (smoother than a slaughtering knife) using a machine that creates a water jet. And I added my own improvement: to operate the machine indirectly (gerama), so that it is not considered human action.

C] To use artificial sapphire [created by extremely hot gases], which is a very strong material and resistant to high heat. It seems one can combine several doubts to be lenient, even according to those who forbid the use of bricks on the altar. 1] A doubt whether all coatings like brass, which are for protection or honor or beauty, are permitted on a stone altar. 2] Doubt whether perhaps it is valid due to the law of nullification. 3] Doubt whether artificial sapphire has the status of "Sid", (lime) [and not just brick]. "Sid" (Lime) is created by fire and originates from stone. Artificial sapphire is also created by fire and is related to the concept of stone. 4] The doubt whether artificial sapphire is considered a stone outright.

And I found evidence to exclude artificial sapphire from the category of being merely brick because 1) It somewhat implies from Exodus 5:7 and Exodus 5:16 that it is impossible to make bricks without straw or stubble {at least in the period of the Exodus from Egypt}. 2) According to Rashi on Exodus chapter 5, bricks = "tiyuli" in Old French [tiles] made from clay and dried in the sun, and some burn them in a kiln: "And a similar explanation is brought in Metzudat Tzion, Yechezkel (Ezekiel) chapter 4:1, s.v. Levana." 3) In Yishayahu (Isaiah) 9:9 it is written: "The bricks are fallen, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but cedars will we put in their place." And the commentators on the Bible understood from this that the quality of hewn stones is superior to that of bricks. And this is the language of Malbim: "They said, why should we fear because Rezin fell by the king of Assyria? Now we will choose other allies who will be stronger than Aram, and it is like one whose house was built of bricks that fell down, who builds in its place a house of hewn stone which is stronger." And apparently, Targum Yonatan ben Uzziel agreed there: "The leaders were exiled and better

ones we will appoint; the possessions were plundered but those of superior quality we will acquire." If so, artificial sapphire, which is not created with straw, stubble, or clay, but is high-quality and strong like hewn stone, apparently falls outside the category of brick. And if we create sapphires indirectly (gerama), perhaps there is another reason to distinguish between sapphire and brick.

The Altar on Mount Eival as Evidence That It Sufficient to Use Stones Extracted as They Are from Virgin Soil or from the Sea

And even though it seems there are solutions to satisfy all opinions regarding complete stones, specifically several important rabbis who are active in restoring the offering of sacrifices before the Messianic era³ prefer the second interpretation I brought for the term complete stones (stones not altered by human hands) because:

³ In the book **Geulah BeDerech HaTeva** (Jewish Year 5757 / 1997 CE edition, p. 196), the religious historian Aryeh Morgenstern cites sources to prove that the author of **Pe'at HaShulchan**, Rabbi Yisrael of Shklov, and his teacher, the Gra, follow the opinion of the Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Ma'aser Sheni, that the Temple will be rebuilt before the kingdom of the House of David. The first source is in the letter "To the Ten Tribes" (copied in **Igrot Eretz Yisrael**, A. Yaari, Tel Aviv Jewish Year 5703, 1943 CE, p. 355), and the second is in the words of the philanthropist Laharan, who greatly supported the old Yishuv, particularly the Gra's students, in the Land of Israel. In a response letter to Rabbi Yisrael of Shklov, Laharan writes: "I was pleased to see in his holy words, the commentary of the saintly Gaon, may his memory be blessed, on the words of the Jerusalem Talmud in Ma'aser Sheni, that the Temple will be built first. The Tosefot Yom Tov also has already promoted this viewpoint." Morgenstern also cites Rabbi Zussman there, explaining why there is no contradiction to the Gra's (Vilna Gaon's) commentary on Song of Songs, "that they are adjured not to build the Temple of their own accord, the Shoshana of above, until he comes" (until here is the excerpt from **Geulah BeDerech HaTeva**).

I myself resolved the contradiction regarding when the Temple will be rebuilt, based on the words of the author of **Pe'at HaShulchan** and the Gra elsewhere, that the restriction of the three oaths has expired because the nations oppressed us excessively (**Geulah BeDerech HaTeva**, pp. 8-9; Yaari, **Igrot Eretz Yisrael**, p. 352). Similarly, in the Gra's commentary on Song of Songs 2:7, "I adjure you not to awaken me... for there will be great pain for me and my lover, that he will do it before its time"; he explains: "The matter is as our Sages said regarding the three oaths that the Holy One, blessed be He, adjured... that they not hasten the time of the end by afflicting Israel".

I admit that according to another student of the Gra in **Kol HaTor**, chapter 6, section 2, it seems that in the days of the author of **Pe'at HaShulchan**, the oath not to build the Temple on their own accord still applied. However, in the notes there by Yosef Rivlin (5754/1994 edition), it somewhat implies that in 1990 (Jewish Year 5750), the oath expired due to the Gra's calculations of the end time.

See further in **Minchat Chinuch**, commandment 95, section 9, for additional evidence that the Temple's construction may precede the Messiah.

I did not intend to say that the Gra and **Minchat Chinuch** agree with the Rashash's opinion, about complete stones, but only brought them as evidence regarding the order of redemption.

Some of them are not aware of the technological solutions to satisfy everyone. And some prefer to use stones extracted as they are from virgin soil or from the sea, because that is how they understand Rambam, and it is a cheap and quick solution. Also, in their opinion, it is unlikely that the stones Yehoshua took from the Jordan to make the altar were naturally smooth, and it is unlikely in their opinion that there was enough time for the people of Israel to smooth them from the time they were taken from the Jordan until they were set up as an altar on Mount Eival using brass tools or silver tools. And I have heard from several rabbis who follow this approach⁴ that one can bring evidence to be lenient, for in our days we have found the altar that Yehoshua built on Mount Eival, which the Torah testifies was made of complete stones. And the stones found in the altar on Mount Eival are not smooth.

Is There Any Place for Archaeology in General to Decide Disputes in Halacha?

Yes, provided that the proof is very strong.

