

How To Keep From Falling

The mortal sin of our age seems to be hypocrisy on the part of those we don't like. As a culture we tolerate a lot of insincerity unless we don't agree with someone's politics or moral views. Then if they don't always practice what they preach we jump all over them.

The truth is, none of us are remotely close to perfect and we have a tendency to stumble at times. Is there a way to learn to keep from falling? I believe the Bible gives us some enduring principles to strengthen our walk.

The sad truth is, God's people don't always live up to their calling. What's interesting is, God tells us about lots of those failures in the Bible. I firmly believe that whenever the Bible contains material that reflects really badly on God's people, it's a testimony to the fact that God's the ultimate author.

The American Atheist Press publishes a book called "The X-rated Bible." The product description reads: Incest, rape, adultery, exhibitionism, prostitution, homosexuality, abortion, mate swapping, bestiality -- it's all there in the book held sacred by three of the world's major religions. Originally published to reveal the hypocrisy of fundamentalists' attempts to censor and suppress the kind of material found throughout their own scriptures.

The X-Rated Bible quickly became the American Atheist Press' most notorious and best-selling book.

What's fascinating to me is, in their attempt to slander the Bible The American Atheist Press is really trumpeting the Bible's divine origin.

It's been said that men couldn't have written the Bible if they would have, and wouldn't have written the Bible if they could have.

They couldn't because the Bible contains hundreds of precise, definitive predictions about Israel, Jesus, and the non-Jewish nations. God gives names, dates, and places in His predictions so we can check them out. People don't predict the future with perfect accuracy.

And they wouldn't have if they could have because the Bible shows us that even

God's people are capable of committing any sin in the book. When people write a book promoting their cause they try to paint a rosy picture the last thing they want you to know is all their failures. The Bible gives the good, the bad, and the ugly.

The man that we're currently studying, Jacob and his descendants were sinful people.

They were the forefathers of the Jewish people. But God puts their offences right out there for all to see. If you're trying to build a case for your religion you definitely wouldn't include the chapters we're going to look at today. Especially chapter 34.

The only way all of the events in the Old Testament could have become included is that the ultimate author of scripture is God who speaks the truth regardless of how it reflects on Him or His people.

Think about that. God actually allows His name to be called into question by exposing the sins of His people.

When God spoke to Jacob in Genesis 32 and said *Your name shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel*, the obvious meaning was, from that time on he was supposed to be known by his new name only.

When God changed others people's names like Abram to Abraham and Saul to Paul the new name stuck and the old one wasn't used again. The new name was used to illustrate the new person God had made them.

But with Jacob, we find something very interesting. After he met God, the name "Jacob" occurs 45 times, while the name "Israel" appears only 23 times. God goes on to call himself the God of "Abraham, Isaac & Jacob" not the God of "Abraham, Isaac, & Israel."

Why didn't the name "Jacob" disappear completely and "Israel" take its place? (The nation was consistently called Israel, but not the man) Here's why. Because even though Jacob had taken a giant spiritual leap in his life, he still allowed his old nature to take over.

In Jacob's case he was guilty of unbelief.

Now just to clarify, unbelief is different from disbelief. If we are guilty of unbelief it means we know the truth but don't follow it. We don't appropriate by faith what's available to meet our needs.

Disbelief means we don't believe the truth at all. We can't appropriate anything because nothing's there to appropriate. Jacob was guilty of unbelief.

There are four steps backward that Jacob makes after making major spiritual progress. They're given to us in chapters 33 & 34.

Open Bible to Genesis 33 Page 32

We're obviously not going to be able to look at all 51 verses in detail but we'll look at the events as they took place.

I. Unbelief Leads To Fear

The first step is in Jacob's meeting with Esau.

Read verses 1-3

In chapter 32 Jacob met God face to face and been blessed. He had like an amazing spiritual growth spurt but now he was going to meet his brother Esau whom he'd cheated 20 years ago.

Jacob had definitely been filled with fear, but after his spiritual encounter his confidence was renewed. He crossed over ahead of his family to meet his brother and Esau's 400 troops.

