

Fighting to change Jacob's character

4. When God's gentle fighting does not succeed, He uses a more forceful method

5. Jacob is defeated but becomes more desperate than ever for God's blessing

• He confesses that he is 'Grasper' by name and 'Grasper by nature

6. Jacob gets victory by being defeated by God

• The promises given to Jacob long ago are to go ahead

• Jacob knows he has entered into a deeper fellowship with God

• God will not reveal His name

As we have seen, the battle with Jacob is a parable of the way in which God has been dealing with Jacob for many years. God has been fighting to get Jacob to change his character and become a new man in God. But Jacob is not the kind of person who gives in easily!

4. When God's gentle fighting does not succeed, He uses a more forceful method. Jacob refuses to admit defeat. He withstands his mysterious enemy, and so 'the man' has to fight more aggressively. With supernatural power he touches Jacob's thigh and injures him. Jacob is defeated. Jacob is now aware – if he has not been aware before – that his mysterious attacker is a supernatural being. He knows that God has defeated him. God has increased the forcefulness of His ways with Jacob and is compelling Jacob to surrender.

This is what God can do to us if we will not yield to His ways willingly. God is being more forceful in getting Jacob to submit. Esau is ahead. Laban is behind. There is a river to cross. Jacob has to admit defeat and get God to bless him on God's conditions.

5. Jacob is defeated but becomes more desperate than ever for God's blessing. God now wants to go ^{□1} but Jacob needs God more than ever. He admits defeat. He admits that God can do anything with him and can immobilise him – or anyone else – with the slightest touch of His supernatural power. He now clings to the supernatural visitor and pleads for blessing. Even though he is wounded and crippled he clings to the supernatural being. *'I will not let you go unless you bless me,'* he says ^{□2}.

Jacob is surrendering to the heavenly visitor. He is defeated and crippled and yet he is insistent that he wants God's help and blessing in his life. This is how God wants us to be. He wants us to be ready for anything He might do to us, anything He might call us to. Jacob becomes open to God as never before. The angel asks Jacob to be honest. *'What is your name?'* Jacob's name is 'Twister' or 'Grabber'. For much of his lifetime Jacob has lived up to his name. Recently in his life he has been wrestling with the possibility of breaking free from his weakness and living more on God than upon his own manipulativeness. Now the angel challenges him: What is your name? What are you really like? What is your real character? ^{□1}. Jacob is willing to give the answer. He knows that his name means 'Grabber', 'Grasper', 'One Who Grabs People By the Heel'. That is exactly who he is and exactly the way he has been living all of his life. Now he is willing to admit that he is who he is. He confesses that he is 'Grasper' by name and 'Grasper by nature' ^{□2}.

6. Jacob gets victory by being defeated by God. Now that Jacob has given in, and surrendered to God, God is ready to come to his help and answer his prayers. *'Your name shall no longer be Jacob, Grasper,'* says God ^{□1}. From now on Jacob will have the name and the character of 'Israel'. The word-play in the name is obscure but the following words – 'for you have fought with God and with men and have prevailed' – make it clear that the sense is 'Fighter With God'.

Jacob has fought with God and has won by being defeated! God is now going to help him. The promises given to Jacob long ago are to go ahead. God will allow Jacob to cross the river Jabbok and enter the promised land.

Jacob has also fought with men and prevailed. God is about to bless Jacob's endeavours at reconciliation with Esau. All of his life Jacob has been striving to get advantage over others. Now he has been striving for reconciliation.

Jacob knows he has entered into a deeper fellowship with God. He says to the supernatural figure *'Please tell me your name'* ^{□1}. He knows that his mysterious attacker is a supernatural being. He suspects that the attacker is God Himself! God has increased the forcefulness of His ways with Jacob and forced Jacob to surrender.

