

This is exactly what Jacob has wanted, his own God to control and force to bless him. God will not allow this; Jacob cannot force a victory over God.

Could God overpower Jacob – of course He could! Even Jacob recognises this. In the end, he marvels that he has escaped with his life! v30. But God won't overpower him. This is more than a physical wrestling. It is a metaphor for Jacob's life; he has wrestled with Esau, Isaac, Laban and been caught between his wives' competition. In a strange way, Jacob is wrestling with himself when he wrestles with God. He is wrestling for his identity and future. He is wrestling for a new self, a new nature and a new name. This wrestling, is a way to explain something spiritual in a way we can understand. In this wrestling Jacob yields to God. This is God's answer to the deceiver Jacob.

**Who changes in this encounter, God or Jacob?**  
**How does Jacob change?**

Firstly, God cripples Jacob: he is broken. But again, this is not just a physical thing. It is his nature that is broken, the deceit, pride, self-sufficiency and ambition that have marred his life. God has been working for this moment for the last 40 years. In a sense, this event is what God and Jacob have already been doing all Jacob's life. Jacob comes away with a limp as a reminder of his experience and commitment. "Jacob is no longer the strong victorious controller of the divine but Israel who is totally dependent on God's grace and lame" (de Pury)

Never trust anyone who does not walk with a limp. (You are not good for anything until you have been broken by God.)

God will not force Jacob to change. This is deeply profound. God does not and will not override human free will. In the Creation account, Genesis makes it very clear that human choice is very important to God and his eternal purposes. Ultimately, the cross is the cost God paid for His insistence on human free will. Perhaps you will understand that in the cross, God is wrestling with you until you change, until you leave behind an old life, win God's blessing and receive a new name.

**Jacob is given a new name. What is it? v28**  
**What does it mean 'you are no longer Jacob'?**  
**What did Jacob mean?**

Jacob has to admit to who he is "Jacob" v27 cf 27:36. In the First Testament, a name is more than a means of identification; it is indicative of your nature and character. A new name means a new character. The two names represent two natures. Israel has at least three possible meanings.

Israel = helped by God.  
Israel = prince with God  
Israel = Contends with God.

**Which of these do you think it is?**

**Who wins this wrestling match?**

**Who loses?**

This question has been very important throughout Jacob's life. The point here is that no one loses, nor is this a draw. Both God and Jacob win. This is a new type of struggle.

**How does God win?**

**How does Jacob win?**

Effectively, this is Jacob's salvation experience. At some time in our life all of us will wrestle with God; to avoid it is to stay unchanged, to embrace it is to become at once more than you were and less than you were.

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## Christian Church

### Jacob - Part 5 - Wrestling with God.

Jacob worked for his uncle Laban for seven years as a dowry for Leah and another seven years for Rachel. He has had at least 13 children during this time. At the end of fourteen years, Jacob goes to Laban and declares his intent to return home. Laban wants him to stay. Laban has grown wealthy through Jacob's work: he is a competent shepherd and it is clear that even though he still does not have a personal relationship with God, God has blessed him. Laban knows 'by divination' 30:27 (which tells us something about Laban's spiritual state) that Jacob is the reason his flocks have prospered.

They make a deal that Jacob will work for a share in Laban's flock. (speckled, spotted and streaked lambs). This deal works out very much to Jacob's advantage. Jacob thinks this is due to his cleverness 30:37-40, in fact, it was simply God's intervention. Jacob becomes very wealthy. He works another six years for Laban.

**Why did God bless Jacob?**  
**Why did God bless Laban because of Jacob?**  
**Can we still expect this kind of blessing?**  
**Do you expect God to bless your workplace?**  
**How will you help God to bless your workplace?**

**Read Genesis 31:1-21**  
**What were Laban's sons saying? Genesis 31:1**  
**Was this true?**  
**Why do you think they were concerned?**  
Twice he mentions that his father-in-laws attitude towards him has changed. Jacob can see the writing on the wall!

**What was Laban's attitude towards Jacob?**  
**What do you think it is now?**  
Laban had seen Jacob as someone to be used, but now he sees him as a threat.

At this point, God intervenes. **What does he tell Jacob to do? Genesis 31:3**  
**What were the risks in leaving Paddan Aram?**  
There are two risks: Laban does not want him to go, at least not with the flocks and grandchildren. He is in Paddan Aram for his own safety. Going back home means facing Esau and his past.  
**Why did Jacob have to go home?**

Facing our past and fronting up is an important part of finding our futures. For Jacob, this was a necessary growing thing, it was also an important part of fulfilling the promises.

**Does God protect you from doing what is right or from facing difficult situations?**  
No, He doesn't, but the promise to us is the same as the promise to Jacob. God will be with us v3. We do not face these things alone.

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 It is interesting to note how often Jacob mentions God in this passage. (vs3,5,7,9,11,13,16). We have seen this on his wives' lips before, but not his.  
**What does this suggest?**

It is also clear in this passage that Jacob attributes his success to God. When Jacob proposes to his wives that they leave, it appears he gives them a choice as to whether they will go with him: he certainly elicits their opinion.

