

## **Genesis in Biblical Perspective: The Gospel of Christ from Genesis – Repentance – The Gateway to Joy and Blessing**

**Genesis 35:1-15**

By [Dr. Harry Reeder III](#)

In this study we will look at first fifteen verses in Genesis 35 on this matter of repentance, the gateway of joy and blessing. This is the Word of God. It's the truth. Genesis 35:1–8 says

*[1] God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau." [2] So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments. [3] Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone." [4] So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem. [5] And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. [6] And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, [7] and there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother. [8] And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name Allon-bacuth.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, this is the Word of our God and it abides forever.

"Oh no!" These words came out of my mouth the other day when I could see a car wreck about to happen. My "oh no" didn't stop it from happening but it did accompany it. Another time those words came out of my mouth was when I teaching my son to drive in the parking lot of our church as I was headed into the front door unfortunately still in the car with him. I remember hearing those words before when my dad was teaching me how to drive. That is the phrase that has been on my heart at least the whole time we've been in the life of Jacob.

God says through His sovereign electing love, “Jacob I love you. Esau I have hated. The older will serve the younger.” So Jacob and his mother connive, deceive and do “oh no” Jacob you’re not going to do that. Aren’t you going to trust the Lord? Then he goes off into exile out of fear for his brother Esau and “oh no” because he goes into a deal with Laban and the deceiver gets deceived. He ends up with a wife he didn’t bargain for so what does he do? “Oh no” he goes into polygamy. Then he begins to fall into people of the land and gets into superstitions like white rods and spotted this and that. Then he attempts to manipulate a situation, “oh no.” When he leaves he sneaks out at night, “oh no.”

Jacob had been met by God before he went to Laban at a place called Bethel. God called him there to worship and Jacob set up an altar and made a vow to God saying he would return there when he left. Twenty years later he is on his way back “oh no” and he doesn’t go to Bethel. He goes to Shechem and falls in among those people. The result, even though Jacob has been converted in that wonderful moment he wrestled against God-man, the angel of the Lord and he was broken and clings to God, his daughter is defiled among these people – “oh no.” He gives no leadership to his sons so they instead of following justice follow vengeance and massacre an entire city – “oh no.”

The “oh no’s” with Jacob have been used of God. We are saved by grace and so all the people in the Bible God is very honest about. He wants us to be honest about where we are as well. Jacob is no reward to God. He just seems to get more and more despicable right before our eyes. Then we realize how much of ourselves we see in Jacob. I am a sinner in the sight of God and there is no good thing that dwells within me. Our sin is worse than we ever dared to imagine and Jacob becomes a living example of this.

The life of Jacob teaches us something else as well. God’s grace is greater than we ever dared to hope. Where sin abounds grace does much more abound. Jacob, even after he is converted falls back into his own ways. He doesn’t exercise leadership or care for his family or ministers to them. He falters even as a believer. We find out that even believers will falter and go back to their old ways. They can easily be ensnared in their sins again.

In Genesis 35 we get to find out something else. That same sovereign grace that sought you is a searching and steadfast grace and God won’t leave you where you are. Arise Jacob, come on back, back to Bethel. So let’s look at the text and then I’ll draw out five lessons from the text. In this text we’ll see God’s call and Jacob’s response. Then we’ll see God’s reaffirming of the covenant and Jacob’s blessing.

In the first few verses of Genesis 35 God calls Jacob and gives him three commands. Command number one is for Jacob to arise. Jacob was down in the pits of sin. His daughter had been defiled and they had even resorted to the desecration of the holy ordinance of circumcision and used it as an instrument to

paralyze their enemies for the purpose of a massacre. They descended into the massacre of people in the name of vengeance and now the foreign gods of the Shechemites had infiltrated their house so all of Jacob's family was now down in the pits of decadence and God called. The hall of Jacob's family was now down in the pits of decadence and God called "Arise!"

Command number two was for Jacob to go back to Bethel. Arise, go back to Bethel, the house of God and leave the house of the Shechemites. Bethel is where Jacob saw the gateway to heaven and the ladder came down. The angels were up and down that ladder. It that place that Jacob vowed to return to and he hadn't gone back like he said he would. He went to Shechem instead and now look at what has happened to him and his family.

The third command is when Jacob gets to Bethel he is to worship. So arise, go back to Bethel and worship. The call of grace is doxological, praise God, worship Me, build the altar. So Jacob says "I will arise and go to Bethel" but he knows where his family is and it's not a matter of arising and going. The first thing they need to do is repent. Repentance is the gateway to get back to the gateway of heaven. So he is called now to believe in God's call, trust Him and to repent.