For example, the Beit Yosef explained why most of the Jewish people do not stringently put on both Rashi's Tefillin and Rabbeinu Tam's Tefillin. And this a translated quote⁵:

And what our Rabbi wrote in the name of the Rosh to make two pairs of Tefillin. So it is written in the Semag and Semak and Terumah, and it is also written in the Semag and Terumah that if he does not know how to align the proper place (on the body) and put both pairs (of Tefillin) together, he should put on Tefillin in accordance with one of the two major views on the arm and head and then remove them immediately and put on the other set (that follows the second view) based on the initial blessing made for wearing Tefillin, and even though he interrupts between the blessing for Tefillin of the arm with the blessing of Tefillin for the head, this is better than not putting them (the second set) on at all. End quote. And in Shimusha Rabba he wrote in accordance with Rashi's position (concerning the order of the biblical passages within our Tefillin), and so ruled Rambam (Tefillin chapter 3, halacha 5), and the

⁴ For example, see **Ma'alim BaKodesh**, volume 18, where Rabbi Friedman cites the altar at Mount Eival as evidence for his opinion.

⁵ Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim, section 34.

Semag and Mordechai wrote that they sent a writing from the Land of Israel that a "Bima" on the prophet Yechezkel's (Ezekiel's) grave fell down and they found there very old Tefillin written in accordance to the order of Rambam and Rashi, and the Rashba in a responsum elaborated on this matter and rejected the words of Rabbeinu Tam and upheld the words of Rashi and Rambam, and at the end of the responsum he wrote: In conclusion, my opinion leans toward Rashi and Rambam, and upon them we rely and act, and so did Rabbi Yonah and the Ramban practice and act themselves. End quote. And this responsum you will find in the Responsa of the Ramban, section 234.

Behold, the Rashba and the Beit Yosef (Rabbi Yosef Karo) incorporated the archaeological testimony into their ruling.

And one person asked me against this evidence, for in the cave of Bar Kokhba's soldiers, it is reported that they found old Tefillin both according to Rabbeinu Tam and according to Rashi, and the text of the portions was like the Masorah except for one word that was written there, "תאכלו" instead of "תאכל," and apparently one can bring from this evidence that one should not pay attention to an archaeological discovery.

And one can respond that there is a distinction, for near the prophet Yechezkel, it is clear to us that he and his students had Tefillin written according to the law, for there was no unresolved dispute in Israel until the period of the Zugot (that is to say from the days of Yosi Ben Yoezer and Yosi Ben Yochanan). However, with Bar Kokhba's soldiers, who lived in a period when disputes proliferated in Israel and during a national emergency, it is not necessary that every soldier had kosher Tefillin.

Rabbi Tzvi "Hershel" Schachter brought other evidence that one can rely on archaeology for halacha from the fact that they wanted to see the Tzitzit on the bodies of the dead from the generation of the desert (Moshe's generation) to determine whether the halacha follows Beit Hillel or Beit Shammai regarding Tzitzit (Bava Batra 74a).

I deliberately do not bring as evidence or contradiction the dispute⁶ whether to read the Scroll of Esther on the 15th of Adar in a place or near a place where, according to archaeologists, there was an ancient wall, because there may be special reasons in the laws of walled cities to

⁶ See **Tchumin**, volume 1

explain our practice, and one can also argue whether they have truly proven beyond all doubt when the wall they found was built.

From the words of the Kesef Mishneh on Klei Hamikdash (Laws of Temple Vessels) 9:1, one can bring evidence that sometimes an archaeological proof is still not evidence for how to act in the ideal situation, for Rambam ruled that the ideal way to make the Tzitz (forehead-plate) is in accordance with the opinion of the first Tanna, despite the testimony of Rabbi Eliezer son of Rabbi Yosi that the Tzitz brought to Rome (during the pillage of the 2nd Temple) was not written according to the first Tanna's opinion.

If so, it is possible that even an archaeological discovery is not absolute proof, at least regarding the ideal requirements of Halacha. And I did not come here to set clear boundaries when to rely on archaeology and when not, for you will see below that regarding the altar found on Mount Eival, it is not a matter that even approaches this boundary.

Are There Strong Proofs That the Altar Found on Mount Eival Is the Altar of Complete Stones Built by Yehoshua?

Despite the fact that several seminars that want to bring people back to observance by using the Mount Eival altar as evidence against those who deny the historic events described in the Bible, one must hold tightly to the seal of the Holy One, blessed be He, which is truth, and admit that it is likely that the altar on Mount Eival is not Yehoshua's altar, or at the very least, the doubts in the identification are so great that one cannot rely on identifying this place to learn practical halacha.

Did Yehoshua Leave the Altar He Built on Mount Eival for Future Generations at All?

The overwhelming majority of our rabbis hold that Yehoshua dismantled the altar he built on Mount Eival, and according to this, the altar on Mount Eival in our days is certainly not Yehoshua's altar.

And so it is written in the Mishnah, tractate Sotah chapter 7, mishnah 5:

"Blessings and curses, how? Once Israel crossed the Jordan and came to Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival in Samaria, beside Shechem, beside the oaks of Moreh, as it is said (there 11): 'Are they not beyond the Jordan...' and further on it says (Genesis 12): 'And Avram passed through the land

unto the place of Shechem, unto the oak of Moreh' – just as the oak of Moreh mentioned further on is Shechem, so the oak of Moreh mentioned here is Shechem. Six tribes ascended to the top of Mount Gerizim and six tribes ascended to the top of Mount Eival, and the priests and Levites and the Ark stood below in the middle, the priests surrounding the Ark and the Levites the priests, and all Israel on this side and that side, as it is said (Yehoshua 8): 'And all Israel, and their elders and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the Ark and on that side...' They turned their faces toward Mount Gerizim and opened with the blessing: 'Blessed is the man that makes not a graven or molten image,' and these and those respond Amen. They turned their faces toward Mount Eival and opened with the curse (Deuteronomy 27): 'Cursed is the man that makes a graven or molten image,' and these and those respond Amen, until they complete the blessings and curses. And afterward they brought the stones and built the altar and plastered it with plaster ('Sid') and wrote upon it all the words of the Torah in seventy languages, as it is said (there): in a clear script.' And they took the stones and came and lodged in their place."

And Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura explains there: "The stones – they dismantled the altar after offering the burnt offerings and peace offerings.

And lodged in their place – in their lodging house in Gilgal, and there they set up the stones."

And so it is written in the Tosefta tractate Sotah (Lieberman) chapter 8, halacha 8:

"And afterward they brought the stones and built the altar and offered upon it burnt offerings and peace offerings and sat and ate and drank and took the stones and came and lodged in their place, as it is said: 'And you shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place,' might it be in every lodging? The verse says: 'in the lodging place where you lodge tonight.' And where did they lodge? In Gilgal, and it says: 'And these twelve stones, etc.' Thus you learn that in Gilgal they set them up."

And so it is written in tractate Sotah (page 36a):

"According to whom? According to Rabbi Shimon. Come and see how many miracles occurred on that day: Israel crossed the Jordan, and came to Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival more than sixty mil, and no creature could stand before them, and whoever stood before them was immediately panicked, as it is said: (Exodus 23) 'I will send My terror before you, and will confound all the people to whom you come, etc.,'

and it says: (Exodus 15) 'Terror and dread falls upon them... until Your people pass over, Hashem' – this is the first entry, 'until the people pass over whom You have acquired' – this is the second entry. Say from now: Israel were worthy to have a miracle done for them at the second entry like the first entry, but sin caused the situation (to lack open miracles); and afterward they brought the stones and built the altar and plastered it with plaster ('Sid'), and wrote upon them all the words of the Torah in seventy languages, as it is said: (Deuteronomy 27) 'in a clear script'; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings and ate and drank and rejoiced, and blessed and cursed, and folded the stones and came and lodged in Gilgal, as it is said: (Yehoshua 4) 'And you shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place,' might it be in every lodging place? The verse says: 'where you lodge tonight,' and it is written: (Yehoshua 4) 'And these twelve stones which they took, etc.'"

And among the list of our sages who support the opinion that they removed Yehoshua's altar after building it are:

- 1] Rashi tractate Sotah page 35b s.v. in Gilgal, and similarly Rashi on Yehoshua chapter 8
- 2] Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura, whom I brought above
- 3] Beit HaBechirah of the Meiri tractate Sotah page 32a
- 4] Responsa Tashbetz part 1 section 53
- 5] Chizkuni Deuteronomy chapter 27, verse 2
- 6] Rabbeinu Bachaye Deuteronomy chapter 27, verse 2
- 7] Radak on Yehoshua chapter 8
- 8] Torah Temimah notes Deuteronomy chapter 27 note 5
- 9] Maharsh"a Chiddushei Aggadot tractate Sotah folio 36a s.v. and it is written and these twelve stones etc.
- 10] Tiferet Yisrael chapter 7 of Sotah, (Yachin) letter 21

I will not hide that the Malbim on Yehoshua chapter 8 explained that Yehoshua's altar did remain on Mount Eival, and this is his language:

Malbim Yehoshua chapter 8:

S.v. Then Yehoshua built. According to the plain meaning, he did this after the war of Ai, and according to the order of the verses. And behold,

in the Torah it says (Deuteronomy 27:2-8) 'And it shall be on the day when you shall pass over the Jordan... and you shall set up for you large stones, and plaster them with plaster, and you shall write upon them all the words of this law, when you are passed over... And it shall be when you are passed over the Jordan, that you shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in Mount Eival, and you shall plaster them with plaster, and you shall build there an altar unto Hashem your L-rd, an altar of stones... and you shall offer burnt offerings thereon... and you shall write upon the stones all the words of this law.' And one must understand why the command to set up the stones and plaster them with plaster and write the words of the Torah is repeated twice; and at first it said 'on the day when you shall pass over' and afterward 'and it shall be when you are passed over'; at first it said 'and you shall set up for you,' and did not specify to set them up on Mount Eival, and afterward it said they shall be on Mount Eival; and why did it say 'and you shall write upon them all the words of this law when you are passed over,' the word 'when you are passed over' is superfluous. And according to this, it is explained that they are two commands at two different times, first it said 'and it shall be on the day when you shall pass over the Jordan and you shall set up for you large stones,' this is one command that they were commanded to do on that day they pass over the Jordan and not delay, and so Yehoshua did, he set up large stones in Gilgal on that day as mentioned (above 4:8 and there 20) and they were for a sign and memorial to the miracle done for them in the Jordan. And he said to them 'and plaster etc. and write etc. when you are passed over,' meaning and afterward when you are passed over (not on the day you pass over but when you are passed over), days after you pass over you shall do another mitzvah with these stones to plaster them with plaster and write upon them the words of the Torah. And since this came incidentally, he was brief, and afterward explained the second mitzvah how to do it, and that is what it says that what I said 'and write etc. when you are passed over,' so you shall act, 'and it shall be when you are passed over the Jordan' (meaning some days thereafter, for here it did not say on the day you pass over) then you shall set up the stones on Mount Eival, that you shall take them from the place where you set them up in the lodging and set them up on Mount Eival and there fulfill the second mitzvah and its details to plaster them with plaster and build from them an altar and write upon them the words of the Torah and that it be (the writing) [the inscription] in a clear script. And according to this, Yehoshua did not omit anything from his master's commands, for what it said first 'on the day when you shall pass over' refers only to

setting up the stones, and what it said 'and plaster and write,' meaning that the stones shall be suitable so that you can write upon them the Torah when you are passed over which is afterward, and our interpretation aligns with the opinion of Rabbi Sheila in Sanhedrin (44a) that this account was after the war of Ai, and like Rav (there) who expounded that Yehoshua did not change from Moshes' words, and he meant what we wrote (and not like the words of Tosafot (s.v. and you) there).

The Alignment of the Eival Altar

And since Rabbi Zalman Koren and some others also hold that Yehoshua left an altar on Mount Eival, we must search for additional evidence that the altar found is not Yehoshua's altar.

