

PREPARATIONS FOR ENTRANCE INTO CANAAN. xxvi.1-xxxvi.13

XVII. PREPARATIONS FOR THE CONQUEST AND APPORTIONMENT OF THE LAND. xxvi.1-xxvii.23

In comparison with the stirring events which have been described thus far, the remaining eleven chapters of the book of Numbers may seem dull and almost anticlimactic. Although forming a necessary preparation for the thrilling experience of entrance into the Promised Land, some of their parts are not particularly interesting in themselves.

a. The new census (xxvi.1-65)

As a result of all that Israel has gone through in the wilderness, the size of the various tribes has been materially altered. A whole generation has died, and the new generation is actually a little smaller than the one that preceded it (51, cf. 1.46). Mortality in the desert has been high, and there have been frequent diminutions through rebellions and plagues. Now the long wilderness experience is over, and a firm basis can be established for determining the size of the tribes. So the command to number is given (1-5) after the plague.

The purpose of this census is partly military, to ascertain the number of fighting men available for taking Palestine. Even more, however, it is to establish a basis for division of the land after it is conquered (52-56). Therefore the names of the divisions of the tribes are listed now, which was not done in the previous census (chapter 1). An interesting feature of this census is the mention in connection with various tribes of those members who figured prominently in events in the wilderness.

Secular tribes are taken in turn, their divisions names, and the total number of each tribe stated (5-51). Then general directions are prescribed for the division of the Promised Land among the various tribes (52-56). The tribe of Levi is taken separately (57-62). Its families are named (57-58), with special mention of the family of Aaron (59-61), and the total number of Levites is given (62).