

BIBLICAL TRUTH: Earrings Are NOT Sinful

Understanding Genesis 35:4 IN CONTEXT

By Presiding Bishop Dwight Reed

There is great controversy regarding Genesis 35:4 but the scripture is clear in its meaning. It is necessary to understand that neither one's Bishop nor Pastor possesses the authority to provide a personal interpretation of these texts. 2 Peter 1:20 says, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation." Historically, the church has used much scripture out of context, leading many individuals to support or defend beliefs based on teachings from trusted leaders, regardless of their accuracy. Let me be clear, this is no disrespect to our fathers and mothers in the gospel who taught what they understood at the time. Nevertheless, we ought to be unwavering in our allegiance to the scripture itself, prioritizing it above any individual interpretation. We should not allow our respect for our leaders to overshadow our allegiance to the Word of God. I encourage all individuals to seek spiritual enlightenment in their engagement with scripture. Let us place the truth of the Word at the forefront of our understanding. I pray God give you spiritual revelation in all scripture.

ADDRESSING A COMMON MISCONCEPTION:

Many religious teachings claim that wearing earrings is inherently sinful, using Genesis 35:4 as their proof text. However, this interpretation misses the crucial context and contradicts other clear biblical passages. The sin was NOT the earrings themselves, but the IDOL GODS STAMPED IN THEM.

THE KEY SCRIPTURES:

GENESIS 35:4 - THE PROBLEM

"So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem."

EZEKIEL 16:12 - THE PROOF THAT EARRINGS ARE NOT SINFUL

"I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head."

If earrings were inherently sinful, would God say HE PUT THEM on His bride? This passage demolishes the legalistic teaching that earrings are wrong.

WHAT WAS THE ACTUAL PROBLEM IN GENESIS 35:4?

The earrings were removed because they bore images of pagan deities. These were not simple jewelry - they were:

- Engraved or stamped with images of false gods
- Used as religious amulets for "protection"
- Symbols of allegiance to pagan deities
- Part of idolatrous worship practices

The command was to remove "foreign gods" AND the earrings because the earrings CONTAINED images of those foreign gods. The issue was IDOLATRY, not jewelry.

OTHER BIBLICAL PROOF THAT EARRINGS ARE ACCEPTABLE:

1. REBEKAH RECEIVED JEWELRY (Genesis 24:22)

"Then the man took a gold nose ring weighing a beka and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels."

- Part of God's providential plan for Isaac's wife
- No condemnation associated with it

2. JEWELRY GIVEN FOR THE TABERNACLE (Exodus 35:22)

"All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds: brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments."

- Earrings were given as holy offerings to build God's dwelling place
- If earrings were sinful, God would not have accepted them

3. THE BRIDE OF CHRIST IS ADORNED (Isaiah 61:10)

"As a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."

- God uses jewelry as a positive metaphor

THE CRUCIAL DISTINCTION:

✓ ACCEPTABLE: Earrings and jewelry worn as adornment

✗ SINFUL: Jewelry bearing images of false gods or used in idolatrous worship

SCHOLARLY CITATIONS - TOP 5 BIBLICAL SCHOLARS:

1. VICTOR AVIGDOR HUROWITZ (Ben-Gurion University)

"Who Lost an Earring? Genesis 35:4 Reconsidered," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 62:1 (2000)

- Provides extensive analysis of why earrings were grouped with foreign gods
- Examines ancient Near Eastern parallels where earrings bore idolatrous imagery

2. NAHUM M. SARNA

The JPS Torah Commentary, Genesis (Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 240

- "The earrings are no ordinary pieces of jewelry but talismans adorned with pagan symbols"

3. MOSHE WEINFELD

Olam ha-Tanakh 1: Bereshit (Tel Aviv: Davidson-Iti, 1993), p. 197

- "As in the case of other pieces of jewelry, earrings...were often made in the shape of small figurines which also served as amulets"

4. ADAM CLARKE (Methodist Theologian)

Clarke's Commentary on Genesis 35:4

- "Ear-rings were certainly worn as amulets and charms, first consecrated to some god, or formed under some constellation, on which magical characters and images were drawn"