It's commendable that he's willing to go out in front and not stand behind his family but look what order Jacob places them in behind him.

1st - The handmaids and their children.

2nd - Leah & her children.

3rd - Rachel and Joseph.

These are all his kids but he put the more "expendable ones" up front where they would be the first to meet any hostility from Esau. That would give the others, especially his beloved Rachel and Joseph a chance to get away just in case. No

wonder Joseph's older brothers hated him. They could legitimately say, "Dad always liked you best."

Isn't interesting that Jacob's still planning. It's amazing how deeply entrenched in the human heart is a mistrust of God. His name has been changed to "Israel" but he's still acting like "Jacob." Notice he bowed himself 7 times. He would take a few steps and bow, take a few more steps and bow again.

What a scene this must have been. There was Esau, the wild, hairy hunter sitting on his Arabian stallion gazing down at his brother. Behind him were 400 armed men.

There was the little group of wives and children. Still arranged as Jacob had placed them, probably scared to death. There were some of Jacob's shepherds, who were pretty tough guys on their own but not any match for Esau's armed men.

And then there was Jacob bowing and scraping, bowing and advancing, and bowing again, bobbing up and down like a cork on waves.

This was all in excess of even the customary oriental courtesy. Jacob still had that sense of insecurity about him.

Now you might say, "Well that is only human. If you were looking in the teeth of 400 armed men and someone who had vowed to kill you, you would be scared too."

But that's really the whole point, isn't it? It was a human reaction. God had promised Jacob that He'd protect him, so Jacob really had nothing to worry about. His name had been changed to Israel. He was God's prince.

God was in complete charge of all circumstances and Jacob was to walk in that victory.

The Bible says, But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. I Corinthians 15:57

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Romans 8:37

God doesn't always remove the obstacles from our path, but He does give the power to deal with them.

Notice how God has been at work in this situation.

Read verse 4

All of Jacob's devising plans was unnecessary. God had fulfilled His promise like He always does. What a unique reunion. God was doing exactly what he had promised 20 years before at Bethel. And yet still Jacob can't totally believe.

There is some discussion that goes on and then Esau asks about the flocks and herds that Jacob had sent out in droves to meet him.

Look how Jacob answers in **verse 8**. *These are to find favor in the sight of my lord.* "These are a gift to appease you; to buy you off."

Esau answers... **Read verses 9 -10**

Why did Jacob insist so strongly that Esau take his gift?

The purpose was to guarantee Esau's continued friendship. Accepting a gift from your enemy was improper in that eastern culture. So if Esau accepted a gift from Jacob, it was a guarantee that the feud was over and that they'd live in peace.

Think about how Jacob presses Esau to take the gift. What's that showing? It's evident that he still wasn't fully confident that God was going to protect him. He was still trusting in his own plans and resources.

The second step in Jacob's unbelief comes in the midst of this reunion.

I. Unbelief Leads To Fear

II. Unbelief Leads To Hypocrisy

Esau says lets go back now and Jacob says, OK but you go ahead, I can't drive my cattle and family as fast as you can ride.

Esau even offers to leave a few men back to protect Jacob but Jacob sends them all on ahead.

Read verse 16 & 17

Jacob led Esau to believe he would follow him to Seir but instead he went to Succoth which is actually the other direction, back on the other side of the Jabbok.

This was Jacob's second major step in backsliding after meeting God. Because of unbelief and fear he lied to Esau. Jacob was afraid of what Esau might do so he resorted to deceit.

I wonder what Esau must have thought about the character of his “spiritual” brother. He could talk about God and spiritual things, but he still slipped back in behaving like God wasn’t really a part of his life.

Words that aren't supported by actions tend to turn other people away from God.

The 3rd step in Jacob's backsliding from his experience with God at is that he settled down and stopped short of obeying God.

I. Unbelief Leads To Fear

II. Unbelief Leads To Hypocrisy

III. Unbelief Leads To Compromise

It was in Bethel that God had appeared to Jacob on the 1st night after he had left the house of his father Isaac 20 years before.

