

## **Genesis in Biblical Perspective: The Gospel of Christ from Genesis – Death and Life, Life and Death**

**Genesis 35:16-29**

By [Dr. Harry Reeder III](#)

Genesis 35:16–29 says

[16] Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance<sup>6</sup> from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor. [17] And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, “Do not fear, for you have another son.” [18] And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. [19] So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), [20] and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb. It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day. [21] Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder. [22] While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine. And Israel heard of it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve. [23] The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob's firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. [24] The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. [25] The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's servant: Dan and Naphtali. [26] The sons of Zilpah, Leah's servant: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram. [27] And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. [28] Now the days of Isaac were 180 years. [29] And Isaac breathed his last, and he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may God's Word be preached for you.

This is the last installment in the life of Jacob. Jacob doesn't die in this text but he recedes to the background. In the next study we'll look at Esau and then after that we'll take a look at the life of Joseph. Have you ever heard the saying 'forgotten but not gone'? That's the way Jacob is. We kind of leave him behind now but he's not gone yet and we'll have a few more things to deal with but this brings us to the last installment in the life of Jacob.

In Genesis 35 Jacob had led his family in repentance and made a public display. He went on record to say that he and his family were leaving idolatry and they buried the foreign idols. The chapter opens with Jacob repenting, leading his family and burying foreign idols and gods. It closes with him burying his family. Jacob has been a consistent, constant lesson to us. The lesson has been clear. Obviously there have been times when we have the pre-incarnate ministry of Christ and there are times when God works with Jacob that we're pointed to Christ but there are two things that are very clear and that is saved men and women are sinners. There is nothing that merits our salvation. The despicable life of Jacob is the life that we're born with. We have a sinful heart and a sinful life but we're saved not on the merit of who we are or that God needs us but it is because the merits of God's grace. God's grace has reached down and done a saving work in Jacob's life but even when we're converted that old man is still there within us. Periodically if we're not diligent like Jacob we can be drug back into those old patterns of behavior but again there is God's triumphant grace.

Here is the theme as we come to the end of Jacob's life. The believer knows they are saved by grace but that doesn't stop us from hating sin, repenting of sin, leaving sin yet the confidence we have is that God's grace is greater than all our sin and the triumph of God's grace is so glorious that as God saves us sin, the practice sin and when He takes us home out of the presence of sin, one day in a new heavens and a new earth. As God's grace brings us there God's grace will triumph over our sin and there will be the praise of Christ who is the Victor as God brings His people home. Jesus said "Father, all whom You have given Me, I lose not one." So all of us our Jacobs, sinners saved by grace and even though we falter God's grace keeps reaching back and even though we are prone to wander God's grace keeps bringing us back.

The fact that God's grace is greater than our sin doesn't give us some kind of view of sin where we can sin like we want to. No, because God's grace is so costly and so rich in Jesus Christ where we hate sin, we know that while we can be forgiven of sin, it will still have consequences in this world. So we want to leave it and Jacob is a reminder of that. That is where we are in this text and I'd like walk you through this text that we're in and I have divided the text into two parts.

As Jacob finally now gets to his ancestral home of Hebron, it comes in two steps in Genesis 35. The first step is that he leaves Bethel where the altar of worship was and gets about halfway to Hebron at a place called Bethlehem which is south of Jerusalem. As he reaches Bethlehem his wife Rachel is having his twelfth son that will be the foundation of the twelve tribes of Israel. This is Rachel's second son and as she is in labor it becomes very painful and then it comes to the point of death.

While Rachel is dying a number of things occur. One is the midwife comforts her by telling her that God has heard her prayers. This is the woman who prayed for

another son. Rachel names this son, Ben-oni which means son of my suffering. Rachel is the wife that Jacob really loved, the apple of his eye and while loving his wife through this he doesn't let the name Ben-oni stand and changes it to Benjamin, meaning the son of my strength or the son of my victory. Then they have an appropriate funeral service. He erects a memorial stone, a pillar there and then moves on and settles in the tower of Eder in that particular area, a little further south.

As Jacob is in this area an unthinkable thing happens. His firstborn, Rueben, commits adultery and incest as he commits sexual intimacy with one of Jacob's concubine, Bilhah, the servant of Rachel. As this act is committed Israel (Jacob) comes to find out. This act is an act of incest because Bilhah is the mother of two of his brothers, Naphtali and Dan. After Jacob hears of it, the text kind of stops and then comes the listing of the family, the twelve sons. They are listed by their mothers. Leah is first and then her six sons, then Rachel and her two sons, then Bilhah and her two sons and Zilpah and her two sons. Then the last part covers Jacob going back and being reunited with his father, Isaac.

