

— S O U T H E A S T E R N —

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## *God's White Flag: Interpreting an Anthropomorphic Metaphor in Genesis 32*

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### **Introduction**

Fording his family across the river in two companies, Jacob remains on the other side of the Jabbok. Here, he becomes locked in conflict with a mysterious attacker till daybreak, at which point the stranger “sees” he does not prevail over Jacob. After an entire night of grueling physical combat, he suddenly exhibits divine power and prerogative in wounding and then blessing Jacob. This development is as enigmatic as it is astounding. What can it mean for an apparently divine being to “see that he did not prevail” over a mere mortal? Could a mere mortal have pinned the Almighty, or subdued him through unexpected tenacity?

The fact that biblical texts unapologetically describe divinity in such language creates an exegetical quandary. As Kenneth Matthews succinctly summarizes,

Much ancient Jewish and Christian speculation arose from this fascinating encounter of Jacob and the “man.” Targumic and rabbinic interpretations identified his assailant as an angel in the appearance of a man, not a theophany, and sometimes recognized the angel by name (Michael and Sariel). That a man could wrestle and prevail over God created a theological tension in Jewish interpretation, resulting in the substitute of an angel (e.g. *Gen. Rab.* 78.1). Philo’s allegorical reading transformed the wrestling’s meaning into the human soul that prevails over the human passions and wickedness (*Jeg.* 3.58.190). Augustine’s *City of God* (16:39) represented the popular interpretation that the angel was a type of Christ. The blessing bestowed on Jacob was meant for his descendants, who would believe in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

As can be seen, interpreters typically lean toward one of two approaches. As with the Targumic and rabbinic sources, texts are sometimes reinterpreted to exempt the divine from such base implications. We also find this tendency in more modern

1. Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (NAC; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2005), 560.

commentators such as Gunkel, who sees in the mysterious wrestler analogies to semi-divine beings in the ANE.<sup>2</sup>

A second approach, similar to Philo, is to dismiss these anthropomorphic assertions as “poetic flourish” – as language which either cannot make, or is not intended to make, truth-conditional statements regarding the deity. Rather, this language is used for “heightened emotional impact” or occasionally to give human worshipers access to a transcendent deity by making him appear “personal.” Or, they represent something else entirely. In Philo’s case, the wrestling match is re-interpreted wholesale as speaking not of the divine, but merely the engagement between the human and itself. One modern commentator, Thomas L. Brodie, extends this existential wrestling match to include the divine and demonic, “The one with whom one wrestles is human – to some degree it is oneself – but it involves aspects of both the divine and demonic, for within the human there is both the original divine blessing and also demonic deviation, beginning with a desire to be a god.”<sup>3</sup> Hence the episode becomes a metaphor for an internal struggle.

In this essay, we shall briefly examine these two approaches, before suggesting a third alternative based on the approach to metaphors advocated by linguistic philosopher Josef Stern. Hence, we will begin by looking at the identity of Jacob’s attacker, to determine if this is indeed a divine metaphor. We then examine the sense in which this character “sees,” in order to further refine the nature of the metaphorical ascription, and finally, we turn to the object of this sight to illuminate the function of this verb within the narrative. As Stern’s program involves determining metaphorical meaning by virtue of the context in which a metaphor is used, these three areas of discussion will also serve to provide an example of his approach. Finally, we examine the implications of this theory on the exegesis of the above mentioned passage from Genesis 32.

## A ‘Dodge-y’ Character: Identity of Jacob’s Opponent

There have been several suggestions as to the identity of the “man” Jacob wrestles. The attacker is undoubtedly quite strong, as Fokkelman observes, “The fight is long and violent. Characteristic of his enormous commitment, Jacob cannot be overcome. But the adversary must be a doughty fighter, if we remember the force Jacob was able to muster in 29.1–14! [by removing a large stone from a well].”<sup>4</sup> However, he displays more than human strength, for he injures<sup>5</sup> Jacob’s

2. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans. M. E. Biddle; MLBS; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 349, 352; cf. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (trans. John J. Scullion; London: SPCK, 1981), 516–17; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (trans. John H. Marks; London: SCM: 1972), 321.

3. Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical and Theological Commentary* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 332.

4. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975), 214.

5. Jerome A. Lund, “On the Interpretation of the Palestinian Targumic Reading of *WQHT*

hip merely by 'touching' (נגע)<sup>6</sup> it, and consequently, Gunkel, Westermann and von Rad see indications that he is a "river demon." Westermann finds a parallel with Exod. 4:24–26 where Yahweh attacks (lit. "sought to kill") Moses, but, "The magical encounter shows that in [Ex. 4:24–26] also the attacker is a demon. The two texts are very alike. The lethal attack precedes a dangerous meeting in both cases (Ex. 4, a meeting with Pharaoh)."<sup>7</sup> This interpretation seems to follow other parallels in ancient literature,<sup>8</sup> and reflects a reluctance to ascribe divinity to Jacob's attacker because of the very focus of our examination: the attacker "sees" that he does not prevail over Jacob, and later requests to be released.<sup>9</sup> A deity should have no problem overpowering a mere mortal.