In the Jerusalem Talmud tractate Eruvin chapter 5, folio 22 column 3 / halacha 1, it is written:

Rabbi Yose said: If one does not know how to determine the directions (of east, west, north and south), go out and learn from the solstice: from the place where the sun rises on the first of the Tammuz solstice to the place where it rises on the first of the Tevet solstice – this is the face of the east; from the place where the sun sets on the first of the Tevet solstice to the place where it sets on the first of the Tammuz solstice – this is the face of the west; and the rest are north and south. This is what is written: 'It goes toward the south and turns toward the north; it goes toward the south by day and turns toward the north by night; the wind goes around and around, and on its circuits the wind (alt. translation, direction) returns' – these are the faces of the east and west.

This method works well in Shiloh and in the eternal house. For the master, Rabbi Acha said in the name of Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchak: How much did the early prophets labor to make the eastern gate so that the sun would align with it on the first of the Tevet solstice and the first of the Tammuz solstice.

Seven names were given to it: Gate of Sur, Gate of the Foundation, Gate of Harisit, Gate of Eaton (arrival), Gate of the Middle, New Gate, Upper Gate. Gate of Sur because there the impure would withdraw, this is what is written: 'Withdraw, impure, they called to them.' Gate of the Foundation because there they would base the halacha. Gate of Harisit because it is aligned opposite the rising of the sun, as you say: 'He who says to the sun and it does not rise.' Gate of Eaton (arrival) because it

serves for entry and exit. Gate of the Middle because it is founded between two gates. New Gate because there the scribes renewed the halacha. Upper Gate because it is above the Court of Israel, the Cheil, and the Women's Court; and there was an additional elevation in the eternal house. And in the wilderness, who aligned the directions for them? Rabbi Acha said: The Ark aligned the directions for them, this is what is written: 'And the men of Kehat set forward, bearing the sanctuary' – this is the Ark – 'and the sons of Merari set up the Tabernacle until the sons of Kehat came, upon whom the Ark was placed.' {End of the words of the Yerushalmi}.

Rabbi Zalman Koren himself concluded in his book "Chatzerot Beit HaShem," from the words of the Yerushalmi, the following conclusion:

Examinations of maps of the Temple Mount show that both the eastern wall and the western wall of the Mount are not aligned with the directions of the world, but there is another wall whose precision toward the directions of the world is great. This wall is the eastern wall of the elevated platform in the center of the Temple Mount⁷. Therefore, we came to the conclusion that this wall is the eastern wall of the Courtyard. End quote.

⁷ I have read elsewhere that the upper edge of the eastern platform might diverge one or two degrees from true east. It is not clear what amount of precision is needed according to be counted as east, since for other halachas (such as the need to have a straight lulav) there is no need for exact precision. Furthermore, additional investigation is needed to determine if the eastern side of the upper platform, has been modified since the time of the Second Temple.

[See my article in Hebrew](#) :

(pp. 38-50), explaining how the measurements we see at the upper level align with Rabbi Chaim Naeh's opinion.



And if we accept his position that the eastern wall of the Courtyard was precisely according to the directions of the world, based on the words of the Yerushalmi, automatically according to tractate Middot, the altar was also aligned according to the directions of the world. And even without the Yerushalmi, it is already explicit in the Babylonian Talmud tractate Zevachim page 62b:

"We learned there: There was a ramp to the south of the altar, thirty-two long cubits by sixteen wide. From where do we know this? Rav Huna said, the verse says: (Leviticus 1) 'And he shall slaughter it on the side of the altar northward,' that the side shall be north and its face south." That is to say, the four sides of the altar were aligned with the four directions of the world.

And according to this, it is very likely that the altar built by Yehoshua was also aligned with the four directions of the world. For apparently the Ark aligned the directions for them as the Ark did in the wilderness. If so, the altar found in our time on Mount Eival is not Yehoshua's altar, for the sides of that altar are not aligned at all with east, west, north, and south.

The Law of the Ramp, Horn-like Protrusion, Foundation, and Squareness in the Altar – Before Hashem

Perhaps the claimant will claim that there is no obligation to set up the altar precisely aligned to the four directions of the world, except when there is also a Sanctuary or Tabernacle; and perhaps on Mount Eival there was an altar without a Tabernacle, and the law to align with the four directions does not apply. Therefore, I will bring a more absolute evidence against the altar found on Mount Eival.

In the Babylonian Talmud tractate Sukkah page 49a, it is brought: "That every altar that has neither ramp nor horn-like protrusion nor foundation nor squareness – is invalid for service." (And similarly in Zevachim 62a) And so Rambam ruled in Beit Habechira (Laws of the Chosen House) chapter 2, halacha 17:

"The four horns {protrusions at the corners} of the altar and its foundation and its squareness are essential, and every altar that lacks a horn {a protrusion at the corner}, foundation, ramp, and squareness is invalid, for all four are essential, but its length measurement and width measurement and height measurement are not, provided it does not diminish from one cubit by one cubit in width and length with a height of three cubits as the measure of the place where the wood was arranged of the wilderness altar⁸."

In the Babylonian Talmud tractate Zevachim page 108b⁹, it is brought that the law of having a horn-like protrusion ('Keren'), foundation, and squareness applies even to a large bamah (public altar) but not to a small bamah (private altar):

It was taught: horn-like protrusion and ramp and squareness and foundation are essential in a large bamah and not essential in a small bamah.

⁸ *The Chafetz Chaim in *Likutei Halachot* cites two opinions regarding the minimum size of the altar: one according to the Rambam and another requiring a length and width of five cubits.*

⁹ *Similarly, in Zevachim 120a: "It was taught in accordance with Rabbi Yochanan: The differences between a large altar and a small altar: a horn-like protrusion, a ramp, a base, and a square shape for the large altar, but there is no horn-like protrusion, foundation, ramp, or square shape for the small altar".*

And so the Chafetz Chaim ruled there in Likutei Halakhot: "It was taught: Horn-like protrusion and ramp and squareness and foundation are essential in a large bamah and not essential in a small bamah."

And according to this, the altar found on Mount Eival is not Yehoshua's altar because it has no Horn-like protrusion and no squareness. According to what was reported, its length is 9 meters and width 7.5 meters approximately¹⁰.