 **What is their response?** Genesis 31:14-16  
**What is their attitude to Laban?**  
**What is their attitude towards each other?**

**Why doesn't Jacob tell Laban he is leaving?**  
**Does Laban escape the consequences of his treatment of Jacob and his daughters?**

 At this point, Rachel steals the family idols.  
**What possible reasons are there for her to do this and what would each indicate?**  
It has been suggested that possession of the family idols was linked to inheritance. Having the idols was symbolic of being the heir. If so, Rachel is stealing the birthright like Jacob stole the birthright. She is also expressing what she thinks of her father's treatment of her. It also reminds us that Laban's family although they know of YHWH, do not serve Him exclusively.

**What happens to the idols?** Genesis 35:2-4

**How long does it take Laban to realise Jacob has left & to catch up to him?** Genesis 31:24  
Sheep travel slowly: he was always going to get caught.

 **What does God say to Laban?** Genesis 31:24  
**What do you think would have happened if he had not done so?**  
**What is Laban's complaint?** Genesis 31:25-29  
**If Laban had behaved differently, do you think the outcome would have been different?**  
**Knowing the outcome, what advice would you have given Laban at the very start?**  
**In verse 42 Jacob makes an accusation against Laban. Is it true?**

 Jacob and Laban make a covenant. *Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." That is why it was called Galeed. It was also called Mizpah, because he said, "May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. Genesis 31:48-49*

This is not an act of friendship the way it is often quoted, but rather an agreement that they will not harm each other.

**What are the conditions?**

This is the second crisis in Jacob's life. Like the first, he has ended up running for his life, but this time it is not entirely his own fault.

 **How would you judge his actions in this incident?**  
**Is there evidence that he is growing?**  
**In what way has God been with him?**

Now the narrative changes, and Jacob begins to prepare for his forthcoming meeting with Esau.

 **Read Genesis 32:1-2**  
**This is an enigmatic event. What do you make of it?**  
This is reminiscent of his last meeting with God at Beit El.  
This is Jacob re-experiencing God's presence with him in a new way. (Wenham)  
Mahanaïm means two camps; it has military connotations  
**What do you think Jacob is supposed to take from this meeting?**  
Jacob sends a message to Esau to tell him he is returning.

 **Read Genesis 32:4-5**  
**What report did the messengers bring back?** v6  
**What was Jacob's response?** v7  
**What does Jacob do as a result?** v8

This gives another possible explanation of the vision, Jacob divides his family into two camps. This is the same word used in v2. Jacob takes this vision as guidance or at least inspiration.

 **What does Jacob do next?** v9-12  
**What do you make of this?**  
**What does Jacob do next?** v13-16, 19  
**What is his goal?** v20  
**How does he describe Esau?**  
**How does he describe himself?** v4  
**Was this a good idea?** Luke 16:16, Matthew 5:25  
**Does this tell us anything about Jacob?**

 This is about more than pacifying Esau: it looks like Jacob is trying to make restitution. Luke 19:8. The Jacob who once could only take can now give. Greed is no longer his master. He is still trying to protect himself and his family, but he is doing it by giving and by thinking about others. He is prepared to acknowledge Esau as Lord! Before, the whole story was about making sure that Jacob was lord. He does this even though the original prophecy and the blessing made him 'lord' and Esau servant. Jacob has learnt humility. He has also learnt that God's promises are given, not taken. He now seems to realise that he is who God makes him. He no longer needs to compete with his brother. Jacob uses the word face 5 times in reference to meeting Esau. He wants a restoration of the relationship, not just a cessation of hostility.  
**What does Jacob do next?** v22-23

 **The Night Attack**  
**Read Genesis 32:24-32.**

Jacob is alone, uncertain and afraid, very much the way we found him after he left home for the first time. But this encounter with God is very different from his first. The word to wrestle comes from the same root as the name of the place (Jacob is Jabboked), you may have noticed it is similar to Jacob's name, (same letters, different order). Before he faces his brother and makes peace with him, he must first face God and make peace. This is one of the most mysterious passages in the Bible. It is full of possibilities.

**On first reading, what do you make of it?**

 **Who does Jacob wrestle with v25?**  
**Who does Jacob wrestle with v30?** cf. Hosea 12:4  
**Why can't God overpower Jacob?** v25  
**Can Jacob overpower God?**  
**What does Jacob want from this encounter?**  
**What does God want from this encounter?**  
**How can Jacob be blessed?**

 *I will not let you go unless you bless me.* The purpose of God's striving with Jacob was so that God could bless him. Jacob cannot overcome God through struggle, something he has successfully done with everyone else. God will not let Jacob go and Jacob will not let God go.

Names are important in this account. Jacob wants to know God's name. God will not tell him. In ANE thought to know the name of a god was to have control of that god.