However, we find his solution to be a bit strained for several reasons. First, the proposed demon is supposed to be "the embodiment of the danger involved in crossing the river,"<sup>10</sup> but by all accounts, Jacob has crossed the river at least twice before meeting him (vv. 23–24).<sup>11</sup> Second, Westermann's appeal is based partially on a desire to absolve the deity from the appearance of weakness. "The attacker's request to let him go is prepared by and follows on v. 26a. It shows that the demon is one who is powerful only by night and loses his strength with the breaking of day."<sup>12</sup> However, this answer is insufficient for, it is purely speculative that a demon would have had any trouble subduing Jacob, at least during the night. Also, as von Rad himself admits, "the request to Jacob to be released is now poorly motivated, since Jacob is, after all, crippled."<sup>13</sup>

Rather, it is this request that demonstrates the full measure of Jacob's commitment. Even having been wounded, he will not release his opponent. Other

in Gen 32:25," *JBL* 105 (1986): 99–103, finds "numb" to be the preferred translation of the versions.

6. Westermann notes, "But נגע cannot mean 'strike.' [ . . . ] One can speak of some sort of magical touch here which has its aftereffect in v. 32b" (Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 517). It is not clear whether the "man" "touched" or "struck" Jacob's thigh. As Hamilton observes, "[נגע] is often 'touch' (cf. Gen. 3:3), though in Job 1:19, the wind 'flattens' [נגע] a house (cf. also Josh. 9:19 and 1 Sam. 6:9). However, for supernatural beings touching a mortal, see Isa. 6:7. He actually makes a case for the thigh actually being Jacob's scrotum (cf. Exod. 1:5; Deut. 25:11–12). However, this view does not seem to fit with Jacob's permanent injury and the resulting cultic abstinence regarding the thigh sinew. For discussion, see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 330–31.

7. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 516.

8. For example, Westermann says, "Jupiter says in the *Amphitryon* of Plautus, 532f.: *Cur me tenes? Tempus est: exire ex urbe priusquam lucescat volo* (Why do you hold me? It is time: I want to leave the city before daybreak)." Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 517.

9. Most commentators nearly universally see the assailant not wanting Jacob to see the face of God, which is deadly for humans (Exod. 33:20). Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1994), 296; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 332.

10. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 516.

11. Jacob escorts his family across, leading the way, and then doubles back to camp alone on the northern side of the Jabbok.

12. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 517.

13. von Rad, *Genesis*, 321.

commentators suggest a more plausible reason for the attacker's demand for release: to keep his identity hidden after daybreak.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, in the parallel Westermann finds in Exod. 4:24–26, the attacker is clearly presented as Yahweh, though Westermann attempts to replace him in the “original” story with yet another demonic being. Although the magical nature of the encounter promotes a supernatural identity for these “attackers,” there seems no compelling reason to find in them the demonic. This is especially true in light of the blessing rendered to Jacob in Gen. 32:28. Here, the attacker changes Jacob's name from one that means “deceiver” to one whose explanation he gives as, “For you have striven with God (לֵא) and men and have prevailed.” As Jacob's opponent is clearly supernatural, and God is the only such being mentioned, the attacker is evidently referring to himself as God (לֵא).<sup>15</sup> In the Exodus passage, the attacker's issue is with the sign of the covenant (circumcision) made by Abraham with God (אֱלֹהִים; Gen. 17:9–10). Again, this is an unlikely concern for a lawless creature like a demon.<sup>16</sup> Although Westermann finds “Jacob's question about the name in v. 30 would make no sense if he knew that his opponent was God,”<sup>17</sup> there are other occasions in the Bible where a being initially presented as a man turns out to be God (cf. Gen. 18:2, 22, Judg. 6:22; 13:16, 21, 22, John 20:15, 16; Luke 24:16).

Nahum Sarna, following the midrash (Gen. R. 77:2; 78:6; Song R. 3:6), alternatively suggests that Jacob's attacker is, “The celestial patron of Esau.”<sup>18</sup> He finds this solution to mediate between the fact that the “man” who wrestles him apparently possessed a desire similar to Esau, to prevent Jacob's return to the homeland (Canaan) and yet possessed divine qualities. This also plays upon Jacob's later statement to Esau, “I see your face as one sees the face of God, for you have received me favorably” (Gen. 33:10). However, this too seems a bit speculative, as we do not have conclusive evidence that Esau sought to prevent Jacob's return, as he does embrace Jacob quite warmly (Gen. 33:4). Furthermore, Jacob's statement in 33:10 does seem to require that he had indeed seen the face of God in a positive light (at least in the ultimate blessing), to which he then compares his meeting with Esau.<sup>19</sup>

14. For example, Brueggemann says, “Is it because he loses his power when seen or because he must preserve his hiddenness? Perhaps.” Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 267. See also Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 296.

15. Otto Eissfeldt refutes Westermann's river demon theory in part by noting the references to the Canaanite supreme deity “El.” Thus, there would be no need to posit such a being, and the inference, if any, is that this is the high god of the pantheon, not a lower one. Of course, the Hebrew author/redactor would have made a connection between this deity and Yahweh. Otto Eissfeldt, “Non Dimittam Te, Nisi Benedixeris Mihi.” In *Kleine Schriften* (Band 3; eds. R. Sellheim and F. Maass; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1966), 415.

