

• *Jacob faces the biggest crisis of his life*

As we have seen, Jacob is a naturally cunning and devious person. Through his experiences with Laban he has learned the folly of deceitfulness of character, although it has to be said that this aspect of his character has not been eradicated. On one occasion when Jacob had determined to trust God and act in honesty it had worked well. *‘My honesty will answer for me,’* Jacob had said ^{□1} and God had blessed him. But Jacob’s experiment with honesty still had not greatly changed his character, and now he was in the greatest crisis of his life. He has left Laban and cannot possibly go back there. Yet he has also heard that Esau is about to meet him and has four hundred men with him. The last time Jacob was in touch with Esau, Esau had been threatening to kill him. Jacob is afraid ^{□2}.

□1 30:33

□2 32:6–7

• *Jacob takes safety measures and prays – but he has no idea how Esau will respond*

Jacob does his best to take safety measures ^{□1} and he prays ^{□2}. Then he sends gifts to Esau hoping that Esau’s anger will be turned aside. But he has no idea how Esau will respond, and does not know what will happen. So far as he knows his life is still in great danger. He is being threatened with the loss of everything he has and the end of his life.

□1 32:7–8

□2 32:9–12

He comes to the Jabbok river. Over the other side of the river he can reckon he is in the land which God has promised to give to the seed of Abraham. God had promised to give that land to Jacob, but that happened more than twenty years previously and nothing of God’s promises had ever been fulfilled during those twenty years.

• *Will God’s promises go forward or be forfeited?*

Have you ever been in a critical situation, a time when it is ‘now or never’ in your life, a time where you hardly know whether you are facing life or death? Jacob is either going to come through this terrible time in his life or he is about to lose his life. The promises of God are either going to start going forward in the land God promised Jacob, or the promises are about to be forfeited altogether. The purpose of Jacob’s life is either about to move forward or it is about to be aborted. The question is: which way are things going to go? Jacob does not know.

The need - to be reconciled with Esau

If he is to achieve God’s purpose for his lifetime he must go to Canaan. He is now ready to renounce his underhanded, self-centred, self-reliant ways and begin to live on God. But if this is to happen he has to become reconciled with Esau.

1. He arranges to be alone

1. **He arranges to be alone.** He sends his family ahead ^{□1}. *‘Jacob was left alone’* ^{□2}. Jacob knows that he must deal with God in a very personal way.

□1 32:21b–

23

□2 32:24

2. God appears to him.

2. **God appears to him.** It is God who takes the initiative. It is always this way. At times when we are desperate God has a habit of stepping in. God appears to Jacob. A very tangible figure appears. Genesis 32:24 says *‘A man wrestled with him till daybreak.’* There is a fight, which is real and which is physical. This is not an ‘incarnation’; it is not like God’s becoming man in Jesus. It is actually an angel. Yet the angel appears in human form, and the angel is representing God. It becomes clear that the figure is God ^{□1}. Hosea 12:3 and 4 say *‘He struggled with God’* and *‘He struggled with the angel.’* This ‘angel’ is not like a ghost or a ‘spirit’. He has material form, and He starts wrestling with Jacob seeking to throw him to the ground. God has taken the initiative in dealing with Jacob.

□1 see 32:30

3. God fights with Jacob in a gentle way.

• *Gentle fighting - a parable of God's dealings with Jacob*

• *An invitation to admit defeat, abandon manipulative ways and allow God to be his guide*

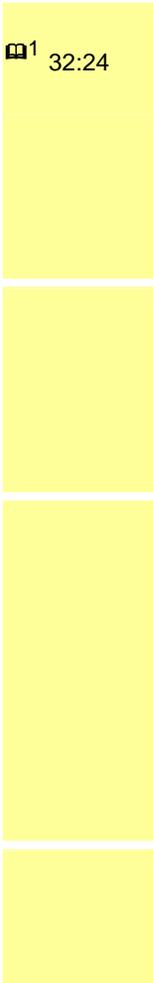
• *God wants our willing submission*

3. **God fights with Jacob in a gentle way.** 'A man wrestled with him until daybreak' ^{32:24} but the supernatural figure was not able to prevail against Jacob. What can this mean? Why is it that a supernatural figure representing God Himself is not able to defeat Jacob and throw him to the ground? God wrestles with Jacob all night, but He is not successful! The reason must be that God is being more gentle than He could be. God is quite capable of immobilising Jacob at any time He likes. His method of fighting is gentle. He will defeat Jacob only if Jacob gives in.

The battle with Jacob is quite literal, yet at the same time it is a parable of the way in which God has been dealing with Jacob for many years. For over twenty years God has been fighting to get Jacob to change his character and become a new man in God. But God's way of fighting has been gentle. He has not been forcing Jacob to surrender his devious ways.

Jacob refuses to give in or admit defeat. He withstands his mysterious assailant. 'The man' will have to fight more aggressively if he is to win. The angel of God wishes not to be totally seen. He has visited Jacob at night in order to veil his appearance. As the first streaks of dawn appear God wishes to leave, but He has still not defeated Jacob. Jacob is not the kind of person who gives in easily! Throughout his life God has not been **breaking** Jacob in a violent way. He has been gentle. He has been **inviting** Jacob to admit defeat, abandon his manipulative ways, and let God be his leader, his guide, his vindicator. The literal fight is typical of the spiritual battle God has been having with Jacob for many years.

God is restraining Himself. God wants to change us, but it is possible for God to fight with us and not be winning! God wants our **willing** submission. He wants us to surrender to Him **without** His having to knock us down or injure us.



	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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