God told Jacob he was going to send him away on a short journey to get a wife and 60 to 80 years later he comes back. He is reunited with Isaac and Isaac dies. He is gathered to his people and Esau leaves Edom to help oversee the burial of their father Isaac. Together they bury their father Isaac.

This last study in the life of Jacob I believe has some interesting lessons for us and I think they run right with the theme of Jacob. Sin, yes God's grace triumphs, yes I can be forgiven, yes even when I sin God can rewrite my life and He can replace the years the locusts have taken away but sin does have consequences. Yet God's grace still will accomplish God's purposes for God's glory and even all things will work together for my good. Sin has consequences and I shouldn't play around with it in my life, in my family, in my testimony, in my ministry.

First of all, sin has a pay day some day. Let me show you from the text three pay days of sin. Pay day number one is the day of death. There are four deaths that occur in Genesis 35. You may be thinking, "I only saw two." The two deaths that we read were Rachel, Jacob's wife, and Isaac, Jacob's beloved father. So there were two but I'm going to cheat of the other two.

In the last study there was another death back in the first part of Genesis 35. The death that took place earlier in this chapter was Deborah. Deborah was Jacob's mother's (Rebekah) nurse. Genesis 35:8 says [8] And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name Allon-bacuth. Deborah would be like Jacob's nanny. Who did Jacob spend most of his childhood with, dad or mom? He spent more time with his mom and Deborah was Rebekah's nurse so he would have spent a lot of time with her and know her well. Somehow Deborah has migrated to be with Jacob's family even though he hasn't come back yet. Jacob ends up burying his mother's nurse.

Deborah spans all the way from Abraham to the sons of Jacob. So Deborah is the first death we've seen.

The second death is Rebekah. You might be thinking "I don't remember reading about Rebekah's death." Well, you're right. Rebekah's death is not recorded so how do I know she died. I will acknowledge that I'm speculating. Here's my speculation. Deborah is Rebekah's nurse and what is Deborah doing with Jacob? If Rebekah was still alive with her husband, Isaac then Deborah would still be back where Isaac was. My guess is Rebekah has died and why the Bible doesn't record it, I'm not sure. Maybe it was because she said she was going to do this deceptive work with Jacob, she lied to her husband and maybe the Bible is making a statement by not recording her death. All of the patriarchs and matriarchs are recorded but not hers. My guess is that she has already passed away because Deborah has been released from service and is not with Jacob. Therefore Jacob is taking care of Deborah which means Rebekah has probably has died so now we have two deaths.

Then Rachel is the third death. Do you remember what Rachel said to Jacob before she had children? She said 'Give me children or I die.' God gave her children and that's when she died. Now Jacob doesn't have the nanny, his mother or Rachel, his beloved wife. By the way, he will sorrow over her his whole life. In fact, some of the last words he says he acknowledges his sorrow about her death and how much he misses her. Let's look in Genesis 48 so I can show you this. Here is when Jacob is reunited with Joseph all the way in Egypt and Jacob is going to bless the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh.

Genesis 48:6-7 says [6] "And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. [7] As for me (Jacob), when I came from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)." Even decades later, his sorrow over Rachel's death will continue to be upon him.

The fourth death is Isaac. Jacob goes away supposedly for a short trip to get a wife and doesn't return until 40 to 80 years later, but he does get back before his father dies and he is reunited with his father. Then his father dies and it says he is gathered to his people. Isaac breathed his last and Esau and Jacob bury his father there. At the start of the chapter they were burying foreign gods and at the end of the chapter the day of death has come. The wages of sin is death.

When the Bible says that the wages of sin is death, we have just seen four funerals here to remind us. Let's think through this verse about the wages of sin is death. First of all, the wages of sin is physical death, the separation of the soul and the body. Then there is spiritual death where the Bible says we're born dead in our sins. Sin has separated us from God and we're born spiritually dead. Then

we face eternal death. Depart from Me you workers of lawlessness into a place called hell. Here are three deaths that the wages of sin bring in this world.

Jesus Christ is our Victor. Christ has won the victory over our spiritual death by sending the Holy Spirit and we're born again. We are given a new heart and we're alive spiritually. Then Jesus as our Victor has won the victory over eternal death because when you come to Jesus Christ that judgment of your sins has been removed, why? My sin, O the bliss of this glorious, my sin, not the part but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord O my soul! I don't have a day of eternal death but I have a day of endless life in the presence of God and that's not up there strumming on a harp and floating on the clouds. When you leave here, absent from the body and present with the Lord, that's just the intermediate state. The everlasting state is a new heavens and a new earth with God in the midst of His people. God has won the victory over eternal death, spiritual death and Christ has risen. He has won the victory over death. Death, where is your sting?