16. “[T]he notion of eliciting and receiving a blessing from a demon is unexampled and inconceivable in a biblical context”: Nahum Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 403–4.

17. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 519.

18. Sarna, *Genesis*, 414, note 3.

19. “The reference to the visual act also anticipates 33:10” (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 336).



Somewhat delayed in his realization, Jacob himself concludes that his attacker was no less than God Himself, for in 32:30 he names the place Peniel (“face of God”) saying, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.” Mark Wessner attempts to demonstrate that this simply meant “neither an ordinary man nor God himself, as is often assumed, but rather a messenger acting on behalf of God.”<sup>20</sup> Wessner contends, “The concept of ‘God and man,’ as used in Gen 32:29, is used elsewhere in the OT, with some scholars seeing it as an expression of totality rather than referring to two separate entities (i.e., the identification of אלהים as representative rather than as a distinct individual).”<sup>21</sup> Thus, he implies, Jacob is said to wrestle with everyone and prevail.

However, Wessner’s conclusions seem questionable. He looks to early post-biblical commentary for support while admitting they have biases against anthropomorphic ascriptions of the deity; yet he uses their conclusions to support his own, that the “assailant” was not God but an angel representing Him.<sup>22</sup> Would not the biases in the texts against this language be the reason they interpret the wrestler as other than God Himself? His primary evidence, the fact that the Samaritan Pentateuch does *not* alter this text where one might have expected it to do so, remains an argument from silence. Furthermore, his example to demonstrate that “God” (אלהים) can refer to men (cf. Exod. 7:1) does not cohere with the text under investigation. Exod. 7:1 does not refer to Moses as “God” Himself, but as the role or office of God “to Pharaoh” (נתתיך אלהים לפרעה). This is clearly different than Jacob encountering a man whom he later deems to have been the being called God (not God “to him”).<sup>23</sup> While we acknowledge debate over the use of אלהים in passages such as Ps. 82:6, we note that, unlike Genesis 32, there is clear demonstration that the addresses are *not* divine (cf. Ps. 82:7 “You shall die like men”). In any case, Wessner’s assertions do not take into account Jacob’s own conclusions revealed in his naming of the place, Penuel, as discussed above.

Similarly, the prophet Hosea appears to mediate this interpretation of this being saying, “He [Jacob] wrestled with the *angel* and prevailed” (Hos. 12:4, emphasis mine). However, as Fokkelman notes, “This does not mean that ‘angel of God’ differs from ‘God’ in content, as Hos. 12.3, ending, shows.”<sup>24</sup> In fact, Hos. 12:5[6] unambiguously insists that it was “Yahweh, the God of Hosts, Yahweh is his Name.” Rather, this points to the conflation of the ideas of angels and God, as in many cases, the identity becomes blurred. For example, although Hagar has encountered the “angel of the LORD” (Gen. 16:7), Yahweh is explicitly identified as, *the One who spoke to her* (Gen. 16:13). Thus, at least in this instance, the “angel of the LORD” (מלאך יהוה) was a manifestation of God Himself, speaking *in person*,

20. Mark D. Wessner, “Toward a Literary Understanding of ‘Face to Face’ (פנים אל פנים) in Genesis 32:23–32,” *RQ* 42 (2000): 176–77.

21. Wessner, “Toward a Literary Understanding,” 174. Wessner refers here to Westermann, *Genesis* 12–36, 518.

22. Wessner, “Toward a Literary Understanding,” 170–77.

23. Note the lack of the ל preposition in Gen. 32:30.

24. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 214, note 13.

not a separate divine being relaying a message. Similarly, Jacob seems to equate the man with whom he wrestled with God (as do others who encounter the “angel of the LORD”; cf. Exod. 3:3, 4, Judg. 6:22–23, Judg. 13:16–22). As Moberly says, the angel is a character “who is virtually indistinguishable from YHWH himself (22:11).”<sup>25</sup>

Thus, we conclude that according to the text, and its parallel in Hosea, it was indeed God whom Jacob wrestled, appearing in the guise of a strong (but not invincible) man, and who “saw that he did not prevail [against Jacob].” This conclusion has a couple of implications. We are now faced with a divine being who does not win a physical contest with a human. Establishing the nature of the opponent also has implications for the ultimate result of the encounter – a change in Jacob’s name and character. We will return to this point later. First, however, we look at the nature of “seeing.” In reviewing yet another element of the context, we hope both to evaluate another approach to the dilemma of a non-prevailing God, and at the same time explore the nature of the encounter: was it real, was it a metaphor, and so on.

### Metaphorical Approach: Nature of the ‘Sight’

A second approach to this quandary is to accept the divinity of Jacob’s assailant, but to interpret “seeing that he did not prevail” as “metaphorical,” thereby relegating what is said concerning the deity to the eccentricities of human language, which is inherently anthropocentric, rather than making straightforward assertions about the deity. For example, Calvin suggests that “while he [God] assails us with the one hand, he defends us with the other; yea, inasmuch as he supplies us with more strength to resist than he employs in opposing us, we may truly and properly say, that he fights *against* us with his *left* hand, and *for* us with his *right* hand.”<sup>26</sup> This sort of interpretation reads into the text the fact that God was empowering Jacob to fight and in so doing mollifies the idea that God “saw that he did not prevail.” Instead of a realization of a lack of success, it becomes a pre-conceived and indeed intentional plan in which God works both sides of the struggle. However, as this is not indicated in the text, it remains speculative.