And perhaps the claimant will claim that Yehoshua actually built only a private bamah on Mount Eival, therefore what we find there today is not evidence to invalidate.

And one can respond that bamot {private altars} were permitted only when the camps were annulled, and in Yehoshua's time on Mount Eival, the camps were not annulled.

From where do I know this?

From Midrash Tannaim on Deuteronomy chapter 12:

When they came to Gilgal, bamot {plural of bamah} were permitted, for it says (there 3): 'that slaughters an ox or lamb or goat in the camp' and it says (there 5): 'lest the children of Israel bring their sacrifices which they sacrifice in the open field' – as long as they dwell in camps, they are forbidden; when the camps are removed, they are permitted.

And it is implied that Rambam, Rabbeinu Bachayei, and Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura hold like this approach.

Commentary on the Mishnah by Rambam tractate Zevachim chapter 14

[5] Gilgal did not have a Temple building in it, but rather the Tabernacle that was in the wilderness (served as their center of worship). But since the language in the prohibition of bamot is dependent of having a camp, and He has stated: 'that slaughters an ox or lamb or goat in the camp,' and made the reason for the matter 'lest the children of Israel bring their sacrifices which they sacrifice in the open field' and this is the prohibition of bamot, behold with the end of the camps and their entry into the land, meaning the Land of Canaan, and this is in the time that they were in

¹⁰ Thus was it reported in certain news sites. I later saw explicitly in the writings of the archaeologist Adam Zertal.

Gilgal, this negative commandment was removed and the leniency remained that if one wanted to sacrifice on a bamah, he could do so, similar to the situation before the Tabernacle was established, since the matter was prohibited only in the wilderness in the place where there were camps; don't you see that they stated "and sacrifices of lighter holiness in every place" since there was no defined camp but the people were scattered in the land.

Rabbeinu Bachaye Deuteronomy chapter 12

(9) For you have not as yet come. For you have not yet come in those fourteen years. To the rest, this is Shiloh. And to the inheritance, this is Jerusalem.

And one must ask why did the verse mentioned here allude to Shiloh and it should have been sufficient to allude to Jerusalem which is the main one (ie. the main place for sacrificial worship) and say 'for you have not as yet come to the inheritance.' But the matter is that Israel in the wilderness offered on bamot (private altars), each one offered his sacrifice on his rooftop; once the Tabernacle was erected, bamot were forbidden, as it is said: (Leviticus 17:4) 'and brings it not to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting...'.

When Israel entered and arrived at Gilgal, they erected the Tabernacle of the wilderness in Gilgal and then bamot were permitted during their time in Gilgal, because the verse made the prohibition of bamot dependent on the camps of the wilderness, and that is what is written: (Leviticus 17:3) 'Each and every person ...who will slaughter beyond the encampment,' and when they entered the land and the camps ceased, bamot were permitted as it was before the Tabernacle was erected.

Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura tractate Zevachim chapter 14, mishnah 5:

When they came to Gilgal – and no Temple building was there rather only the curtains of the wilderness Tabernacle:

Bamot became permitted – for the Merciful One said 'that slaughters in the camp' etc. 'and brings it not to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting,' excluding Gilgal where there was no camp, for the camps had already been annulled and they began to be scattered throughout the land. And for this reason also sacrifices of lighter holiness are eaten anywhere, for there was no camp as there was in the wilderness:

Now one can still ask, according to the Mishnah that they offered sacrifices on Mount Eival on the day they crossed the Jordan in Yehoshua's time, it is understood why specifically in Gilgal and not on Mount Eival, bamot were permitted, because only after they arrived in Gilgal were the camps annulled. And therefore certainly according to the approach of the Mishnah, there was no possibility to build on Mount Eival an altar without a horn-like protrusion and squareness. But according to the Malbim's approach that the Mount Eival altar was built after they arrived in Gilgal, perhaps we can claim that Yehoshua then built it specifically as a private bamah and not as a public bamah (for a public bamah also requires horn-like protrusions, foundation, and squareness).

And one can respond that from the Torah itself one can bring evidence that even according to the Malbim's approach, the camps returned (and thus the prohibition of bamot and the requirement of horn-like protrusions, foundation, and squareness) at the time Yehoshua's people offered sacrifices on Mount Eival. For it is written in the Torah:

Deuteronomy chapter 27 (4) And it shall be when you are passed over the Jordan, that you shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in Mount Eival, and you shall plaster them with plaster ('Sid'): (5) And there you shall build an altar unto Hashem your L-rd, an altar of stones; you shall lift up no iron tool upon them: (6) You shall build the altar of Hashem your L-rd of complete stones; and you shall offer burnt offerings to Hashem your L-rd: (7) And you shall sacrifice peace offerings, and shall eat there; and you shall rejoice before Hashem your L-rd:

The expression "before Hashem" indicates the existence of camps in Israel. And I will bring examples of this:

- 1] Rashi tractate Zevachim page 112b, s.v. within the wall – of Jerusalem which is in place of the camp of Israel in the wilderness as it is written 'and you shall eat there before Hashem' (Deuteronomy 12).
- 2] Tosafot Yom Tov tractate Zevachim chapter 14 s.v. within the wall – of Jerusalem. Which is instead of the camp of Israel in the wilderness as it is written (Deuteronomy 14) 'and you shall eat there before Hashem your L-rd.' Rashi.

3] Rashi on the Torah, Deuteronomy chapter 12 verse 18 s.v. before Hashem – within the wall.

4] Radak Isaiah chapter 62 verse 9 s.v. for they that have garnered it – ... and the meaning 'and praise Hashem' alludes to the second tithe and fourth-year planting, and this is 'for they that have garnered it shall eat it,' which were eaten by the owners, and fourth-year planting is praise to Hashem, and similarly for second tithe he would confess and praise the Almighty, and that is what it said 'in the courts of My sanctuary,' for second tithe and fourth-year planting were eaten only in Jerusalem within the wall as it is written **'before Hashem your L-rd, you shall eat it,' and the whole city is called 'before Hashem your L-rd,'** and so it is called 'courts of My sanctuary,' and the court includes all the houses.

