

May 27, 2007 (LS)

**DEFILEMENT, RESTORATION, DEFILEMENT (PART 2)**  
**GENESIS 35.1-29**

vv. 1-15 = covenant renewal. *The call to approach God's house (1-4); meeting with God at his house (5-15)*

**3. BUILDING AND DEFILEMENT OF GOD'S HOUSE (16-22A)**

***The woman painfully bearing the son (16-18):*** God renewed the covenant with Israel so that Israel might depart from there and go fulfill the mission, the vocation, given to him. This is seen in the fact that the people leave Bethel.

Israel, and all who are with him, begin to head south to the area of Ephrath, or Bethlehem. What happens in this incident happens in relationship to Ephrath/Bethlehem.

Ephrath/Bethlehem is set up as being important for the rest of Scripture. This is the first time the town is mentioned in the Bible, and, so, in some way it sets the stage.

Bethlehem = birthplace of the king. Note David (cf. Lk 2.4). He is an Ephrathite of Bethlehem (1 Sam 12.17). Note Micah 5.2-3 - *the king will be born in Bethlehem.*

Looking back through these lenses and taking the promises given to Israel earlier in the chapter, we have an idea of the significance of the birth of Benjamin. God told Israel that "kings would come from his body" in v. 11.

What happens here with the birth of this son will be the partial fulfillment of God's promises. God's renewal of his covenant is moving history forward, accomplishing his purposes. But this will not be the end of the story.

Rachel's labor and birth of son: (1) connection to the birth of Joseph. When Joseph was born Rachel named him Joseph, "he adds," because, she said, "God will add to me another son" (30.24). Joseph's birth stood as a promise to Rachel that God would indeed give her another son.

(2) God promised Jacob/Israel in this covenant renewal that he would be fruitful (v. 11). God is fulfilling that promise. God has cleansed Israel of his defilement and is now giving him another son.

(3) Rachel's name for son, Ben-oni, reflects the pronouncement upon the woman in the Garden; cf. Gen 3.16 ("in pain you shall bring forth sons.")

Rachel has been established as the woman. She is the barren wife who, through, God's resurrecting of her womb has born the seed. She has borne the son, the seed, through pain and sorrow just as God has promised.

Israel's re-naming of the son is not going against what Rachel does, but coincides with it. Israel names him Benjamin, son of my right hand. The one who sits on the right hand is the son who is also the king. This is seen most explicitly in our Lord Jesus Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father. Benjamin is named in faith. He is the seed that is promised by God.

Now, as history plays out, the first official king of Israel (there are some unofficial kings in the times of the judges) is from the tribe of Benjamin. He is Saul. He does have to be replaced by David who is of the tribe of Judah, nevertheless, he does fulfill this position of being the son of the right hand.

***Death and burial of the woman (19-20):*** Jacob sets up a pillar on her grave. Jacob has done this at Bethel twice and now he is doing it again over Rachel's grave.

Pillars = memorials before God. Memorials are things that God sees so that he will remember his covenant. God's remembering his covenant is about God acting in accordance to what he has promised. This pillar is a memorial of God's promise of resurrection.

***The journey continues (21):*** The tower of Eder = "the tower of the flock." Along with Bethlehem, this place is significant in the prophecy of Micah later on referring to God's bringing his promises to pass. Cf. Micah 4.8

The prophecy deals with the restoration of God's people, daughter Zion/Jerusalem. There is a discussion about dominion and kingship and all peoples being gathered to this tower. The tower is a mountain either literally or symbolically. This is clear from its

association in Micah's prophecy (i.e., Zion is a mountain). And this is the place where the flocks will gather.

Mission of Israel = be a shepherd to the nations.

***The defilement of God's house (22):*** The nature of Reuben's sin: he seeks to seize authority from his father. Cf. e.g., 2 Sam 12:8, 11; 16:21-22 with 20:3; 1 Kgs 2:22; 20:3-7.

This mimics the sin of Ham with Noah and the sin of Adam in the Garden. Reuben, the firstborn, loses his status. Joseph will replace him, receiving the double portion (i.e., his two sons being blessed).

Joseph will also receive the robe of authority from his father later and then from Pharaoh. But Reuben loses that position in this act. He is not patient where God has put him at the time, and his impatience costs him.

This brings defilement to the house. The firstborn son sins and the whole house is defiled once again.

Pattern: God makes/renews his covenant, and his people defile it by falling into sin. It is a pattern of creation - fall - recreation. E.g., Sinai: covenant - golden calf; David: covenant - adultery & murder.

#### **4. THE CONTINUATION OF GOD'S HOUSE (22B-29)**

***The twelve (22b-26):*** Twelve is a foundational number in Scripture. E.g., One of the reasons that Jesus chose twelve apostles was to tell us that he is creating a new house, a new Israel. cf. also Rev 21, the city has twelve foundations.

***The death of Isaac (27-29):*** Mamre/Kirjath Arba/Hebron = the place where Abraham built an altar (13.18). It is the place where Abraham had made alliances with the Amorites (14.13). It is also the place where Sarah is buried (23.9, 17, 19).

This will now be the place where Isaac will be buried. This is where God meets with his people and makes promises. That is also why the patriarchs bury people there. God will fulfill his promises.

A note about chronology: Much of what happens in the following chapters happens while Isaac is still alive. This is the end of a literary unit.

Taking the biblical records for what they are and the ages of the people involved, Isaac died when Joseph was 29 years of age, the year before he stood before Pharaoh in Egypt. Jacob is 120 when Isaac dies. This is ten years before he goes down to Egypt (47.9). So Isaac sees much of what goes on later.

**(1)** One purpose of the Lord's Service (i.e., covenant renewal) is to remake us as a people to go out and fulfill our God-given mission.

**(2)** Our mission is fulfilled through death.

**(3)** Patient perseverance is a must in the Christian life.

**(4)** There is always a need for covenant renewal.

**(5)** God's kingdom presses on even with what seem to be great losses.