

Numbers 4:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And upon the golden altar they shall spread a cloth of blue, and cover it with a covering of badgers' skins, and shall put to the staves thereof:

Analysis

The golden altar's covering procedure—'spread a cloth of blue, and cover it with a covering of badgers' skins'—paralleled other holy objects but was distinct in its placement 'before the vail' (Exodus 40:5). The golden altar (incense altar) stood nearest the holy of holies, representing prayers ascending to God (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8). Its transport maintaining ceremonial protection teaches that prayer access to God requires proper mediation. In the Old Covenant, priestly intercession; in the New, Christ's high priestly work (Hebrews 7:25). Prayer is not casual but sacred, requiring Christ's mediatorial covering.

Historical Context

The golden altar of incense (distinct from the bronze altar for animal sacrifice) burned fragrant incense morning and evening when priests trimmed the lamps (Exodus 30:7-8). This daily practice symbolized continual prayer. Later, Zacharias was offering incense when Gabriel announced John the Baptist's birth (Luke 1:9-11). The altar's position before the veil—closest to God's presence—symbolized prayer penetrating to God's throne.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does the incense altar representing prayer inform our understanding of prayer's sacredness?
2. What does Christ's mediation of our prayers mean practically?
3. How should we approach prayer—casually or with reverence befitting access to God's presence?

Interlinear Text

תְּכַלֵּת בְּגָד לְעֵד מִזְבֵּחַ כְּבָשָׂבָשׂ וְיִפְרְשׁוּ
H5921 altar And upon the golden they shall spread a cloth of blue
H4196 H2091 H6566 H899 H8504

אֶת אֶת וְיִכְסֶן בְּמִכְסָה הַעֲרֵב תְּחַשׁ וְיִשְׁתַּחַם אֶת
and cover H853 it with a covering skins of badgers and shall put H853
H3680 H4372 H5785 H8476 H7760

בְּלֵי:
to the staves
H905