5] Malbim Deuteronomy chapter 12, verse 18, s.v. but before Hashem your L-rd you shall eat it in the place which He shall choose, what it said 'in the place' indicates Jerusalem where sacrifices of lighter holiness and second tithes are eaten within the wall and what it said 'before Hashem' includes also Shiloh where sacrifices of lighter holiness are eaten in all places that see (the Tabernacle of Shiloh) and they have no unique place but all places where the people see (the Tabernacle of Shiloh) is called before Hashem, end quote.

6] Pesikta Zutarta (Lekach Tov) Deuteronomy Parashat Re'eh page 19a:

'And you shall rejoice before Hashem.' It is said here rejoicing and it is said further on rejoicing, just as further on peace offerings are associated with rejoicing, so here peace offerings. 'Before Hashem your L-rd.' In the partition within the wall. 'You and your sons.' The beloved first. 'And the Levite that is within your gates.' Wherever you find the Levite give him from his portion. If he has no portion due to him, give him the second tithe. If he has no second tithe, give him peace offerings.

7] In the Babylonian Talmud tractate Zevachim page 16a, the matter of camps is not mentioned explicitly, but we see explicitly that the expression "before Hashem" comes to exclude bamot, and here I quote:

"And sitting down, which is valid for sacrifices on a bamah, from where do we know this? The verse says: (Deuteronomy 10) 'to stand before Hashem to minister unto Him,' before Hashem– and not before a bamah."

And all this as an introduction to the words of HaAmek Davar on Deuteronomy 27:7 s.v. and you shall eat there. That is on Mount Eival specifically, for it says they were commanded to set up the altar and offering specifically there; by default, outside the place of offering it is forbidden to eat, just like outside Jerusalem in the Chosen House.

It was a Temporary Ruling issued in Exigent Circumstances?

Perhaps the claimant will claim that all the details of the altar on Mount Eival were in the category of a temporary ruling, except for the law of complete stones.

And one can respond to this claim that our sages learned the laws of sacrifice and rejoicing for generations from what was offered on Mount Eival. This plainly indicates that they did not offer sacrifices based on a temporary ruling in exigent circumstances ('Horaat Sha'ah') but rather based on standard halacha.

See for example: 1] Bartenura and Rosh on tractate Maaser Sheni chapter 1, mishnah 3 s.v. animal for peace offerings.

2] Rashi tractate Sukkah page 42b, s.v. and the rejoicing

3] Tosafot tractate Pesachim page 70b, s.v. peace offerings slaughtered on the eve of Yom Tov

4] Tosafot tractate Chagigah page 8b, s.v. who chagigah comes from them

5] Ran on the Rif tractate Sukkah page 21a s.v. and the rejoicing.

Does the Type of Animals at the Site Found on Mount Eival Prove At Least That the Altar Was Built by Israelites?

Professor Adam Zertal, who excavated on Mount Eival and is the great supporter of identifying the altar as Yehoshua's altar, claimed that the type of animals at the site prove that the altar was built by Israelites. For at gentile sites, a large percentage of the animal remains found there, are remains (such as bones) from non-kosher animals. And on Mount Eival, the overwhelming majority (but not 100%) of the animal remains found were from kosher animals.

But in truth, there is no proof here at all, for Rambam rules in Maasei Korbanot (Laws of the Procedures of Offerings) chapter 1 halacha 1:

"All of the sacrifices of living animals comes from five species alone: from cattle and from sheep and from goats and from turtledoves and from young common doves."

And according to Professor Adam Zertal, about 20% of the sacrifice remains were Yachmur animals (translated by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan on Deut. 14: 5 as antelope), a pure animal but not kosher for the altar. According to Professor Zohar Amar, the animal on the Mount Eival altar was not an antelope but another animal that is pure but not kosher for the altar, and the remains from this animal were 28% of all the remains found, see the note¹¹.

And it should be noted that it implies from the Chofetz Chaim in Likutei Halakhot, chapter 14 of Zevachim, Torat HaKodashim point 50, that offering sacrifices from Yachmurim and other pure wild animals (that are not cattle, sheep, goats, turtledoves, or young common doves) is relevant specifically for gentiles. And this is his language: Gentiles nowadays are permitted to offer on a bamah [meaning they build a bamah for this and not on the ground] and are permitted to offer there domesticated animals, wild animals, and birds, males and females, unblemished and blemished, provided they are not missing a limb, and specifically pure and not impure.

And according to this, it is more likely that gentiles connected to the laws of the altar relevant for Noah's descendants built the place, unless one can find a reliable source that permits offering for Jews of every kosher wild animal, contrary to Rambam's ruling.

¹¹ I wrote to Professor Amar: "My former study partner, Rabbi Hillel ben Shlomo, wrote in your name that it was not a **yachmur** but an **ayal**. Did you mean a type of **ayil** that was offered on the Temple altar, or **ayal** that is considered a wild animal, not a domesticated one, and thus invalid for Temple sacrifices according to the Rambam?

He replied: I share the opinion that the altar at Mount Eival is not Yehoshua's. Regarding the identification of the **yachmur**, I believe that **Dama Mesopotamica** (note: 28% of the sacrificial remains at the Eival altar came from this animal) is considered in biblical terminology as part of the **ayal** group, whereas the biblical **yachmur** is another kosher animal (note: which is also forbidden for altar sacrifices)." For those who wish to delve deeper, see Professor Amar's article, "On the Identification of the Ayal, Tzvi, and Yachmur," in **Al Atar**, issue 15, Adar 5769 .

Is It At Least Agreed That What Was Found on Mount Eival Was an Altar?

In truth, even among the archaeologists themselves, there is a great dispute whether they found an altar on Mount Eival at all or a watchtower. And if indeed there was an altar there, who built it, and when? One prominent archaeologist who I refuse to name, for example, claimed it is a watchtower. And even though that man was a great denier of the Torah from heaven¹², and one must suspect his interpretation, nevertheless he raised a correct point, that what is called "the altar ramp" that they found is only about a meter wide, and not very useful for bringing up sacrificial limbs on it. And I will add that apparently it is even narrower than the ramp of the wilderness altar.