As with Brodie’s approach mentioned earlier, Robert Alter contends that this fight is representative of other struggles in Jacob’s life.

He [Jacob’s attacker] is the embodiment of portentous antagonism in Jacob’s dark night of the soul. He is obviously in some sense a doubling of Esau as adversary, but he is also a doubling of all with whom Jacob has had to contend, and he may equally well be an externalization of all that Jacob has to wrestle with within himself. A powerful physical metaphor is

25. R. W. L. Moberly, *Genesis 12–50* (Old Testament Guides; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 20.

26. John Calvin, *Genesis* (trans. John King; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 196.



intimated by the story of wrestling: Jacob, whose name can be construed as “he who acts crookedly,” is bent, permanently lamed, by his nameless adversary in order to be made straight before his reunion with Esau.<sup>27</sup>

As this shows, Alter adeptly discerns the irony and deeper themes running throughout the Jacob narratives, but his focus says little about what this meant for God himself in the passage, who is at least an equal partner in the wrestling match.

These approaches tend to view the claim that God “saw that he did not prevail” as a metaphorical, rather than literal statement, and hence one that does not make assertions about an actual, physical wrestling match with the deity, but about Jacob’s existential condition or even his analogous struggle with Esau. While such approaches can reveal important connotations and literary allusions within a text, they often employ an inadequate view of figurative language as a medium for making assertions about the deity. They imply that figurative statements cannot be used to express assertions that can then be judged to be true or false (truth-conditional). Hence, they end up finding a different meaning altogether for the expression.

### *Josef Stern’s Approach to Metaphors*

Josef Stern deals with figurative language somewhat differently. Key to his understanding of metaphor is the fact that “strictly speaking, there are no literal or metaphorical *expressions* per se (except as terms of art); there are only literal and metaphorical *interpretations* of expressions.”<sup>28</sup> Because the usage of an expression is what makes it metaphorical, Stern characterizes metaphor as “a special kind of context-dependent expression, an expression whose character is sensitive to its context set of presuppositions.”<sup>29</sup> For example, if we take the predication “is the sun,” we can find a literal interpretation such as, “The closest star to the earth is the sun” based on the contextual understandings of the situation in which it is uttered or written, such as an astronomy text. The statement, “Juliet is the sun,” is determined to be metaphorical only because we know from Shakespeare’s context that Romeo is referring to his beloved and not a cosmic ball of burning gas (as opposed to a particular star which might have happened to be named “Juliet”).<sup>30</sup>

If metaphorical meaning is context-dependent, we must determine whether there is some semantic incongruence from the way that terms, such as our case in point of “sight,” are applied to God. On what basis is “sight” considered anomalous when applied to God? For instance, “seeing” or “walking” are not considered anthropomorphic metaphors when used of dogs, because they are normal ascriptions of that activity for dogs, despite the fact that they use four legs instead of two and display different patterns of walking. In other words, “walking,” and likewise “seeing,” are not *essentially* human. This is what Janet Soskice calls “linguistic

27. Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: Norton, 1996), 181, note 27.

28. Josef Stern, *Metaphor in Context* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2000), 307.

29. Stern, *Metaphor*, 308.

30. See this example used throughout Stern, *Metaphor*.

analogy” which “concerns stretched usages, not figurative ones.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, an analogy is simply a straightforward usage of a term, though originally used for another category – such as “riding bicycles” derived from “riding horses.”<sup>32</sup> The point here is that human actions are not necessarily inappropriate, and thus non-literal, simply because they are used of God. They may point to activities or traits that can be ascribed to both the human and divine, despite the different manner in which each is enacted or held for each type of being. Rather, the idea of biblical anthropomorphisms arises from the assumption that a predicate such as “seeing” or “walking” would be incongruous with the nature of a non-corporeal being. And yet in our present case, God has manifested himself in a distinctly corporeal way.

Such a statement would not necessarily have any bearing on God’s being “as he is in himself.” That is, just because in this particular theophany he may have physically and literally seen in this way, it does not then mean that God must always or only does so in this manner. On the other hand, it is important to remember that when he reveals himself in a particular way (as he does in this theophany) it does not mean the limited power he reveals is not real or significant.<sup>33</sup> His infinite nature does not, and by definition cannot, prevent him from choosing physically to “see” at that moment. This is much the same argument as used to discuss the incarnation of God in Christ. His manifestation as a fully human being neither curtails his transcendence, nor does the latter render his incarnation less than real. Although this is not necessarily part of his true essence,<sup>34</sup> it is crucial for examining what God, in human form, does in the passage. We could therefore take these terms for sight quite literally of the “man” whom God chose to reveal himself.

However, the nature of the subject of such typically physical verbs does not alone make them literal. Even naturally corporeal beings can “see” in a metaphorical sense. This is usually the case when there is no physical way of attributing the concept of these actions to their subject. When we speak in contexts of discussion and learning where there is no physical illumination mentioned, expressions like “seeing the light,” “seeing what you mean” or “seeing through an argument,” do not refer to literal sight as if dependent on light waves and visual organs. In these contexts, we have a metaphorical use of the term “seeing” because one semantic field (physical sight) is being applied to another (cognition). Again, this is context-dependent, for if one is at sea at night looking for the shore, “I see the light” may mean something quite literal as the beacon from the lighthouse comes into view.

