

Numbers 10:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the Kohathites set forward, bearing the sanctuary: and the other did set up the tabernacle against they came.

Analysis

The Kohathites set forward, bearing the sanctuary: and the other did set up the tabernacle against they came. The Kohathites marched in the assembly's center, carrying the miqdash (מִקְדָּשׁ, "sanctuary")—the holy furniture including the ark, table, lampstand, and altars. Unlike the Gershonites and Merarites who used wagons, Kohathites bore their sacred burden on their shoulders with poles (Numbers 7:9), never touching the holy objects directly (Numbers 4:15). This honored the items' supreme holiness while enabling their transport.

"The other did set up the tabernacle against they came" means the Gershonites and Merarites, who marched earlier, would have the tabernacle structure erected and ready when the Kohathites arrived with the furniture. The Hebrew *hēqîmu* (הִקְרִב, "set up") emphasizes active preparation. This coordination prevented the holy objects from sitting exposed—they moved directly from the dismantled previous camp to the freshly erected new sanctuary. God's presence was never homeless; the tabernacle awaited the ark.

Historical Context

The Kohathites were Aaron's own clan within Levi, making them the highest-ranking Levites. Their central march position between Judah's vanguard and Ephraim's rear guard protected the holy objects from external threats while keeping God's presence at Israel's heart. Numbers 4:4-20 details the elaborate

covering procedures Aaron's sons performed before Kohathites could carry the furniture—the items were wrapped in blue, purple, and scarlet cloth, then covered with badger/goat skins. The Kohathites never saw the bare holy objects; unauthorized viewing meant death (Numbers 4:20). This protocol was violated when Israel later transported the ark by cart instead of poles, resulting in Uzzah's death (2 Samuel 6:6-7). God's prescribed methods must be followed, not replaced by human pragmatism.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What does the coordination between Gershon/Merari (structure) and Kohath (furniture) teach about the body of Christ working together with complementary gifts?
2. How does the requirement to carry holy things on shoulders (not carts) challenge our culture's pragmatism—our tendency to prioritize efficiency over obedience?
3. In what ways does the covered, protected transport of the ark illustrate how God's holiness requires reverent handling, not casual familiarity?

Interlinear Text

וְפָקַד יְהוָה יְתָבֵל
set forward And the Kohathites bearing the sanctuary and the other did set up

H5265 H6956 H5375 H4720 H6965

בְּאֹם: וְעַד הַמִּשְׁכָּן | אֶת
against they came the tabernacle

H853 H4908 H5704 H935

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 10:17 (Temple): And the tabernacle was taken down; and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari set forward, bearing the tabernacle.

Numbers 7:9 (Temple): But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none: because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders.

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