5. JOHN GILL (Baptist Theologian)

Gill's Exposition of Genesis 35:4

- "Not the earrings that women wore in common...but either which were worn in the ears of the strange gods or idols...or rather in the ears of the idolaters themselves, worn by them in a superstitious way, having the images of these idols on them"

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE - TOP 5 SOURCES:

1. WILLIAM W. HALLO (Yale Assyriologist)

"Cult Statue and Divine Image: A Preliminary Study," in *Scripture in Context* 2 (Eisenbrauns, 1983), p. 16

- Earrings were "among the typical accoutrements of cult statues by Neo-Sumerian times at the end of the [third] millennium [B.C.E.]"
- Documents that placing earrings on idol statues was common practice

2. ORA NEGBI (Archaeologist)

Canaanite Gods in Metal: An Archaeological Study of Ancient Syro-Palestinian Figurines (Tel Aviv University, 1976)

- Catalogued numerous metal figurines of Canaanite deities wearing earrings
- Items #1453, #1384, #1563 show gods with earrings as divine adornment

3. W.F. LEEMANS

Ishtar of Lagaba and Her Dress (Leiden: Brill, 1952)

- Documents how goddess statues were adorned with jewelry including earrings
- Shows earrings were part of religious regalia in ancient temples

4. JEAN BOTTÉRO (French Assyriologist)

"Les inventaires de Qatna," *Revue d'assyriologie* 43 (1949)

- Inventory texts from ancient Qatna listing jewelry used to adorn cult statues
- Proves earrings were ceremonial items for idols

5. PIERRE AMIET and MAURICE LAMBERT

"Objets inscrits de la Collection Foroughi," Revue d'Assyriologie 67 (1973), pp. 157–162

- Documents inscribed jewelry with religious significance from ancient Near East
- Shows religious symbols were commonly engraved on jewelry

WHAT ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN EARRINGS CONTAINED:

Archaeological and textual evidence shows that earrings in Jacob's time often featured:

- Images of moon gods, sun gods, and fertility deities
- Sacred symbols associated with Canaanite worship (Baal, Asherah)
- Crescent moons (moon worship)
- Magical inscriptions and protective symbols
- Amulets believed to provide protection or power

These were NOT decorative choices - they were religious statements of allegiance to false gods.

THE CONTEXT OF GENESIS 35:

Jacob's household was preparing to go to Bethel to build an altar to God. Before this sacred journey, Jacob commanded complete purification:

"Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." (Genesis 35:2-3)

The household had acquired these idolatrous items from:

- Their time in Paddan Aram (where Laban practiced idolatry)
- The plunder from Shechem (Genesis 34)
- Rachel's family (she had stolen household gods - Genesis 31:19)
- Cultural influence from Canaanite neighbors

WHY JACOB BURIED THEM:

Jacob didn't simply discard these items - he buried them under the oak at Shechem. This symbolized:

- Complete separation from idolatry
- Permanent removal from the household
- Purification before approaching God
- A covenant act of dedication to the Lord alone

WHAT THE BIBLE ACTUALLY TEACHES:

1. THE HEART MATTERS MORE THAN OUTWARD APPEARANCE

"The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

2. MODESTY AND INNER BEAUTY ARE PRIORITIZED

"Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit." (1 Peter 3:3-4)

Note: This doesn't forbid jewelry - it prioritizes inner character over obsession with external adornment.

3. KEEP YOURSELF FROM IDOLS

"Dear children, keep yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:21)

The command is against idols - not against earrings.

ANSWERING LEGALISTIC ARGUMENTS:

ARGUMENT: "Genesis 35:4 proves earrings are sinful."

ANSWER: No, it proves earrings WITH IDOL GODS STAMPED IN THEM are sinful. The context is removing foreign gods. God Himself gave earrings in Ezekiel 16:12.

ARGUMENT: "1 Timothy 2:9 forbids gold jewelry."

ANSWER: Paul's concern was excessive, ostentatious display showing wrong priorities, not simple adornment. If this banned all gold jewelry, it would also ban braided hair and nice clothes.

