Numbers - Commentaries by James M. Freeman

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 177. Standards

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Numbers 2:2. Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard, with the ensign of their father's house.

The degel, "standard," was the large field sign which belonged to each division of three tribes, and was also the banner of the tribe at the head of that division. The oth,"ensign," was the small flag or banner which was carried at the head of each tribe and of each subdivision of a tribe. The Bible gives us no intimation of the form of these different signals. They probably bore some general resemblance to the Egyptian military signals, representations of which are to be found on the monuments. These were not at all like our modern flags or banners. They were made of wood or metal, and ornamented with various devices, and shaped in the form of some sacred emblem. Some illustration of the mode of using these signals may perhaps be obtained from the account which Pitts gives of the signals which are carried on the top of high poles in an Arabian caravan, not only by day, but also at night, at which time they are illuminated. "They are somewhat like iron stoves, into which they put short dry wood, which some of the camels are loaded with; it is carried in great sacks, which have a hole near the bottom, where the servants take it out as they see the fires need a recruit. Every cottor [that is, company] hath one of these poles belonging to it, some of which have ten, some twelve, of these lights on their tops, more or less. They are likewise of different figures as well as numbers; one, perhaps, oval way, like a gate; another triangular, or like an N or an M; so that everyone knows by them his respective cottor" (Religion and Manners of the Mahometans, p. 43).

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 180. The Staff of Inheritance

Numbers 17:2. Take of every one of them a rod, according to the house of their fathers.

In the pictures on the walls of the ancient Egyptian tombs the chief person is always represented with a long staff—the mark of his rank as a land owner, and as the head of his family. In the Abbott Collection there are fragments of two of these rods with hieroglyphic inscriptions.

In the engraving this staff is seen in the left hand. The stick in the right hand is supposed to be a scepter. Sharpe represents this man as "an Egyptian of the reign of Amunmai Thori II, who lived at least two centuries before the time of Moses" (Bible Texts, etc., p. 46).

Manners and Customs of the Bible, 179. Fullness of Food

Numbers 11:20. Until it come out at your nostrils.

Roberts says, that this figure of speech is used in India to convey the idea of being filled to satiety. A host says to his guests, "Now, friends, eat mookamattam: to the nose. That is, Eat until you are filled to the nose. Of a glutton it is said, "That fellow always fills up to the nose."