This may raise the question: is sight in Genesis 32 not a common metaphor for cognition, and hence could be translated with something like “realized?” Cognitive

31. Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 66.

32. Soskice, *Metaphor*, 66.

33. This discussion touches on kenotic theories of God “emptying” himself (cf. Phil. 2:5–11), ultimately beyond the bounds of this paper. Suffice it to say, however, that divine expressions, whether limited or not, are still significant for the meaning of a narrative, whether or not they express God’s full capabilities.

34. Cf. Isa. 31:3; John 4:24.

linguist Eve Sweetser claims such an interpretation would result from what she calls the Mind-as-Body metaphor,<sup>35</sup> whereby abstract thought processes are conceptually viewed in terms of physical ones. Hence, abstract ideas such as “knowing” are interpreted along the conceptual lines of human sight. Thus, our semantic expressions reflect conceptual frameworks with which to grasp these difficult concepts.

However, David Aaron argues this is not conceptual, but semantic. “The word *שמע* means ‘understand,’ just as the word *ראה* sometimes means ‘understand’; These are not instances of metaphor, they are instances of [Wittgenstein’s] wordfield extension. The fact that cognitive processes are associated with the perception of stimuli only speaks to the fact that human beings intuited that epistemologically, sight and hearing are identical to certain cognitive functions.”<sup>36</sup> Aaron’s approach would then view God’s “seeing” as simply another way of saying “thinking.”

The problem with both of these approaches lies in their sense of what a metaphor is and how it functions. For Sweetser, a metaphor is a figure of speech which reflects cognitive frameworks, not assertions of truth with respect to the actual world. Thus, there is nothing asserted about God in this “metaphor,” for it is only a humanly created framework for understanding a divine concept and does not pertain to reality: only human conceptual (mental) grids. Divine knowledge here would be viewed in terms of sight, but this would not indicate that there is any necessary relation between the two. Aaron appears to understand “metaphorical” in the sense of unreal, as opposed to literal, or real. Hence, he denies that references to divine sight are metaphorical. Rather, for him, these terms are simply synonyms for [real] cognition. However, as Stern observes,

Some writers take “literally” to mean “actually,” and then use this assumption to argue that metaphors, not being literally true, are also not (indeed cannot be) actually true [. . .]. [W]hat is “actually” true is simply a proposition that is true in the actual world, namely, the circumstances of the context in which the utterance is performed. Contraries of the actual are the merely possible and the contrafactual [. . .]. The distinction between the metaphorical and the literal, on the other hand, is a distinction between two kinds of interpretations or uses of language, not between kinds of truth, or between the circumstances in which what is said is true or false.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to this misunderstanding of metaphor, Aaron’s default reduction of “seeing” to a cognitive process such as “realizing,” leaves us in the same quandary. If “seeing” equates simply to “knowing,” did God *not know* of Jacob’s resolve beforehand?

Metaphors, rightly understood, are more than mere conceptual frameworks and more than wordfield extensions. They carry different content in different

35. Eve E. Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990), 30.

36. David H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics, and Divine Imagery* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2002), 108.

37. Stern, *Metaphor*, 304.

contexts. For example, although sight is closely related to thought (“I see what you mean”), it can still indicate visual perception<sup>38</sup> preceding and providing the basis for said thought. Both the visual and cognitive realms may be involved. Consider the case of observing an instructor physically demonstrate a new dance move that she has just verbally described. “Seeing” what she meant is both visual and cognitive, but this can only be derived from its context. This contrasts with Sweetser’s cognitive linguistic notion that sight here would only be a case of a solely cognitive framework for understanding mental processes based on the concept of physical sight, not generated by any actual instance of physical seeing. Furthermore, according to Stern’s theory, the metaphor of “sight” draws its content from the particular context – especially that of the consequent naming of Jacob, rather than being a static, generic mental conception applied in all cases.

Hence, the way to approach attributions of what are typically human actions/traits to the divine, as advocated by Stern, is to look at the context in which they are used. By determining the entailments (subject, object, context of use, effects of, etc.) of such terms within their setting, one can then determine both whether or not an expression is being used metaphorically. And if it is, then one can determine the meaning of the metaphor within that particular context. This is not necessarily transferable across all usage of a term as would be the case with Sweetser’s approach to metaphor. In another context, a metaphor for divine sight might mean something significantly different from the case at which we are looking.<sup>39</sup>

### *The Metaphor of Sight in Genesis 32*

How does “sight” function with Jacob’s assailant? It appears to include both physical and mental aspects, and as such, constitutes a significant (actual) action within the unfolding of the plot. God is not said to know of Jacob’s resolve going into the confrontation with him. It is only after wrestling with him that this is mentioned. Something within the contest itself must have precipitated the “seeing.” Perhaps this is seen in the length of the contest, from dusk till dawn, a fact underscored through repetition (vv. 21, 22, 24, 26). The “man” “saw that he did not prevail” by both visually experiencing Jacob’s tenacity as well as cognitively assessing the situation. This then informs his subsequent naming of Jacob. Hence, the plot turns on this revelation. According to Stern, this instance of sight would be metaphorical in its primary sense regarding cognition, yet it retains some of the entailments of physical sight, such as basis for the cognition, but expresses an actual event in the narrative nonetheless.

