

Exodus 40:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And thou shalt set the altar of gold for the incense before the ark of the testimony, and put the hanging of the door to the tabernacle.

Analysis

The golden incense altar 'before the ark' (לִפְנֵי אֲרוֹן, lifnei aron) positioned prayer closest to God's presence (though separated by the veil). The 'hanging for the door' (מָסַךְ הַפֶּתַח, masakh haPetach, screen of entrance) separated the Holy Place from the courtyard, creating graduated holiness—courtyard, Holy Place, Most Holy Place. This teaches that approaching God involves increasing consecration. The incense altar's position teaches that prayer brings believers nearest to God. Christ, our Intercessor (Hebrews 7:25), stands perpetually 'before the ark,' pleading our case.

Historical Context

The incense altar stood directly before the veil (Exodus 30:6), closer to the ark than any other furniture. When the high priest burned incense, its fragrant smoke filled the Holy Place and penetrated the veil into the Most Holy Place. The door's hanging screened the Holy Place from common view.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What does the incense altar's position (closest to God's presence) teach about prayer's supreme importance?
2. How do graduated holiness zones illustrate the believer's progressive sanctification?

Interlinear Text

וְנָתַתָּה ה	אֶת	מִזְבֵּחַ ח	הַזָּהָב	לִקְטֹרֶת	לִפְנֵי י	אֲרֹן
And thou shalt set	H853	the altar	of gold	for the incense	before	the ark
H5414		H4196	H2091	H7004	H6440	H727
הָעֵדֻת	וְשָׂמַתָּ	אֶת	מָסַךְ	הַפֶּתַח	לְמִשְׁכָּן:	
of the testimony	and put	H853	the hanging	of the door	to the tabernacle	
H5715	H7760		H4539	H6607	H4908	

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 9:24 (Parallel theme): For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

John 14:6 (Parallel theme): Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.