ARGUMENT: "We should be separate from the world."

ANSWER: True separation is from sin and idolatry, not from beauty. God adorned His people with jewelry (Ezekiel 16:12). Separation means holiness in heart and conduct.

ARGUMENT: "Our church/denomination doesn't allow earrings."

ANSWER: Church traditions are not the same as biblical commands. If God gave earrings to His bride, human traditions cannot make them sinful.

MODERN BIBLE TRANSLATIONS THAT ACKNOWLEDGE THIS:

1. AMPLIFIED BIBLE

Genesis 35:4: "So they gave Jacob all the [idols and images of the] foreign gods they had and the rings which were in their ears [worn as charms against evil]"

2. THE MESSAGE

Genesis 35:4: "They turned over to Jacob all the alien gods they'd been holding on to, along with their lucky-charm earrings"

3. NEW LIVING TRANSLATION

Genesis 35:4: "So they gave Jacob all their pagan idols and earrings"

PRACTICAL APPLICATION FOR TODAY:

Modern "earrings with gods stamped on them" might include:

- Religious symbols from other faiths worn as fashion or "good luck"
- Astrological or occult imagery in jewelry or clothing
- Items that represent spiritual allegiances contrary to Christ
- Cultural or fashion trends that normalize false spirituality

EXAMINE YOUR JEWELRY:

- Does it bear symbols of false religions or occult imagery?
- Is it associated with pagan worship or superstition?
- Does it represent spiritual allegiances contrary to Christ?

If yes, remove it - just as Jacob's household did.

EXAMINE YOUR HEART:

- Is your identity found in Christ or in your appearance?
- Are you obsessed with outward adornment at the expense of inner character?
- Is wearing (or not wearing) jewelry a matter of pride or judgment?

FREEDOM IN CHRIST:

- You ARE free to wear earrings, necklaces, rings, and other jewelry
- You are NOT free to wear items that honor false gods
- Prioritize inner beauty and godly character over external appearance
- Do not judge others based on cultural preferences about jewelry

CROSS REFERENCES:

- Exodus 20:3-4 - "You shall have no other gods before me"
- Exodus 35:22 - Earrings given for the Tabernacle
- Genesis 24:22 - Rebekah receives jewelry
- Ezekiel 16:12 - God gives earrings to His bride
- Isaiah 61:10 - The bride adorns herself with jewels
- 1 Samuel 16:7 - God looks at the heart
- 1 Peter 3:3-4 - Prioritize inner beauty
- 1 John 5:21 - Keep yourselves from idols

CONCLUSION:

The scholarly and archaeological evidence overwhelmingly supports that the earrings in Genesis 35:4 had images of pagan gods stamped, engraved, or molded into them. This is grounded in:

- ✓ Academic biblical scholarship
- ✓ Archaeological discoveries
- ✓ Ancient Near Eastern parallels
- ✓ Historical Jewish interpretation
- ✓ Commentary tradition spanning centuries

EARRINGS ARE NOT SINFUL. What IS sinful is:

- Idolatry and worship of false gods
- Wearing items that bear images of pagan deities
- Using jewelry for occult or superstitious purposes
- Excessive vanity and obsession with outward appearance
- Judging others based on personal preferences

God Himself adorned His people with earrings (Ezekiel 16:12). Jewelry was used in building the tabernacle (Exodus 35:22). The issue in Genesis 35:4 was the IDOL GODS STAMPED IN THE EARRINGS, not the earrings themselves.

Don't add to God's Word by making rules He didn't make. Focus on the heart, pursue inner beauty and godly character, and keep yourself from idols - not from earrings.

MEMORY VERSES:

"I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head." - Ezekiel 16:12

"The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." - 1 Samuel 16:7

"Dear children, keep yourselves from idols." - 1 John 5:21

Remember: The Bible condemns idolatry, not earrings. The earrings in Genesis 35:4 were condemned because they bore images of false gods - that was the sin. Keep the focus where God places it - on the heart, not on human traditions about jewelry.