38. Eve Sweetser suggests that sight and thinking are one and the same: “hearing is connected with the specifically communicative aspects of understanding, rather than with intellection at large. (It would be a novelty for a verb meaning ‘hear’ to develop a usage meaning ‘know’ rather than ‘understand,’ whereas such a usage is common for verbs meaning ‘see’).” Sweetser, *From Etymology*, 43.

39. Cf. Brian Howell, “In the Eyes of God: A Metaphorical Approach to Biblical Anthropomorphic Language,” (PhD Diss., University of Bristol, 2009).

## Object of the Sight

By concluding that the attacker was in fact God, and his seeing as a metaphor which conveys contextually dependent meaning, we are now placed back on the horns, if not of a demon, of the dilemma from which Westermann attempted to escape. Upon “seeing” that he did not prevail, God, almost inconceivably, requests to be released from a human’s hold. Having established the “see-er’s” identity as God, we turn now to the object of the sight to determine the function and meaning of divine sight in this passage.

Some try to downplay any sense of divine defeat. Hamilton separates the verbal phrases in Gen. 32:29, from, “You have struggled with God and man and have prevailed,” to “You have struggled [שרית] with God, and with men you have succeeded [רתוכל].” He says, “Note the chiasm in v. 29b: verb / prepositional phrase // prepositional phrase / verb. The change in sequence possibly reinforces the change of name that has just been disclosed to Jacob.”<sup>40</sup> In this way, he implies that Jacob did not prevail over God. However, this seems to provide inadequate explanation for the earlier statement in 32:25[26] and the parallel passage in Hosea 12:4[5].

One possible solution to the anomaly of having God see his own defeat may be found in the nature of the object God is claimed to have seen. Perhaps these words are not as inappropriate on divine lips as might initially be supposed. The object of the attacker’s sight is set in a *ki* phrase which, in v. 26, indicates a state of affairs – “that he did not prevail against him” (וירא כי לא יכל לו).<sup>41</sup> Despite Jacob’s unusual displays of strength on occasion (Gen. 29:2, 3, 10), God should be infinitely stronger. So what can it mean for God not to have “prevailed” (לא יכל לו)?

### *To Prevail*

Two closely related instances that shed light on the sense of “prevailing” include that of Rachel and Hosea. Just two chapters earlier, Rachel proclaims, “With the wrestlings of God I have wrestled with my sister, *and* I have indeed prevailed (יכל)” (Gen. 30:8). As opposed to Jacob’s combat (אבק, v. 25) with the angel, the sister’s “wrestling” is a different verb (פתל),<sup>42</sup> and is obviously being used figuratively for their struggle, as there was no expressly physical contact between them. However, “to prevail” (יכל) is used in both pericopes, and thus informs both the angel’s lack of, and Rachel’s sense of, victory.

For her, there is a competition with her sister to have the most sons.<sup>43</sup> Oddly, the arrival of her second surrogate child (Naphtali) causes Rachel to proclaim that she has “prevailed,” despite Leah having birthed four sons by this point – all

40. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 334–35.

41. Cf. Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 3:6, 6:2, 5; 29:31.

42. For discussion, see Bruce Waltke and M. O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 391, section 25.3a.

43. For Leah, this is ultimately in service of winning Jacob’s favor (Gen. 29:32–34; 30:20). Rachel seems more envious of her sister than desperate for Jacob’s love (Gen. 30:1–2, 8).

naturally.<sup>44</sup> So, this instance of “prevailing,” which lies within the same larger narrative as chapter 32, indicates both nonphysical rivalry, but more importantly, a mere shadow of victory rather than an actual one. Jacob, like Rachel, “prevails” not by an ultimate triumph – by incapacitating or pinning the angel but merely by refusing to be overwhelmed and beaten himself. He may have no chance to win outright, but he will never surrender (cf. Gen. 32:26). Thus God’s “seeing he did not prevail” is less a statement of defeat than an observation of a lack of surrender on Jacob’s part.

Interestingly, though, the prophet Hosea (12:4[5]) casts the event in Genesis 32 slightly differently. Hos. 12:4[5] reads:

“Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed (כָּל); he wept (בִּכָה) and sought his favor (חָנַן). He found him at Bethel and there he spoke with us.”

Here we find Jacob to be prevailing in a positive sense, rather than God “not prevailing.” However, for several reasons this verse demonstrates that “prevailing” does not necessarily imply unilateral, unqualified dominance.<sup>45</sup> First, one seeks favor only from those of higher rank or position than one’s self. Thus, Jacob’s “prevailing” is limited to the contest, and does not apply to his ultimate position *vis à vis* his wrestling partner.

Second, wrestling itself provided a manner of defeating opponents without annihilation.