So he leads his family in repentance and Jacob gives three commands to his family so that they might follow the three commands of God to him. Number one is Jacob tells his family to put away the foreign gods. Renounce and repent of the foreign gods that have infiltrated their household during the time they have settled there for these past years among the Shechemites and Canaanites. Number two Jacob wants his family to ritually purify themselves. That is probably referring to a water baptism of ritual purification, cleansing. The third thing is he wants them to change their clothes.

So Jacob took the foreign gods and at a place of a public gathering, on a hill, under an oath, he buried them once and for all. Then they rose up and went back to Bethel. Jacob afraid of Esau, Laban and the Shechemites but now as he travelled he had Divine protection for God put terror among the people that they would not pursue the sons of Jacob. The word terror means a deep, dark dread. It's the very word used to describe Abraham's response when he had the dream of the sacrifice of the covenant. The terror of the Lord came upon the people so they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

Let's now see what happens when he gets to Bethel. Genesis 35:9–15 says

*[9] God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him. [10] And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So he called his name Israel. [11] And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. [12] The land that I gave*

*to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.” [13] Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him. [14] And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it. [15] So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.*

How long has he been gone? He had connived and deceived his father for the birth right, the family blessing and the covenant blessing. He fled and God met him at Bethel. God let him see the ladder and that is not the ladder you climb up to get to heaven. The ladder is Jesus coming down from heaven. That is very clear in the Gospel of John. Christ is the way, the truth and the life. Christ is the gateway to heaven. It is God who comes down by grace to take us to heaven. As Jacob is there he vows “God, if You will be with me then I will come back to this place.” Most commentators would say Jacob was gone somewhere between 20 to 35 years from the first time he was at Bethel and that would be necessary for the age of Dinah for the defilement to have taken place. Finally he is back where God’s presence had manifested, where God called him to worship and where he had vowed to return to worship and give God a tenth in praise to His Name. He now worships the living God at Bethel.

God does two things. Number one, God reaffirms Jacob’s new name, Israel. No longer are you Jacob the sup-planter but now you are Israel, the one who has been planted by God Himself, the child of God. Secondly, He reaffirms the covenant and it’s almost a verbatim repetition of the covenant when it was given to Abraham in Genesis 12:5, 15 and 17, even repeating the name that He used to reveal Himself – El Shaddai, I am God Almighty. I’ll give you a nation. I’ll give you kings from your loins. I will give nations from you. I will give to you a land that is a down payment for the Kingdom of God and most importantly I’ll give you My presence.

Jacob responds by giving God praise and he re-anoints the altar he once had established and this time he adds two things – a libation drink offering and an anointing with oil which is a type of the outpouring of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament. He baptizes it with the oil offering and then consecrates it for the purpose of worship. In the midst of all of this don’t forget Rebekah’s nurse, Deborah, dies. She was the only living connection from Abraham all the way to Jacob. There is something interesting about that but we’ll go further into that in the next study.

Now out of this text what does this do in our lives as we focus upon our Savior and the Gospel? The first is on the one hand a discouraging note and on the other hand an encouraging note. Those who have been saved by faith in Jesus Christ have saving faith. Saving faith is sometimes a wavering faith and even an incomplete faith. I wish I could tell you that every believer always lived by faith and obedience in Jesus Christ out of love to Christ never faltered. I have

wavered. I have faltered. Until we get to heaven when we don't need faith anymore, we are going to waver and falter. We will easily slip back, fall back and get re-entangled and God's call to you is the same as it was to Jacob, "Get up!" There is no country that you have settled in that is too far away for you to come back to the Promised Land, the land of God, to Christ Himself. There is no sin that you have become enmeshed in that is too great for God to disentangle you, forgive you and bring you back to Himself.

It is a discouraging word to know that we do falter but it is an encouraging word that God's sovereign grace from all eternity said "I love you, not because you merited it or because I need you." But in love He predestined us to adoption through His Son and the same electing love that came upon Jacob has come upon us. God's sovereign grace is not only sufficient but it is severe because in the flesh we'll take our wits and strength and just like Jacob we will wrestle and strive against God but He'll break us. He'll touch whatever He needs to touch to put it out of socket so that our striving will no longer be striving but now by faith, clinging to Him. Even then when we falter that sovereign, searching, severe grace is a steadfast grace for God will call you home. There is no place so far you can't come from and there is no sin so great that you can't leave it and come to Christ. Here is a man who with his leadership absence and complicity has murdered, done idolatry, abandoned a defiled daughter for his own peace and security, has left sons trying to handle bitterness with no leadership, but God's sovereign, steadfast grace still calls saying "Jacob arise and go to Bethel."