God will not reveal His name. The full revelation of God's name will come in the days of Moses, when God reveals the meaning of 'Yahweh' – the God who redeems His people by the blood of the lamb. But God does bless Jacob. He

^{□1} 32:26a

^{□2} 32:26b

^{□1} 32:27a

^{□2} 32:27b

^{□1} 32:28

^{□1} 32:29

reveals Himself as the one who defeats us in order to bless us.

• 'Peniel', 'the face of God'

Jacob names the place 'Peniel', 'the face of God' ^{㉑1}. Jacob knows now that he has experienced a revelation of God, in an amazing way. It was only a partial revelation. It took place at night. The angel left before dawn. Yet Jacob knows that he has met with God.

㉑1 32:30

7. Jacob must spend the rest of his life as one who leans on the help of God

7. **Jacob is made to know that he must spend the rest of his life as one who leans on the help of God.** He crosses Jabbok limping ^{㉑1}. He will never be allowed to be his old self again. From now on he will be crippled and will have to look to God to give him special help. What happened on that night must be the way he lives for the rest of his life. From now on he must be one who knows his own weakness and trusts in the strength of God.

㉑1 32:31

8. This way of living must be learnt by the nation of Israel

8. **This way of living must be learnt by the nation of Israel.** It became a custom not to eat meat that came from the hip of an animal ^{㉑1}. Jacob – or Israel as he is now called – insists that his people remember what has happened to him. For the future nation of Israel must live as their forefather lived. They must be a people who know their own helplessness but have learned to live in dependence on God.

㉑1 32:32

9. God abundantly answers Jacob's wish for reconciliation

9. **God abundantly answers Jacob's wish for reconciliation.** Genesis 33 is the end of the story of Genesis 32. It tells of the results of Jacob's new surrender to God. Jacob's desire for reconciliation to Esau is fulfilled. Somewhere in his journey Esau's attitude had been completely changed. Jacob had fought with men ^{㉑1} as well as with God! He had striven for reconciliation with his brother and he won a victory of love.

㉑1 see 32:28

Jacob sees Esau coming. He puts those members of the family that he values least in the front. Leah the next most favoured is in a second group. The most favoured members of the family are put in the safest position ^{㉑1}. Favouritism was a mark of all the patriarchs! God's people have not reached New Testament standards of wisdom

㉑1 33:1–2

• A very apologetic manner

Jacob himself goes ahead of his family. He is extremely courteous towards Esau, and acts in a very apologetic manner. It is Jacob's way of seeking to make amends for his horrid treatment of his brother in years gone by ^{㉑1}.

㉑1 33:3

• A happy family reunion

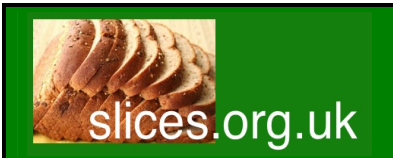
But God has answered his prayers. Esau who came with a large number of men welcomes Esau ^{㉑1}, and there is a happy family reunion in which Jacob introduces his wives and children ^{㉑2}. Jacob explains he wants Esau's favour and forgiveness ^{㉑3}, and insists that Esau takes his gifts ^{㉑4}.

㉑1 33:4
㉑2 33:5–7
㉑3 33:8
㉑4 33:9–11

• In a greater way than ever Jacob knows that God is his God.

Esau wants to travel with his brother ^{㉑1} but Jacob asks to be allowed to travel more slowly with his family ^{㉑2} and will meet Esau at Seir ^{㉑3}. He is promising that he will visit Esau later. Esau offers further help but it is not needed and Esau leaves ^{㉑4}. Jacob travels on, making a dwelling-place at Succoth ^{㉑5} but buying land in Shechem ^{㉑6}, where he builds an altar, calling it 'God, the God of Israel' (33:20; the word 'Israel' in the name of the altar refers to Jacob not to the nation). In a greater way than ever Jacob knows that God is his God.

㉑1 33:12
㉑2 33:13–14
㉑3 33:13–14
㉑4 33:15–16
㉑5 33:17
㉑6 33:18–19



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