

NUMBERS

INTRODUCTION

The English name of this book is taken from the Greek translation, and may represent the hasty selection of someone only superficially familiar with the book. The names which the Greek translation gave to the other four books of the Pentateuch are good descriptions of their contents, while those appended to them in the Hebrew consist merely of the first word or the first two words of each book, and sometimes give no idea at all of what the book contains. Here the reverse is true. The Hebrew name, bemidhbar, 'in the wilderness' (which is the fifth word of the book), describes it excellently; but the Greek title fits only chapters 1 and xxvi. While it might loosely apply to one or two other chapters, it has no application to nine-tenths of the book. It is to be feared that the misleading title which the Latin and the English versions have taken over from the Greek translation has led many to neglect the book, and to miss the rich treasures which it contains.

As the Hebrew title suggests, the book contains a description of the wilderness journey of the Israelites. Exodus tells how they left Egypt, and traces their progress as far as Sinai. Joshua tells how they entered the Promised Land. Their long journey from Sinai to the borders of Canaan is described in Numbers.

Actually this book is of very great significance for the Christian. Like the Israelites, he has come out of Egypt, the region of slavery and oppression. He has been born again through the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary just as they were redeemed by the special power of God, as demonstrated in the Passover which marked their departure from Egypt. Like them he looks forward to entering into full possession of all the promises of God. But at present he is a pilgrim and a stranger, with a wilderness journey to pass through before he enters the Promised Land (cf. 1 Pet.ii.11; Heb.xi.8-16,xii.1).