

May 20, 2007

DEFILEMENT, RESTORATION, DEFILEMENT (PART 1)
GENESIS 35.1-29

God is renewing his covenant with Jacob, and through him with all those who are united to him.

1. THE CALL TO APPROACH GOD'S HOUSE (1-4)

"Go up" (1): This scene connected to what happened with the Hivites; note "then."

God tells Jacob to "go up." Bethel is south of Shechem. "Going up" is a theological/liturgical movement. Bethel = house of God. To go to the house of God is always an ascent.

Why build an altar? Note: altars are miniature holy mountains. The altar = mountain of God in Ezek 43.15 (usually trans. "altar hearth," but lit. "mountain of God"). Cp. Sinai in Ex 19 and fire and smoke at the top, the place where God is.

God's telling Jacob to build an altar there means that he is planning on meeting with Jacob and his household in a special way. It is here, at God's house-mountain, that he will renew his covenant with him.

Jacob was re-establishing the worship of God in the land. Establishing God's worship there in the land meant that he was bringing the kingdom of God culture into the land of Canaan.

Preparations for meeting with God (2-4): "his household" and "all who were with him." Not all who were with Jacob were "of Jacob;" i.e., in his household. Put it this way, not everyone with Jacob was a part of the circumcised household of Jacob. (Cp. the "mixed multitude" that came up with Israel out of Egypt; cf. Ex 12.38; Num 11.4.

In the NT era these people would be called "God-fearers." They were worshipers of God, but they had not taken on the particular mission of Israel.

While "all who were with him" may not have been members of Jacob's household, they were still *with* Jacob. Because this, they were obligated to abide by the same instruction that Jacob's household had to obey.

1st command: they are to put away from themselves all of the foreign gods. Cp. Josh 24.23 and the covenant renewal @ Shechem.

Where did they obtain these foreign gods? Probably not the ones that Rachel desecrated. Most likely what came from the Hivites.

2nd command: they were to purify themselves and change their garments. "To purify" oneself speaks of ritual purification, a washing of some sort.

Defilement happened in Shechem. First Shechem, but then, more importantly, how Simeon and Levi handled the situation.

Later in Israel's history even when men would come back from a legitimate war, they would be unclean for seven days. They had to be washed on the 3rd and 7th days by the water that contain the ashes of the Red Heifer in order to be cleansed from their defilement. This would cleanse them so that they could re-enter the camp. Bloodshed must be cleansed.

Why "change their garments?" The garments of man represent who he is. They are an extra layer of skin for a person. This is seen throughout Leviticus in that same types of defilements and cleansings are associated with the skin and the garments. They also represent a person's *office*. Israel's office was defiled and needed cleansing.

Earrings - obviously connected somehow to the false gods. Mathews notes that it is well attested that the idols themselves had earrings. If this is the case, this is a wholesale disavowment of the false gods. Also note golden calf in Ex 32.2-4.

Concealing it under the terebinth tree: place where Abraham and Jacob built altars. Cf. 12.6; 33.20. Why? Possibly showing YHWH's victory over the gods of the nations as they are buried beneath his mountain.

2. MEETING WITH GOD AT HIS HOUSE (5-15)

The terror of God (5): Cp. to the terror that fell on the people of the land before conquest under Joshua. Cf. Josh 2.9

Building the mountain (6-7): Luz - still the way most of the world knows the place. Only God and Jacob know that it is Bethel.

'el bethel = God of Bethel, which translated is God of the House of God.

The oak of weeping (8): Scene is surprising. What is Deborah, *Rebekah's* nurse doing with Jacob? Possibly sent to give news from home? See Ge 27.45

Her death and burial may be a significant sign of faith in God for the resurrection of the dead.

She is buried below Bethel under the terebinth tree. That tree receives a new name *'allon bachuth*, which is 'oak of weeping.'

Now trees are functionally equivalent to altars; i.e., they are ladders to heaven as well. Deborah is buried under the house of God and under this oak. Burying her in faith would mean that she will ascend to God. Weeping - cp. Ps 56.8; God collects the tears of his people in a bottle and remembers his promises to deliver them from their enemy.

Blessing as new name (9-10): Blessing = life. Blessing given to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob. Here it involves all three things named: a name, fruitfulness, and land.

Hasn't God already changed his name to Israel? Yes. But he is renewing his covenant with Jacob that has been defiled. Purification has taken place. Now God is remaking Jacob into Israel.

You are initially given a name upon entrance. Then your name must be renewed as it is defiled. When the covenant is renewed there is a break with the past in that we are cleansed from our sins, and God renews our names; which means that he renews us.

Name involves authority, access (e.g., to God), and a vocation/mission. All of these things are renewed with us when God renews his covenant in which he gives us the name. Cp. the Aaronic benediction in Num 6.27.

Blessing as fruitfulness (11): *'el shaddai*, God Almighty; the way God introduced himself to Abraham in ch. 17.

The covenant that God made with Jacob continues to encompass more as history progresses. But God's covenant being renewed with Jacob also moves history into the next stage. The covenant is fundamentally the same, but we are being transformed from glory to glory.

Fruitfulness: this is a restatement of the original blessing given to the man and the woman in the Garden in Gen 1.28. After the flood it is renewed with Noah in 9.1. It is the promise given to Abraham in his name and in chs. 12, 15, and 17. Jacob is the heir.

Blessing as possession of the land (12): dominion associated with fruitfulness (and the name). The land will brought under subjection of man.

God's ascension (13): Whenever God meets with his people, making or renewing covenant, he then goes away, leaving them to do what he said. Then, he will come back at a particular day and inspect what we have done and bless us or curse us. See what happened with Adam and Eve in the Garden. Cf. also e.g., Jesus' parables in Mt. 25.

Communion with God (14-15): Jacob is imaging God by setting up this pillar. This is a memorial stone where God is to see and remember his covenant.

Drink offering = wine. Drink offerings were prescribed for the Tabernacle worship when people came into and settled in the land of Canaan later on. This is what God prescribes in Num 15.1ff. Wine is the result of dominion and rest.

Jacob pours out this drink offering. You see in the old creation world (i.e., before Christ came), that is what they had to do with wine in the Tabernacle. The priests weren't allowed to drink it. But it still represented communion with God, but it emphasized that they had not quite entered into full rest, still being at distance from God.

Oil = Holy Spirit, liquid light. Cp. ch. 28. Jacob receives a fresh anointing.

(1) What we do on the Lord's Day here is covenant renewal.

(2) Jesus has ascended and left us with a task. He will come again and inspect.