In chapter 31 God appeared to him 20 years later and said I'm the God of Bethel. Go back.

Then in chapter 35 God is going to say to Jacob *Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there.* Genesis 35:1

Obviously God wanted Jacob in Bethel, but Jacob had other ideas.

Read verses 17-20

By this time he's just a days journey from Bethel but he still stopped short of total obedience.

Jacob actually bought a piece of property that God had promised him by faith. The problem was his faith was too small.

I'm sure that if we would have been there to ask Jacob why he chose to settle at Shechem rather than Bethel he would have had some good reasons.

He might have said, "First of all I don't want to get too close to Esau. He's received me back but he's a hot-head. You can't be sure of what he might do. Not only that, but I have sheep, goats and cattle to think about.

They need pasture and there is no better pasture in this entire region than the fields around Shechem."

If we would press him a bit, Jacob might even have admitted "We've been living like nomads for years, now; I'd like to see us settle down where there is a little bit of civilization - on the edge of Shechem."

Jacob wanted to settle down. That is why he "pitched his tent before the city." It's why he built an altar. Here at last, his pilgrimage was over. He was back in Canaan, and he was going to put down roots.

Partial obedience is unsatisfactory to God. In the book of I Samuel there is an account of King Saul that vividly portrays what God thinks of partial obedience.

God told King Saul to destroy the Amelikes and all their possessions. Saul and the people decided to keep the best sheep and cattle.

God sent the prophet Samuel in to meet Saul who said, *I have performed the commandment of the Lord.*

Then Samuel said, *What then is this bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?* If you did what God said to do how come it sounds like Old MacDonald's farm around here?

And this is Saul's answer. *The people spared the best to sacrifice to the Lord.* Hey, we know that God said to destroy them all, but we kept the best to sacrifice to Him (and a few for ourselves of course).

God's prophet Samuel gives the divine principle. *Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.*

Jacob built an altar. He even called it “God, the God of Israel.” It sounded good but it was Jacob, not Israel at work.

God's not concerned with our worship if our life isn't right before Him. God wants our worship but if it isn't from an obedient life then it isn't really worship at all.

Jacob was backsliding. He was doubting God's promises. He wanted to be near the city and near the people of the land, rather than truly near His God. His altar turned out to be a facade. It was just like going to church and going through the motions of Christianity when your heart's set on disobedience to God's revealed Word.

Well, Jacob certainly has lost some ground in his spiritual life hasn't he?

Remember, a big part of the reason why these things are in the Bible is to teach us. His life ought to stand as a solemn warning that even a mountain top type experience in our walk with God doesn't guarantee we'll stand tomorrow.

From the day we trust Jesus Christ as our personal Savior until the day we go home to be with the Lord we need to walk in the Spirit, walk by faith, rooted and grounded in Christ. We all have the “Jacob” down inside.
The “old man” or “old nature” wants to pull us down.

Jacob was being pulled down. He hasn't been called “Israel” yet but since he met God and had his name changed he's been called “Jacob” 6 times already.

Now in chapter 34 we find his 4th step in his backsliding process.

I. Unbelief Leads To Fear

II. Unbelief Leads To Hypocrisy

III. Unbelief Leads To Compromise

IV. Unbelief Leads To Tragic Consequences

Several of the commentaries that are more of a sermon style skip over chapter 34. In Leupold's commentary under homiletic suggestions (sermon ideas) he writes “We may well wonder if any man who had proper discernment ever drew a text from this chapter. We cannot offer homiletical suggestions for it's treatment.”

Genesis 34 is definitely in the “X-rated Bible. It deals with seduction, scheming, and ultimately murder. And yet we can't just skip over it.

God is honest and straightforward about the sins of his people. His prophets write simply and factually about these incidents without drawing us into sinful thoughts. And they do it so that we can learn from the examples of others.

We're not going to read through this whole chapter but here's the story line: Diana, Jacob's only daughter, wanted to see the sights of Shechem. Besides that, she had 11 brothers and probably wanted a few girls her own age to hang out with.

But when Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the country, saw her he took her and forcibly had sexual relations with her. He wanted to marry the girl so he sent his father to try to get her hand in marriage.