Bethel, with this ladder, the house of God, is anticipating Christ, the Word, the God of glory. He became flesh, tabernacled among us. God dwelt among us in His Son, Jesus and that is what we flee to. Christ is our Bethel so we arise and for us it's not going to a physical place but for us it is arise and come to Christ. Come to Him, trust in Him and His Word even when we have wandered away. There is no place that we've been that He doesn't call us to come and He rejoices over us when we come home.

Secondly, God's call upon us is the same as His call upon Jacob. Arise and worship! That is God's call to us. When God calls us with sovereign, steadfast and severe grace and He captures our heart, what is the purpose? Is it so I can be rich or wealthy or my business will succeed or that I will go to heaven? God may entrust things to you and He may give you 80 years of health. If you know Jesus you'll miss hell and hit heaven but the reason He has called you is for the praise of the glory of His grace. He called you to worship Him. He called you to praise Him. There are multiple benefits all the way to glory but His saving, sovereign, searching, steadfast grace is for the doxology of our lives, that we will praise Him.

This is the key. It is not me giving you seven steps to an effective Christian life. It is idolatry, the gods of this world, being buried in this world and the God of glory upon our heart. That is what moves the life of every believer. It is Christ reigning,

Christ filling and Christ enriching that moves us to dress with modesty, to speak with respect, to eat and drink to the glory of God. When we see God's call to worship it governs everything in our life.

When the Bible calls us to worship, think of two categories. There is general worship and that is the way we do our life. Then there is special worship and that is what we do when we gather and they are not disconnected. They are very much connected. When Paul talks about the grace of the Gospel in the book of Romans for eleven chapters he ends with a doxology saying "O God there is none like You, who has known Your thoughts or has become Your advisor, Your ways are not my ways, Your thoughts are not my thoughts, You are so far beyond me. Everything is from my God and through my God, to my God. Praise be to God forever." Then in the next chapter he says *[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship* (Romans 12:1).

You don't live a life of worship to be saved. You are saved by the merits of Christ, the blood of Jesus, the righteousness of Jesus. God's sovereign grace is sufficient in Christ so in light of God's mercy and grace, what does Paul tell me to do? He says to worship. This is not Old Testament worship. Old Testament worship was at a place with dead sacrifices. New Testament worship is every place with living sacrifices. Our bodies are living sacrifices. There is only one problem. A dead sacrifice stays on the altar. Living sacrifices keep wiggling off. So we have to keep putting ourselves up on that altar every day, that spiritual altar of glory to God we now give our lives for that. God-centered lives for God's worship will govern every decision we make. When that happens we see our lives as worship and watch your growth in Christ Jesus. It's not how close can I get to sin for I hate it. I love Jesus and I want Him to be lifted up. God centered living, worship, is the key, motivated by Gospel love and obedience.

Special worship and general worship are very connected. After six days of work and special worship, Praise God I can go to a place and gather with God's people, no matter where that is for it is the Lord's Day so I praise God from whom all blessings flow and it becomes a moment to collect the corporate praise of God on the day of resurrection. Then that becomes a diving board into the next week for the glory of God. Why did God make you? He made you for His glory. Why did God save us? He saved us for His glory that we might worship Him. That is why we must intentionally commit and tenaciously hold on to God centered worship in special worship as well as in life worship because if God centered worship becomes anything other than God centered worship it's just a matter of time until it becomes self-centered living.

That's why we can't have seeker centered worship. Anyone who comes into our worship service that doesn't know Christ I want to love on them and hug them, welcome them and put things out for them, but we didn't have the worship service for them. We had it for Jesus. Any believer that senses a religious 'Siskel

and Eibert' making a judgment of worship services has got it all wrong. It is not a believer centered worship or an unbeliever centered worship. It is a God centered worship service. The beat of our heart ought to be on beat when we get here. I want to praise God the way He says to praise Him. I want everything to be done that He says pleases Him and I want my heart thrilled with that. It is not a matter of musical genre for me or personality but I want my heart filled with one thing and that is my God is being lifted up in the very way that He says to do it. That's what thrills my soul.

I want to tell you what will happen with that. Unbelievers will get saved as a consequence, not the objective. Believers will get encouraged. When we come here having renounced idolatry, even the idolatry of my worship experience and I have come to do worship to meet my God, then that will drastically effect the Christian life. I believe the Christian life that is God centered is what fuels that kind of worship when God's people gather.

