

What Does it Mean for the Righteous Man to Fall Seven Times?

Description



Question:

If it is true that being righteous means to no longer sin, what does Proverbs 24:16 mean by saying, "The righteous man falls seven times, but rises up again"?

Answer: (by [Trent Wilde](#))

Of primary importance in this question is the issue of whether or not the life of a righteous person is without sin. Second to this is the issue of the meaning of the particular text in question. To find the truth to both issues, we must examine the texts which most specifically address each question. This principle is important to remember and abide by, for it will save the student from being swayed by side arguments against the plainest truths of Scripture. To state this principle more clearly, we offer this saying: when considering any matter, look for the answer where an answer is intentionally given. In other words, look to the places which speak specifically to the issue at hand.

To address the first issue, we will quote just one passage that deals specifically with this question:

Whoever commits sin also breaks the law, for sin is breaking the law. And you know that he [Jesus] was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. Everyone who abides with him does not sin; everyone who sins has neither seen him nor known him. Little children, let no one deceive you: The one who does righteousness is righteous, just as he [Jesus] is righteous. The one who commits sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was revealed: to destroy the works of the devil. Whoever is born of God does not commit sin, for his seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Everyone who does not righteousness — the one who does not love his brother — is not of God. — 1 John 3:4-10

This passage, along with others such as Romans 6 and John 8:33-37, should leave no question in the mind of the one who believes in the inspiration of the writers of scripture that the lives of the righteous are as free from sin, once [justified \(made righteous\)](#), as that of the Son of God himself. On this issue, we also point you to our study [The Lost Gospel of Christ](#).

At this point, no interpretation of any passage (including Proverbs 24:16) should sway the believer away from [the gospel of righteousness](#), for he knows it is true. The reader does find himself in somewhat of a conundrum, however, when he knows the truth of the gospel, but at the same time believes in the inspiration of the writers of [Proverbs](#). — Could it be that this text contradicts the gospel? — one might ask. Well, if it did come by Inspiration, it certainly could not, and if it does contradict, then it just as certainly did not come by inspiration. The only way to find the answer is to examine the context of the passage in question under the influence of the Spirit of Truth.

Do not lie in wait like the wicked against the place where the righteous live; do not assault his home. For though a righteous man may fall seven times, he gets up again, but the wicked will be brought down by calamity. Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and when he stumbles do not let your heart rejoice, lest Yahweh see it and be displeased and turn his wrath away from him. Do not fret because of evil people or be envious of wicked people, for the evil person has no future, and the lamp of the wicked will be extinguished. Fear Yahweh, my child, as well as the king, and do not associate with rebels, for suddenly their calamity will overtake them, and who knows the ruinous judgment the two of them can bring. — Proverbs 24:15-22

When reading the passage in context, it becomes apparent that the — falling — in question is not falling into sin, but rather falling by calamity. The same sentiment contained here is conveyed in the following passages:

The righteous man may have many troubles, but Yahweh delivers him from them all. • Psalm 34:19

We are experiencing trouble on every side, but are not crushed; we are perplexed, but not driven to despair; we are persecuted, but not abandoned; we are knocked down, but not destroyed, always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus may also be made manifest in our body. • 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

Besides this, there are also passages that do speak of •falling• in the sense of falling into sin, but these passages only serve to confirm for us that the righteous do not fall into sin. For example:

For whoever keeps the whole law, and yet falls at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. • James 2:10

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, • Jude 24

Therefore, brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never fall. • 2 Peter 1:10

We sincerely ask that anyone who at this point still finds himself resistant to the idea of a sin-free life for the righteous to honestly and thoroughly examine himself and ask the Spirit to show him why such resistance remains in his heart. While a sinless life is impossible in our own strength, all things are possible through Christ (Phil. 4:13).