The archaeologist Professor Adam Zertal, who was in charge of the excavations on Mount Eival, holds that the structure was indeed an altar and quite similar to the altar described in tractate Middot, and also to the form of the altar in the book of Yechezkel, and completely different from what is found at gentile sites. And the way the animal bones were burned and the form of the site around indicate that there was indeed an altar there.

When, According to Professor Adam Zertal, Was "the Altar" Built?

Archaeologists customarily attribute a find to a period and a specific people based on the type of pottery vessels and other tools they find together with that find in the same excavation layer. The deficiency in this method is they somewhat are turning a blind eye to the possibility that natural phenomena or humans over the years moved the tools or artifacts from the true layer. Or perhaps the tools or artifacts came from a distant people, or were in use for a long time from their creation before being buried in the layer.

Despite the problems in the method, Professor Zertal, and apparently most archaeologists, are willing nevertheless to date a find based on the pottery vessels found in the layer; and according to Zertal's conclusion, the pottery vessels he found under the altar layer, and also in the grid of the rectangular altar, belong to the period called "Iron 1," which in his

¹² I would have distanced myself greatly from this person's viewpoint, were it not for the words of our Sages: "Know what to respond to a heretic." Although sometimes, the harm from exposure to heretics' claims outweighs the benefit. I do not presume to set clear rules for the public.

opinion belongs to the period of the beginning of Israel's settlement, and in his opinion the "Iron 1" period began around 1250 BCE.

More precisely, Professor Zertal wrote in an archaeological booklet (in 5750/1990), that the lower layer he excavated belongs to the period 1200 to 1240 BCE, and in it there is (perhaps) a small round altar of about 2 meters, and at that time this place of worship was established on a modest scale. In the west there is a house with four spaces and a storehouse of jars for cultic needs. In the upper layer, where the altar is, which Zertal claims is Yehoshua's altar, the pottery vessels indicate in his opinion that the altar was erected between 1130 and 1200 BCE.

Another element of evidence for the time of the "altar" is that in the older lower layer, two rare ornaments called "scarabs" were uncovered, attributed to the time of the kingdom of Ramesses II (who in his opinion reigned from 1279 BCE to 1212 "according to the low chronology"). And here I quote:

"Parallels to the two scarabs were discovered in Egypt, Cyprus, and the Land of Israel. One scarab was discovered in the filling material of the central structure, whose belonging to the early layer is beyond doubt," and it has parallels in the find in the cemetery in Riqqa in Egypt... in Megiddo... in Yavne. "In all these places the find was attributed to the days of Ramesses II or the days of the 19th dynasty." Another and important parallel comes from tomb 9 in Kition in Cyprus: the tomb was sealed in a layer containing vessels that the excavator attributed to about 1225 BCE. The second scarab, which depicts a kneeling archer before the cartouche of Thutmose III, was discovered in one of the offering installations north of the complex. This is a commemorative scarab, issued in the days of Ramesses II and intended to glorify the great conqueror. It too is from the second half of the 13th century BCE.

If we accept Zertal's chronology, then indeed there is here another evidence against his approach that he found Yehoshua's altar (when accepting the Bible as absolute truth). For if the large rectangular altar, somewhat similar to the Temple altar, was built around 1200 BCE, it comes out from this, according to the 6000-year calendar of the Rabbi Kook Institute, that that year equals in today's Hebrew calendar approximately year 2561 (when counting year 1 from the day of the creation of light, according to the simple plain meaning of the Torah that the six days of Genesis were 24-hour days), and year 2560 from the

creation of Adam¹³. And since, if we add 420 years to the famous date of the destruction of the Second Temple, corresponding to the days of the Second Temple¹⁴, and 70 years of the Babylonian exile, and 410 years of the First Temple, and 480 from the building of the First Temple to the Exodus from Egypt (as explained in 1 Kings chapter 6 verse 1) and subtract 40 years in the wilderness, we discover that the end of Yehoshua's life was approximately 45 years (in rough rounding) before Zertal's altar, for Yehoshua reigned 28 years¹⁵.

¹³ In the distant past, many counted the years from the creation of man, which was on Rosh Hashanah, so there is a one-year difference between our calendar and theirs. See **The Six-Thousand-Year Calendar**, p. 649, Mosad Harav Kook, Jerusalem, Jewish Year 5376 (1976) edition . See, the Baal HaMaor on Tractate Avodah Zarah 2b for a more in depth explanation.

¹⁴ Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Megillah, chapter 1, 72d, halacha 12: "And in Jerusalem, they had usage for the First Temple 410 years and for the Second Temple 420 years." This is also cited in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Yoma 9a, see there.

It is known that some commentaries, such as the **Daat Mikra** commentary on Ezra (Mosad Harav Kook), hold that the Second Temple period was approximately 585 years. I am aware that according to secular history, lists of Persian kings have been found that do not align with the Sages' calculation. I also know of ancient sources, such as the Behistun Inscription and the cuneiform text VAT 4956, which are easier to explain according to **Daat Mikra**. However, according to the Sages' approach, Esther 2:6, Daniel 6, Daniel 11:1-2, and Daniel 9:24-27 can be interpreted straightforwardly. I hold that the Sages were correct as long as there is no definitive proof to the contrary. Rabbi Chaim Rabinowitz, in his book **Daat Sofrim** on Ezra, establishes that we must rely on the Sages and attempts to reconcile secular history with the Sages' history without contradictions .

Although, I have not read his books, I am told that Rabbi Alexander Hool has reinterpreted the secular sources so they do not contradict Rabbinic Chronology.

I also found a precedent in Rosh Hashanah 12a: "The Sages taught: The scholars of Israel count the Flood {at the time of Noah} according to Rabbi Eliezer and the calendar according to Rabbi Yehoshua. The scholars of the nations count even the Flood according to Rabbi Yehoshua ". This tells us that most scholars of Israel were not willing to back down, even when the Gentile Historians don't agree with them.

