

**THE IRON AGE I STRUCTURE ON MT. EBAL:
EXCAVATION AND INTERPRETATION**

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Problem

The Iron Age I site on Mt. Ebal, discovered in 1980 by Adam Zertal and excavated between 1982 and 1989, has remained largely unknown by both the scholarly community and the public. No scholarly congress or colloquium has ever been held regarding the Mt. Ebal excavations. The Mt. Ebal excavations, however, may have important implications for reconstructing Israelite origins. The present study investigates the Mt. Ebal excavation and its results.

Method

This study uses the comparative method and is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction, giving an overview of the investigation to be carried out in subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 analyzes the archaeological data from the Mt. Ebal site and compares it with both cultic and noncultic materials in order to assess the nature of the site. Chapter 3 considers physical parallels for the Ebal site. Chapter 4 compares each of the physical elements of the Ebal site with biblical and other literary data relevant to a cultic interpretation. Chapter 5 examines the site in its historical and sociological position among the new settlement sites of the central hill-country in Iron Age I. Chapter 6 provides a summary and draws conclusions based on the overall study.

Results

The Mt. Ebal site appears to fit the criteria for a cultic site from archaeological remains and also to fit the general picture in terms of the biblical accounts. When the Ebal site is set on the larger stage of the Israelite settlement, its origin seems to be consistent with the dramatic settlement activity in the central hill-country during the transition from the Late Bronze Age to the Iron Age I.

Conclusion

The Mt. Ebal site may have served an important role in the early life of the central hill-country settlers. Altars played an important role in centralizing peoples in the ancient world. In light of the claim of the biblical tradition that a cultic site located on Mt. Ebal played a centralizing role in the progress of the Israelite sedentarization, it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that a single site may have functioned in a central capacity.