But here the day of the death has visited Jacob and there are four funerals. Not only do you see this day of physical death that is in front of him, but you also see that sin has done another number on his family. You see the day of family division. Sin has come back in and divided up the family. The last time the sons were listed they were listed chronologically, yet the twelve sons are still together even after Rueben's despicable act. Now when the family is listed it's divided up by mothers. It lists the six sons of Leah, the two of Rachel's, the two of Bilhah, and the two of Zilpah. There are still twelve sons but there is family division and boy will that play out in the life of Joseph. They are still together, praise the Lord, but there is a division that is there within the family.

So there is the day of physical death, the day of family division and thirdly there is another son, Rueben, who has drank from the same poisonous well as his father, self-promotion. Rueben is the first born and the first born is supposed to take over the family. Rueben isn't waiting for his father to die. This is a power play. Have you ever noticed in our country our sex, politics and power go together? There is nothing new under the sun. That's the way it happened in the Middle East. One of the ways you would make clear your ascendancy in power was to take the wives and concubines of the one whom you were exercising dominion over. The Bible is full of this tactic. There are about seven or eight times this is affirmed in the Bible but I'll just show you one time.

Let's look in II Samuel. Was there a king in Israel who wanted to usurp his father? Yes it was Absalom. Absalom wanted to take King David's place instead of it going to Solomon. What did he do to accomplish that? II Samuel 16:20-21 says [20] Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give your counsel. What shall we do?" [21] Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house, and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be

strengthened.” This was a political power play, not a sexual escapade, to take the man’s wife and concubine to declare your ascendancy over them.

So there is the day of physical death which includes the four funerals. The wages of sin is death. There is a day of family division because of the sins that have gone throughout this family. Now there is another day of another son drinking from the poisonous well of self-reliance and self-promotion. Who are the two that did it before Rueben? It was Simeon and Levi who had taken upon themselves the vengeance of their sister, Jacob’s daughter, and had massacred an entire city. Now Simeon and Levi are followed by Rueben who raised himself up by taking the wife and concubine, even the mother of two of his brothers, attempting to make Jacob a stench to strengthen others to draw them to himself, but it doesn’t work. The family is still together. The twelve sons are listed.

You see sin and its consequences but take hope. God’s grace is still at work for His power, His purposes and His people. For instance, there are four deaths that take place but even here in the face of death look at the hope of God’s grace, power and victory. Christ hasn’t come yet and all that we know in the victory of the New Testament, they just have a promise that a Victor will come. Yet in the midst of all of that, that has taken place even there is the bud of the victory of grace. For instance, as Rachel is dying notice a word of comfort – God has heard your prayers. God has been gracious to you.

Notice the hope in the way that Jacob is dealing with the death of his beloved wife. He will be sorrowful his whole life. He will not forget her but while he will grieve and be sorrowful, he will not grieve in despair. So when his wife, as much as he loved, named the child Ben-oni (the son of my suffering), he said ‘no, for when I look at that child and I grieve over the loss of my wife, I will not grieve in despair, son of my suffering” and he changes the name to Benjamin (son of my strength). In the midst of death is life. God has given life. He will grieve but he will not grieve as one who has no hope. He will grieve and know the Hope of life, the gift of God.

Also notice, one of my favorite phrases in the Old Testament and it’s the third time mentioned in the book of Genesis – ‘and was gathered to his people.’ That wasn’t the end for he was gathered to his people, even then is the bud of the knowledge of eternal life with the people of God and the presence of God. Death gathered Isaac to his people and it wasn’t the end. I can’t go to my daddy anymore. Jacob knows that but his dad has an everlasting life for he has been gathered to his people. Here in the midst of this death is this constant statement of life.

Not only is the sting of death and sin is gone, hope is there and look at the dignity of the death of the burial with the hope of eternal life. There is the comfort of life in the midst of death. Notice the monument that is put there for we will remember what God has done in the life of this woman. What guidance there is for us there

today but I can tell you that every time I stand at a grave my heart is wrenched as I look out at tears, people who are hurting as they have lost a child or loved one and it shows me how much I hate sin. I wouldn't be here without sin, spiritual death, physical death and eternal death.

One man said to me once "Harry, would you pray for me to have a natural death?" I said "No." He said, "Why not?" I said "There is no such thing as a natural death." You don't find death in Genesis 1 and 2. You don't find death until you find sin. The wages of sin is death. Death isn't natural. It's unnatural. It's an enemy. It's an intruder but I can say absent with the body is to be present with the Lord, yet that is just the intermediate state because when the Lord comes back we'll have a new heavens and a new earth coming. They went to the land of the living when they died and you're in the land of the dying. They are home and you're the one that is not home yet, because grace has won the victory. Even though God's revelation is just starting to come out and it's pointing to Christ, even then that Hope and victory over every enemy including death is there. I will not fear in death or life for my Savior is sovereign and His grace is reigning.