Joseph Azize, in an in-depth study on wrestling in Ancient Mesopotamia says,

It would seem that wrestling was conducted according to definite rules, and the fact that it was conducted as part of a festival would militate in favor of thinking that victory could be obtained short of utterly crushing the opponent: in fact, there is, as we saw, a theory that one could win by removing the opponent’s belt. It is certain that the Mesopotamian art of wrestling rested upon holds and throws, not punches and kicks. The evidence seems to show continuity in the Mesopotamian tradition, in this respect.<sup>46</sup>

With these insights serving as an analogue to Jacob’s wrestling match, it is likely that the angel did not desire to kill Jacob at all (different to the situation in Exod. 4:24–26). Nor did Jacob necessarily seek to crush the angel. Rather, victory was won in a rule-guided manner and limited to the contest.

This is also evident in that the “man” in chapter 32, upon “seeing that he did not prevail,” supernaturally injures Jacob simply by “touching” him (נגַע). Matthews says, “Jacob’s power over the divine intruder was only apparent, however, for at the

44. At this point in the narrative, that is. Eventually Leah has two more sons and a daughter Dinah, plus the two surrogate children by her maid Zilpah.

45. “And this is just what v. 26a<sup>o</sup> says: the attacker (who alone can be the subject of אָרָב) sees that he cannot overpower him (Jacob). One expects him to yield, but this comes only in v. 27” (Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 517). A crushed opponent would have had to yield immediately; Jacob’s victory over the angel is not unilateral.

46. Joseph Azize, “Wrestling as a Symbol for Maintaining the Order of Nature in Ancient Mesopotamia.” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 2 (2002): 1–26, esp. 10.



breaking of dawn his life was in jeopardy at any time the 'man' wished to take it. The passive voice of the Hebrew verb, 'was spared' (*niph.*, *wattimmās ʿl*) suggests that Jacob admitted that he lived only because God's grace preserved him.<sup>47</sup> God (אלהים) did not lack power over Jacob.

However, this demonstration of power follows the contest itself. Perhaps in limiting himself to the form of a man,<sup>48</sup> אלהים must have constrained his power for the duration of the wrestling match. In Genesis 32 it is the "man" who sees he does not prevail, and in Hosea 12, it is the "angel" over whom Jacob prevails. These terms may be serving to underscore not a different being, but a different manifestation – one corresponding to Jacob's humanity.<sup>49</sup> It was this over which Jacob prevailed, not ultimately over God in his fullness.

Furthermore, while in Genesis 32 the emphasis is negative (the angel did not prevail), in Hosea it is positive (Jacob did prevail). Yet, the match was at most a draw. These emphases thus point to the differing thrusts of the individual passages. In Hosea, the stress is on the success of Jacob in (initially) pursuing God rather than other nations (Hos. 12:1–6). He is held up as an exemplar for his descendants in that he sought God's blessing to the point of personal injury. In Genesis, however, the emphasis on God's failure to prevail over Jacob, rather than Jacob's success, rules out any thought of the patriarch's dominance. In fact, this could even potentially be construed as the result *desired* by God, as with Abraham's test in Genesis 22. As Fredrick C. Holmgren suggests, "A positive view of Jacob's name change casts a different light on his demand for a blessing (32:26). If he was given the name 'Israel' *because* he was strong over against God and men, then his demand for a blessing should not be seen as a grasping for what did not belong to him. The narrative is affirming that if one is to receive blessing (or is to inherit leadership) then one must be assertive – even against God!"<sup>50</sup> Thus, Jacob's blessing came as a result of his persistence in seeking a blessing from God rather than his strength over God.

Another illuminating instance of "prevailing" is found in Judg. 16:5. This case is revealing, as it involves discovering a weakness in a person in order to exploit it:

"The lords of the Philistines came up to her [Delilah] and said to her, 'Entice him, and see where his great strength *lies* and how we may overpower (כִּלּוֹ) him that we may bind him to afflict him. Then we will each give you eleven hundred *pieces* of silver'."

Ironically, Samson's weakness was not simply bound up in his hair, but in his eye for foreign women and his misplaced trust. Like several other occasions (Jer. 20:7, 10; Obad. 1:7), this passage implies that "overpowering" or "prevailing" can be the

47. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 560–61.

48. Cf. Gen. 32:25 and the use of אִישׁ.

49. Notice a similar case with the Ancient Sumerian tale of Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Enkidu is divinely designed to be the match for the irascible Gilgamesh, and though Gilgamesh bests him, he remains his equal.

50. Fredrick C. Holmgren, "Holding Your Own Against God!: Genesis 32:22–32 (In the Context of Genesis 31–33)," *Interpretation* 44 (1990): 11.

result of a treacherous move rather than a straightforward attack. However, this sort of action is notably absent in Jacob's contest. The one who formerly deceived his way into blessing, and was deceived himself, finally faces his problems head on.

Hence, by looking at the literary context as well as ANE wrestling practices, we have found that "prevailing" does not necessarily mean "vanquishing." Rather, it can refer to a victory of spirit rather than numbers (Rachel) or persistence in seeking (Hos. 12:4–5). It is notable that the connotation of deception is not present, for Jacob's very name and life have been bound up with such behavior. Having stolen a human blessing, and been deceived himself, he found he could no longer win a worthwhile blessing by these means. What God saw when he "saw that he did not prevail," was that Jacob would not give up his pursuit of blessing – he refused to be "overcome." Instead he came to seek God's blessing, and though he did not "force" God into it, he refused to let him out of it. Though he had always been a cheat, he finally played by God's rules in seeking a blessing, and came out a victor. Jacob may not have prevailed *over* God in an ultimate sense, but his single-minded pursuit of blessing has now prevailed *upon* Him.

