

sense of being visible to them and in authority over them. In line with this use of the phrase some interpreters consider that the verse simply means that the ark was carried in its normal place in the midst of the tribes, but that the priests who traveled near it observed the movements of the pillar of cloud and of fire, received reports from the scouts, and indicated by trumpet signals the proper times for the host to move and to encamp. Another and possibly better interpretation of the statement results in the conclusion that during the first three days the ark was carried ahead of all the tribes. There would be nothing strange in thus departing from the prescribed travel order for the first three days. We have already noticed (x.17,21) that the original directions for movement of the parts of the tabernacle were somewhat altered, for increased convenience. These first three days were through rough wilderness country, devoid of human enemies, but presenting unusual difficulty in finding suitable camping spots. At this time the ark may have been carried at the very head of the people to typify the divine leadership and the interest of God in providing suitable places for encampment. Afterwards it was carried at its normal place, where it would be protected against enemies. Similarly, at the beginning of the conquest of Canaan, when the Jordan was crossed, the priests were ordered to carry the ark at the head of the people, and when their feet touched the river its waters receded before them (Jos.iii.6). At a later time people took the ark as a magical thing, rather than simply as a symbol of God's presence, and wicked men tried to use it to win a battle against the Philistines (1 Sa.iv). The effort proved disastrous. God is not to be compelled by the manipulation of physical things, but uses physical things as symbols of His presence to assure His people of His interest in them.

Verse 34 again stresses the divine leadership, as shown by the pillar of cloud. Verses 35 and 36 give the formula uttered by Moses at the beginning and end of the day's journey. The words of verse 35, uttered in the third instead of the second person, occur again in Ps. lxxviii.1 Thousands (36). Perhaps here and in 1.16