The worship services were all messed up and Paul said "I want everything done in decency and in order and here's the way you do it." Then he says I Corinthians 14:24– 25, *[24] But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, [25] the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.* Another thing that will happen in that worship service is that a believer will be equipped, encouraged and stimulated all the more as the day of the Lord draws near. I have seen this happen in my life.

When I was a student pastor in Chattanooga, Tennessee this dear saint in the Lord named Ruth told me she was praying for me. I asked her why and she said because her son was coming and he hates Christians, Christianity and you even though he hasn't met you. I wanted to know why he was coming. She said it was because it was Mother's Day and he promised me he'd come. Sure enough when he came to the worship service he had his arms folded, glaring at me and I tried to shake his hand on the way but he brushed out by me. He was 6 feet 4 and played basketball at the local college. He got on his Harley and peeled out of the parking lot. My wife and I are sitting at the table eating lunch and I hear a motorcycle screech up into my yard. I hear a beating on my door and I tell my wife to call the police because I think I'm about ready to get in a fight. I answer the door and he says to me "I want to be a Christian." I wish I could tell you that there was a point in my sermon where he came under conviction but he just said "I was with people today in worship that showed me they had something that I don't have and I want it."

At another church I was at there was a man who was a friend of one of our elders who came in and he had given up on the church and on everything. He said "I'm just going to cruise to heaven but I'm tired of this church stuff. He met me in the back of the church that day after the worship service with tears in his eyes and said "I want to recommit my life to the Lord. I want to get back with Him." I said

“Why” thinking it was some point in my sermon that convicted him. He said “I was with people in worship today that for the first in years I was with people that wanted to worship God and I want that same relationship back with the Lord.” Today he is a videographer, producer, director in multi-media putting out Christian technology that’s unbelievable.

Number three, the true worship of God is the ultimate purpose of the grace of God upon the people of God and is the face of God to the world. I really believe that the world forms ideas about the way we live, general worship, and the way we gather, special worship. If this service isn’t important to you the world laughs at our claims that Jesus Christ is everything. If worship is not important to a believer the world laughs. If we treat worship as our happy-hour adjustment moment once a week or a lecture class where you can learn a few facts about the Bible or a therapy class to get seven steps to something then we haven’t come to worship. I am absolutely convinced that our lives open the door for the sharing of the Gospel.

People aren’t going to become Christians by seeing us live for Jesus. They will become a Christian by faith. Faith comes by hearing the Word but they are not going to listen if we don’t have lives that worship. Doxological lives are what open the door for sharing the Gospel, humanly speaking. Now God can do anything in most any way except that He’ll always be faithful to His Word and to His character. He can use a donkey to bring people to the Lord. When we falter we should be ready to confess and repent. We’re ready to even ask unbelievers to forgive us. Worship is so crucial.

Worship has two threads that are entwined – celebration unto joy and reverence unto consecration. We can do the joy thing just by singing and all or in the name of reverence we can all come to the service like this is a morgue and we’re getting ready for a funeral instead of celebrating the resurrected Jesus. Reverence is not morbidity. Joy is not frivolity. If you manipulate either one of those, you’ll never have the other one. This is something only the Spirit of God could give. I will praise my God. I will not sit in this pew and watch people move their mouths. I from my heart, filled from my mouth, will praise my God and speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs and you can’t shut me up. That’s the joy that overflows but it’s done with reverence for we are appearing before the King in all of His glory. There is no frivolity or triviality about it.

I do not want to live my Christian life or do my worship for the eyes of men. I think it’s very interesting that when Jacob got the foreign gods he didn’t go over in the corner and hide this thing. He went to the hill where the oak was and that’s the gathering place and there was a public display of him burying the foreign gods. Now we’re on record. My family is on record. This will not be in our lives anymore. I believe there is a place, not to be seen by men, but to let our God be seen in our lives.



I have a friend who plays baseball and the first thing he does at Spring Training every year when they sit down at the training table he'll ask to say a prayer. They will always say 'no' because baseball players are not polite and they make fun of him. Then he bows and prays and he does it for two reasons. One is that he wants to get on record with Jesus Christ and he wants to give thanks for his food. He doesn't do it to be seen by men because he gets railroaded for doing that in public anyway but he wants to be on record with Christ. As for me and my house we shall serve the Lord.

