

Numbers 16:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the LORD every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each of you his censer.

Analysis

Take every man his censer, and put incense in them—The mahtah (מְאַתָּה, censer/fire pan) was a priestly implement used for burning incense before God. Moses's challenge is brilliant: if Korah's company truly believes 'all the congregation are holy' (v. 3), let them perform the priests' most sacred duty—offering incense at the tabernacle. **Two hundred and fifty censers** indicates the scale of this rebellion; these were influential men, not a fringe group.

Incense symbolized prayer ascending to God (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 8:3-4), but unauthorized incense was capital sacrilege (Leviticus 10:1-2, where Nadab and Abihu died for this). Moses essentially says, 'Let God choose whom He has sanctified'—echoing v. 5's qadosh (קָדוֹשׁ, holy). This was ordeal by liturgy.

Historical Context

Only Aaronic priests could burn incense on the golden altar in the Holy Place (Exodus 30:7-8). When King Uzziah later usurped this privilege (2 Chronicles 26:16-21), God struck him with leprosy—demonstrating that even kings couldn't bypass priestly appointments.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What 'censers' might you presume to carry—ministry roles or spiritual authority God hasn't actually given you?
2. How does this passage inform the NT teaching that believers are priests (1 Peter 2:9) but also that church leadership requires divine calling (Hebrews 5:4)?

Interlinear Text

וְקַבְבִּחַת מִן קְרֵבָתְךָ אֲשֶׁר וְקִרְבָּנָה מִן
And take each censers and put incense in them and bring

לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר מִן קְמַשׁ יְמִינְךָ וּמִמִּתְחִדְתְּךָ מִן
ye before the LORD each censers and fifty two hundred censers

וְאַתָּה | אַף־אֲרֹן מִן קְמַשׁ יְמִינְךָ אֲשֶׁר
H859 thou also and Aaron each censers