

With this section we conclude the portion of the book which has led to the misleading title in Greek and in English. Only in these four chapters and in chapter xxvi do we find long lists of numbers. These numbers have sometimes been a cause of difficulty in accepting the narrative as true. It is asked how so many Levites could be occupied with the care of the tabernacle. While 8,580 men may seem a large number to be set aside for this task, we must remember that it was not only a matter of caring for the tabernacle, but also of setting apart a group to represent God in all the various sections of Palestine after the conquest. Moreover, although this section deals principally with the work of moving the tabernacle, there were doubtless many other duties to be performed while staying in one place and directing the religious life of a nation so large as to include 603,550 fighting men (1.46). See also the remarks about the numbers under 1.17-46 above.

III. REMOVAL OF UNCLEANNESS AND DEFILEMENT FROM THE CAMP. v. 1-31

This section has three parts, each of which is concerned with a specific type of evil which must be eradicated from the camp, if God's blessing is to remain upon it. The first of these involves people who are hygienically or ceremonially defiled. The second deals with defilement which results from theft or injury to others. The third relates to matrimonial jealousy whether justified or not.

a. Removal of defiled persons (v.1-4)

Commands are given for removal outside the camp of three classes of people: lepers, persons with certain other diseases, and persons who are temporarily unclean as a result of touching a dead body. This removal was vital to the Israelites in the wilderness both from a hygienic and from a ceremonial viewpoint.

Touching a dead body made one ritually unclean. God wished to indicate that His people should be completely separate from sin and defilement. In addition there was a hygienic purpose, to hinder the spread of disease. It was also important to make a sharp break, in order that people should recognize that when a person has died the