Additionally, Rabbi Saadia Gaon, at the end of the eighth article of **Emunot VeDeot**, explicitly states that one should not rely on the history of the nations' scholars against the Sages' calculation regarding the years of Persian rule and the Second Temple. His words are: "I found people who lacked counsel, so they claimed an addition to the timeline, imagining that Persian rule over the Land of Israel before Greek rule lasted about 300 years, with seventeen kings in that period. I responded to them from the text in Daniel, that it is impossible for there to be more than four Persian kings over the Land of Israel between Babylonian and Greek rule, as the angel said to Daniel, peace be upon him ".

Even the Maharal, who in some places interprets the Sages' numbers non-literally, strongly defends (in **Be'er HaGolah**, sixth article, pp. 139-140) the Sages' calculation for the Second Temple period and completely rejects the historical reckoning of the nations' scholars, which adds years .

Whether I am mistaken or correct regarding the Second Temple period, Adam Zertal's chronology contradicts the **Daat Mikra** chronology in their commentary on the Book of Ezra even more than it contradicts the Sages' words.

¹⁵ Rashi on 1 Chronicles 22: "For Yehoshua did not rule after Moshe (Moses) for more than 28 years and lived 110 years " .

Similarly, Tosafot on Bava Batra 117b: "For Yehoshua was 110 years old and led Israel for only 28 years " .

Likewise, Radak on Judges 11:26, s.v. "three hundred years": "Three hundred years they dwelt in that land until today from the day it was conquered, and why did you not fight for it until today or save it? These three hundred years are calculated as explained in **Seder Olam**: Yehoshua led Israel for 28

I will add that even if we add 50 years to the time of his rectangular altar, to at least reach the end of Yehoshua's lifetime, it is still not enough, for according to most commentators, the Mount Eival altar was at the beginning of Yehoshua's rule and certainly no more than 14 years after their entry into the land, when the Shiloh Tabernacle was built and the prohibition of bamot and external slaughter returned¹⁶.

I will further add that in truth, even the round altar under the rectangular altar was built after Yehoshua's time, if we accept Zertal's chronology. For Zertal wrote in one of his articles that the scarab was of an Egyptian type from the last third of Ramesses II's days found in the filling of the central structure. And the last third according to Zertal's data, out of the king's 67 years, began around 1234 or 1235 BCE, which is approximately 2627 from creation and belongs to the period of the judge Otniel ben Kenaz.

Can We "Shift" the Time of the "Iron Age 1" Period and Also the Time of King Ramesses II, to Fit Professor Zertal's Altar to a Time That Matches Yehoshua's Life?

Since our knowledge through archaeology of these periods is not built on solid foundations of truth but on dubious and fluid conjectures, I am under the impression that according to the researcher's inclination, one can shift such periods forward or backward, according to different interpretations of the finds, or by disqualifying part of the evidence brought to "prove" the Egyptian chronology.

years, Otniel ben Kenaz for 40 years, Ehud for 80 years, Deborah and Barak for 40 years, Gideon for 40 years, Avimelech for 3 years, Tola ben Puah for 23 years, Yair for 22 years, totaling 276 years, including two periods of oppression, and 18 years that the Ammonites oppressed Israel until Yiftach arose, totaling 300 years with Yiftach's six years ".

Even one who disputes Seder Olam's calculations cannot add more than 22 years to Yehoshua's rule, as he was certainly at least 20 during the sin of the spies and was spared their punishment due to his loyalty to Hashem. Thus, he was at least 60 when entering the land and lived until 110. Even without Seder Olam, Joshua died before the rectangular altar was built.

¹⁶ Mishnah, Zevachim, chapter 14, mishna 6: "When they came to Shiloh, the high places were forbidden." On this point, they nearly went to war against the tribes of Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe at the end of Joshua 22:12. Rashi, s.v. "to wage war against them": "Because the high places were forbidden once the Tabernacle was established in Shiloh ".

The book *Tzemach David* by Rabbi David Ganz (Prague, Jewish Year 5352 /1592 CE) states that the Tabernacle was in Shiloh from the Jewish year 2503 until Eli's death, a period of 369 years, as per *Seder Olam* (chapter 11).

Assuming that some famous archaeologist in the future shifts the time of "the altar" on Mount Eival to fit it to Yehoshua's period, is there additional strong evidence against identifying the "rectangular altar" as Yehoshua's altar?

Yes! For the archaeologist Adam Zertal determined that there is a small round altar or at least a small round structure, located under the rectangular altar. The round altar was built several decades according to Zertal, about 40-50 years before the rectangular altar, which he attributed to Yehoshua.

It comes out from this, according to Zertal's data, that Yehoshua built his altar on top of an altar of idol worshippers, for Yehoshua's time in the land before building the Shiloh Tabernacle was only 14 years. Or at the very least (according to Zertal's data) Yehoshua built the altar on a used structure of profane matters. And due to halakhic prohibitions, it is impossible that Yehoshua would actually agree to this.

Summary

When building an altar, one should not be lenient to use stones that are not smooth based on "the altar" discovered in our days on Mount Eival.

A] The overwhelming majority of our rabbis hold that Yehoshua dismantled the altar he built on Mount Eival.

B] The direction¹⁷ of the altar is not according to the 4 directions of the world, as required by the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds.

C] The altar found has no horn-like protrusions and squareness, and the altar Yehoshua built on Mount Eival contained horn-like protrusions, foundation, and squareness.

¹⁷ *Someone remarked to me that perhaps, at least for the golden altar, the sides of the altar were not aligned with the cardinal directions, but rather the four corners were aligned with the four directions, not the sides. However, I found evidence against his opinion in Yoma 58b: "The Sages taught: He began sprinkling and descended. From where did he begin? {Note: on the golden incense altar} From the southeast corner, to the southwest, to the northwest, to the northeast, the words of Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Yossi HaGelili says: From the northeast corner, to the northwest, to the southwest, to the southeast".*

D] About 28 percent of the animals sacrificed on the altar found were not kosher for the altar.

E] The Egyptian ornament found near the altar, and the pottery vessels currently indicate that the altar is not from Yehoshua's time.

F] It is hard to believe that Yehoshua chose the place for his altar precisely upon the spot of a circular altar built by the Gentiles