

Exodus 35:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And all the congregation of the children of Israel departed from the presence of Moses.

Analysis

Sweet incense for the altar (קֶטֶרֶת הַסַּמִּים, ketoret ha-sammim) symbolizes prayers ascending to God (Psalm 141:2, Revelation 5:8), offered morning and evening on the golden altar before the veil. The specific recipe (30:34-38) was sacred— forbidden for common use under penalty of death—demonstrating that approaching God requires coming His way, not ours. The incense altar's position before the veil, between the Holy Place and Most Holy Place, represents prayer's access to God's throne through the mediator.

Historical Context

The incense recipe included equal parts stacte (aromatic gum), onycha (mollusk shell), galbanum (resin), and frankincense (tree resin), mixed with salt. It produced a pure, aromatic smoke when burned on coals. The altar of incense was gold-overlaid acacia wood, positioned directly before the veil.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the incense offering illustrate the nature and necessity of prayer in approaching God?
2. What does the prohibition against using God's incense recipe for common purposes teach about the holy versus the profane?

Interlinear Text

וַיֵּצֵא ו	כָּל	עַד ת	בְּנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל ל
departed	H3605	And all the congregation	of the children	of Israel
H3318		H5712	H1121	H3478
מִלִּפְנֵי י	מֹשֶׁה:			
from the presence	of Moses			
H6440	H4872			

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