

Numbers 4:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation.

Analysis

The command that Kohathites must not touch the holy things lest they die demonstrates that proximity to holiness without proper mediation brings death, not blessing. Aaron's sons covered the sacred objects; only then could Kohathites transport them. This pictures the principle that sinful humanity cannot touch divine holiness directly—we require priestly mediation. Christ fulfills this role, covering our sins so we can approach God safely (Hebrews 10:19-22). The severity of the penalty underscores God's holiness and the seriousness of presumption.

Historical Context

The lethal danger of touching holy things was demonstrated when Uzzah touched the ark to steady it and died instantly (2 Samuel 6:6-7). David learned the hard way that God's commands for handling sacred things must be followed precisely. Later, when the ark was transported correctly by Levites using poles, God blessed the procession (2 Samuel 6:13-15).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does this severe penalty teach us about God's holiness?
2. What does it mean that we need Christ as mediator to approach God safely?
3. How should we balance confidence in approaching God with appropriate reverence?

Interlinear Text

הָעֵלְיוּ have made an end H3615	וְעַתָּה And when Aaron H175	וּבְנֵי and his sons H1121	לְכֹסֶת of covering H3680	אֶת H853	הַקֹּדֶשׁ any holy thing H6944
וְאֶת H853	כָּל H3605	כָּל י and all the vessels H3627	הַקֹּדֶשׁ any holy thing H6944	בְּנִסָּע is to set forward H5265	הַמִּחָנֶה as the camp H4264
וְאַחֲרָיו after H310	כִּי H3651	יָבֹאוּ shall come H935	וּבְנֵי and his sons H1121	קָהָת of Kohath H6955	לְשֵׂאת to bear H5375
וְלֹא H3808	אֶל H413	הַקֹּדֶשׁ any holy thing H6944	וְיָמוּתוּ lest they die H4191	אֶלָּה H428	
מִשָּׂא These things are the burden H4853	וּבְנֵי and his sons H1121	קָהָת of Kohath H6955	בְּאֹהֶל in the tabernacle H168		
מוֹעֵד: of the congregation H4150					

Additional Cross-References

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.

Deuteronomy 31:9 (Parallel theme): And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel.

Numbers 10:21 (Temple): And the Kohathites set forward, bearing the sanctuary: and the other did set up the tabernacle against they came.

1 Chronicles 15:2 (Parallel theme): Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him for ever.

1 Samuel 6:19 (Parallel theme): And he smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because the LORD had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter.

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