

b. Positions assigned for the camp and for the march (ii.1-34)

This chapter describes an orderly arrangement of the tribes, both for camping and for marching. Each man is to camp according to his tribe and family group (2). Far off (2). Heb. minnegebli; better 'over against' as in AV mg. and RV. Doubtless the tribes would have to be some distance from the sanctuary, since the Levites were encamped around it (1.53), but the emphasis here is on their position in relation to it, rather than on their distance from it.

The tribes were divided into four groups of three tribes each, which were called 'camps', and named after the first tribe in each group. Each camp was to encamp on a particular side of the tabernacle. The four camps are described in order, starting with the one on the east, and going clockwise around the compass. In connection with each camp its three tribes are taken up in order. A captain is designated for each tribe and the number of fighting men in the tribe is stated. The description of each camp ends with mention of the total number of its fighting men, and of its order in the march. This order of march is identical with that in which the tribes are listed in the chapter. It is interesting to note that the order of the tribes here is the same as in i.21-43, except that the first three and the second three are interchanged, thus placing the three youngest sons of Leah before the two eldest.

i. The camp on the east side (ii.3-9). This was the camp of Judah. It included the tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun, and went first in the march.

ii. The camp on the south side (ii.10-16). This was the camp of Reuben. It included the tribes of Reuben, Simeon and Gad, and had the second place in the march. The son of Reuel (14). This name occurs as Deuel in i.14, vii.42,47 and x.20. In ancient Hebrew writing D and R looked very much alike. Hence they were confused in transmission far oftener than any other two letters. Cf., for instance, Hadadezer in 2 Sa.viii.3,5,7,8,9,10,12, with Hadarezer in 1 Ch. xviii.3,5,7,8,8,10.

iii. The place of the Levites (ii.17). After the description of the camps of Judah and Reuben, mention is made of the Levites, since they would come next on the march. They camped in the centre, around the tabernacle (1.53).