The sons of Jacob said, "OK, we'll intermarry with you if you circumcise all your males. God told us to circumcise all our males. If you agree we can intermarry.

Haman and Shechem went to the men of the city and said, "Let's do what they ask. "

Look at their ulterior motive, **verse 23**

They were saying let's intermarry and we'll take them over.

So all the males of the city were circumcised and while they were debilitated from the pain of that operation Simeon and Levi came in and killed the men and plundered the city.

You can see why Ed Orner was having trouble picking the songs for this service! What do you do with that?

God had given Jacob the responsibility for the actions of his family. He was the leader. He was to be authority in his home. He was to be the priest for the family.

The problem was, he doubted God, lied to Esau, and was living out of the revealed will of God. He tried to act religious and set up an altar but I'm sure the children picked up on his less than up-right attitude.

Now his daughter's out on her own, but beyond that when the trouble comes Jacob seems to back out of the picture.

In verse 6 Hamor went out to Jacob to speak to him, but it's the sons of Jacob that he ends up speaking with. In fact, Jacob didn't even know about the revenge enacted by his sons until after the atrocity had been committed.

No wonder he's called "Jacob" 10 times in this chapter, but never referred to as Israel.

There's some striking things in this chapter that are obviously there for our admonition.

1. Parents watch out! You can play church and pretend Christianity but your children will pay a price. If Jacob would have been in Bethel where God wanted him none of this would have ever happened.

2. Co-existence with evil is in direct opposition to the principles of good. God didn't want this fledgling group of Jews to intermarry with the people of the land.

3. This wasn't a case of some poor nobody with worthless sons. This was Hamor the King. This was Shechem, a place that Jacob admired. These were the civilized people. They were the educated, sophisticated city people. Jacob and his household were the drifters, the gypsies.

4. The culture's offers look so appealing. Hamor offered Jacob's family some appealing things. "Come make marriages with us. Where are your boys going to find wives out in the countryside. Dwell with us. An alliance with a powerful people will keep you safe. Dwell and trade in the land. You can acquire even more possessions."

5. As was the father, so were the sons. Jacob had been deceitful and now so were his sons. Jacob had taken things into his own hands, now his sons did the same.

Jacob had tricked his father 20 years earlier in an "end justifies the means" situation. Now the chickens were coming home to roost.

6. The sons of Jacob excused their actions by claiming that Shechem had treated their sister as a prostitute. But in their response they prostituted circumcision, which was the sign of the covenant, by their scheme.

Donald Barnhouse says: The sign of the covenant of God (circumcision) was

appropriated by Shechem to gratify his lust, by Hamor to increase his cattle (even unbelievers will agree to religious vows if they think they can profit), but the sons of Jacob used circumcision as a cover for murder.

All had sinful motives. But of all the evil, that of the sons of Jacob was the worst. They used the pledge of God's favor to cloak their murderous intentions.

Griffin Thomas writes: The heathen show up well by contrast with those who were professedly the people of God.

Then finally, #7. Jacob's old fears all came back on him again.

Read verse 30

In Chapter 32 Jacob repeated God's promise, *I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.* Genesis 32:12

Now he says, *I shall be destroyed, my household and I.*

In fact, he says "I" and "me" seven times but he doesn't mention God, he doesn't mention sin or wrong, just his own fears.

Jacob and his family had now hit bottom. They couldn't go any lower.

Why would God put such a passage as this in His word? Why would God put his reputation on the line? What could we possibly learn from such a horrible event?

Above everything else it's this: Every one of us has that old nature. Salvation comes from believing in Christ as Savior and when we do we are born again. We receive that new nature from God but the old never goes away. If we don't put our trust in God in a day by day dependence that old nature will rear up and begin to take over. And when that happens what a horrible price we have to pay.

How do we keep from falling? Let's learn today from Jacob's mistakes. Let's learn from God's Word so that we don't have to learn by experience.

Jacob hasn't acted much like Israel in these last 2 chapters. How about you? What defines you? Faith or unbelief and doubt?