Secondly, look at grace at work in the face of death. Look at the dignity. Look at the little evidences of grace. In God's grace Jacob was able to get home before his dad died. Can you imagine that reunion? There are a lot of unsaid things. I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall that day. Esau is an unbeliever but in God's common grace Esau has been reconciled to Jacob. When Jacob left Esau wanted to kill him but when Jacob came back God in His common grace moved upon Esau's heart to be reconciled to Jacob. Now the two brothers are together and they are able to enjoy a moment of together burying their father. You can see God's grace at work and the testimony that is all over the passage.

Just one more thought here. The sting of death and its sin is gone in Jesus Christ. Grace is at work in the face of death. Even the unthinkable, incest, the oldest son takes one of Jacob's concubines and the whole point is to takeover. He doesn't and the family stays together. There is still some division here, the family stays together and God's purposes are furthered. I get so excited when I see things like this. God is sovereign and He said He would make a covenant with Abraham and then He was going to move that covenant through Abraham's seed. Normally in the Middle East that covenant right and blessing would have gone from Abraham to Ishmael but God said 'no, it will be through the son of Sarah.' God overruled the culture and sovereignly said Sarah's son, Isaac. Then Isaac has two children and the covenant should normally go to the first born, Esau but it went to Jacob. Even in all the conniving of his mother and himself, God's purposes still stand and the covenant goes to the second born.

Now Jacob has twelve sons and God is going to give the covenant line and blessing to Judah who is the fourth son. Who were the sons ahead of Judah? The sons ahead of Judah were Rueben, Simeon and Levi and their sin removed the covenant blessing. Let's look at Genesis 49 to see how God's purposes are

still being done. God won't be stopped and God even takes the sin of Simeon and Levi when they massacred an entire city to remove them from the covenant line of blessing and the blessing of Jacob. Then God removed Reuben. Genesis 49 is when Jacob gives his blessing to his twelve sons. Genesis 49:3–7 says

[3] "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. [4] Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it—he went up to my couch! [5] "Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. [6] Let my soul come not into their council; O my glory, be not joined to their company. For in their anger they killed men, and in their willfulness they hamstringed oxen. [7] Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.

So Jacob removes Reuben because of his sin. He removes Simeon because of his sin and Levi because of his. What does that do? That gets to God's purpose which was to bring the line of blessing through Judah, the fourth born. Genesis 49:8–12 says

[8] "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. [9] Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? [10] The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. [11] Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. [12] His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.

Here Jacob says "Here comes the line of the Redeemer. It's going to be through Judah." This will show up in the first king and his name is David, but we're going to One greater than David. He is our Victor, Jesus Christ, the Lion of Judah. He has the scepter and He rules and reigns. Death is all over Genesis 35 but look at the victory of our God in the midst of it.

Here is my closing thought. Hate sin and hate it with everything. It has consequences attended to it but know when you falter, not if, you have a Redeemer and His grace is glorious. He will not only forgive you and redeem you but watch what He does as the story of His glory is still written through our lives as we submit to Him by grace as He accomplishes His purposes. In fact, death becomes the invitation to life. Do you want eternal life? Then come to Christ. It is an invitation to die. You die to yourself and you live unto Christ.



This Christ has won the victory for you and He by His grace, for His glory will bring all of His people home. Some will come soaring on the wings of an eagle and some will come crawling to the finish line. Some will come being carried by some others but God's people will get to that finish line. He will bring them all and whether they are on the wings of an eagle or someone is bringing them, the power of the Spirit of God has come upon them and when they all show up there, they will all show up with a limp, just like Jacob but they will all be there. Jesus said "I lose not one." Our Savior is our victory. Praise His Name forever! Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You so much for the time we could be together in Your Word. I pray that everyone reading this will one day be gathered to Your people in the new heavens and the new earth where there is no weeping and crying and no sin. The means of grace, accountability groups, and fleeing temptation, we won't have to worry about. Oh to think of the new heavens and the new earth, please come quickly Lord Jesus. You haven't come yet so there is room at the cross for everyone reading this. If you have never come to Jesus today would be a great day for that. Say, "Lord, I know I'm a sinner and I come to Jesus Christ as my Savior. I repent of my sins and put my trust in You." Make that prayer. This is not an invitation to church membership. It is an invitation to Christ, to

glory, to heaven and He is ready to receive you. His grace is greater than all our sin and no matter what sin has brought in consequences our God can raise you up and rewrite your life for His glory. Come to Him. O God may Your people know the victory is Jesus for I pray in His Name, Amen.

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