Fourthly, the first step to loving obedience in acceptable worship is always repentance. Praise the Lord you don't have to do a ritual cleansing for you have one. The Bible says if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive our sins. When you repent and confess Jesus will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. I believe the passage I just read to you was in Paul's mind when he talked about the new Christian life in Ephesians 4 and 5. The new Christian life is to put off the old man and put on the new man. So we are to identify our sins, turn from our sins, we renounce them, God removes them, we declare them as a false idol of this world, we'll be cleansed by the grace of God and we'll be consecrated to the glory of God. We will be glad to do that publically.

Repentance is God's gift. II Timothy 2:24–25 says *[24] And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, [25] correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.* Repentance is God's gift that we are to exercise. Arise, repent and then go to the praise of our God with our lives for worship and to assemble for worship. Repentance always has sorrow, not worldly sorrow over the consequences of sin, but Godly sorrow over the sinfulness sin. Godly sorrow leads to repentance.

Worldly sorrow leads to therapy. We are in a nation of therapy. We sin and we go to a rehab to get therapy and then this process will continue to be repeated. I do not mean to be sarcastic about it because I know it's hurting people looking for an answer but the answer isn't therapy. The answer is a new heart in Jesus Christ. You can modify behavior for a time but only God can transform a life from the heart out. Oh that we might draw people to that saving grace!

Let's look at that last piece. Repentance is God's gracious gift which restores His people to a reciprocal relationship with Him by renouncing sin, idolatry and turn to Christ alone as our life. You can't rise up, repent and go worship without God's grace enabling you and we're not meriting anything when we do that. You will not draw near to God until He draws you but when God draws you to Himself and you draw near to God, He will draw near to you. He will deepen the intimacy in a reciprocal relationship with you. The grace enabled life of trust and obedience is a life of safety, security, and joy in the Lord. Yes you will have adversity but you will be more than a conqueror in Jesus Christ and God responds to your pursuing Him. You come to the means of grace and God fills your heart and your soul.

These aren't merits for Jesus is your Merit but God has drawn you and you draw near to God, He draws near to you and you enter into a reciprocal relationship.

I'll just finish with this thought. In Genesis 34 Jacob the believer fled from God. You don't even find God's name mentioned in Genesis 34. There is defilement, desecration, denigration and dissipation in Genesis 34 and you won't find God's name in that chapter, not one time. Arise, and go to Bethel. In Genesis 35 Jacob repents and comes to Bethel. In Genesis 35 God's name is mentioned twenty times. You draw near to God and God draws near to you. You leave Shechem and you end up walking with the Lord. You leave the house of idolatry and you come to Bethel, the house of God. You leave the fear of Esau, Laban, the Shechemites and the terror of God gives you security and peace in this world. You leave decadence and disintegration and you come to devotion in the Lord. You leave unacceptable worship and you come to true worship. You leave a family in disarray and total defilement but now there is a family that has come around the altar of God to give Him praise forevermore. This is God's call.

Arise, and repent. Repentance is not being preached today. They don't teach you to preach repentance in the church growth handbook. I feel guilty doing this but my heart for the Gospel call of faith and repentance are Siamese twins where you can't preach one without the other, but it's not preached today because no one wants to preach repentance. We'll grow the church and get people to come to events but repentance is not preached today. I feel guilty saying that because I serve in a congregation that encourages me, prays for me and wants me to preach the call of the Gospel to repentance but I want to ask you to pray for repentance to be restored to the preaching of the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ because I have brothers out there whose congregations hate it and are under financial and psychological pressure and attack any time they raise the call to repentance.

Pray that the call of repentance would be restored to our churches today and then pray for God's people that because of our love of Jesus Christ, our Bethel, our House of God, our Gateway that we will arise and let this day bury the gods of this world and then everyday bury the gods of this world. Then fill the heart with the glory of Christ, praise His Name! 'Oh no' becomes 'oh yes.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time that we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the privilege to walk with Jesus. God, I know that it is my responsibility and I do not dodge it but rejoice in it, to make sure in all of the worship of this congregation that anyone reading that doesn't know Jesus is invited to the Savior. If you have not come to Christ, O arise and come by faith and repentance and put your trust in Jesus who died for your sins and was resurrected. My friend, this can be the first day of a forever life. Lord, would You work in our hearts though that we don't just come in and look for our place in a church

service but we come in to worship You and then we look to encourage one another in the worship of God. Father, allow our face in worship to be a face of joy and reverence so that anyone here would be drawn to Christ through our worship of You. God, help us to bury the idols and exalt Jesus, I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

#### **Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine***

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).