### The "Sight" Effects

Having determined the meaning of the object of sight, we now turn to its effects upon the narrative. If it was simply "poetic flourish" we would expect to find such a term to be inconsequential to the plot. If, however, the term is pivotal, we must interpret its substance accordingly.

Jacob's hanging on for a blessing is significant as an action in that he, like his grandfather Abraham, went through a test (Genesis 22). However with Jacob the test itself brings about a change in him. As Speiser notes,

The encounter at Penuel was understood as a test of Jacob's fitness for the larger tasks that lay ahead. The results were encouraging. Though he was left alone to wrestle through the night with a mysterious assailant, Jacob did not falter. The effort left its mark – a permanent injury to remind Jacob of what had taken place, and to serve perhaps as a portent of things to come. Significantly enough, Jacob is henceforth a changed person. The man who could be a party to the cruel hoax that was played on his father and brother, and who fought Laban's treachery with crafty schemes of his own, will soon condemn the vengeful deed by Simeon and Levi (xxxiv) by invoking a higher concept of morality (xlix 5–7).<sup>51</sup>

Not only was the test a crucible for forming Jacob, but God's act of acknowledging Jacob's unrelenting pursuit of blessing also informs the very name he now gives his covenant partner. Fokkelman notes insightfully,

That obstinate, proud, grim resistance to God is what he now displays on the banks of the Jabbok – and there it is also . . . knocked down. Liter-

51. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (ABC; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 257.

ally. At the same time, however, it is, as it were, countenanced. It is true, the “man” has, just for a while, shown unambiguously that every human effort pales into insignificance as soon as supernatural, no divine, power manifests itself; but on the other hand he accepts defeat (“you have prevailed”) from that gnarled, irreducible, primeval will of Jacob’s, who does not want to pass under any yoke and who wants to be ruler, not servant. He expresses his appreciation and admiration of this undivided will and commitment. He adorns him with the name “Israel” on the ground of (*kīl*) his recognition of Jacob’s unique nature. The name “God fights” may then mean: God fights with you, because he is forced to by your stubbornness and pride. And also: henceforth God will fight for you, for he appreciates your absolutely sincere and undivided commitment.<sup>52</sup>

It is in God’s “seeing” that he did not prevail – that his resistance would not deter Jacob’s pursuit of his blessing – that he is now able to give him the name “Israel.” According to von Rad,

the ancients did not consider a name as simply sound and smoke. On the contrary, for them the name contained something of the character of the one who bore it. Thus in giving his name, Jacob at the same time had to reveal his whole nature. The name Jacob (at least for the narrative) actually designates its bearer as a cheat (cf. chs. 24.25; 27.36).<sup>53</sup>

Now, however, he has striven with God and men and not cheated, but *prevailed*. Hence, the act of seeing in this passage is integral to the name which Jacob is given, for it serves to establish God as a witness of Jacob’s change in character. If God had simply “known” of this change omnisciently, there would be no need for the wrestling match, no struggle to bring this character out in Jacob occasion to establish his character.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, there would have been no witness to his determination. He could only have been called, “the one whom, if he did struggle with God and men, would likely prevail.” By this act of seeing, God establishes the reality of Jacob’s change in character (his “prevailing” in a straightforward manner) as rooted in (and drawn out by) his own experience. Hence Jacob’s new name – Israel – is grounded in a historical event, established by divine witness, and accompanied by physical proof (or reminder!).

In view of his current journey – to reconcile with the man whose blessing he stole – human blessing is shown to be insufficient for Jacob. He required something more, and was finally willing to chase it at all costs. This commitment changed Jacob, even as his new name reflected. Before wrestling with God, it is emphasized twice that Jacob sent gifts *before him* (פניה; Gen. 32:20–21). Furthermore, he sends

52. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 216–17.

53. von Rad, *Genesis*, 321.

54. This is not to argue that God didn’t know of this event beforehand, but to draw out the significance of God’s engagement with Jacob, both in wrestling and ‘seeing that he did not prevail,’ with respect to the narrative and the etiology of “Israel.”

his family across before him.<sup>55</sup> However, after wrestling God, and receiving the blessing in the form of his new name, Israel, we find him going before his family (33:3). He is now the man who has wrestled with *God* and men and prevailed (32:28).<sup>56</sup> he has nothing to fear.

## Jacob's Sight

It is crucial to the text that Jacob claims to have “seen the face of God,” yet not been destroyed (32:30). This is why he names the place “Penuel.” He has fought with God himself and survived – though not untainted. He seeks a blessing, and receives a name, but has to face his brother to get the full effect: “Permission to be Israel (and not Jacob) depends on wrestling and prevailing. But it also requires meeting the brother.”<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, immediately following the wrestling match, he meets Esau, and says, “your face is as the face of God.” How was this so? Jacob saw the face of God, and expected to die, but did not. Similarly, he expected Esau to kill him (27:41–42), but Esau did not. Seeing God was also the route to blessing, but reconciling with Esau was the only way to put the “deceiver” moniker behind him, to stop running from his past, and truly embrace his future as Israel. Brueggemann notes,

The narrator knows this interrelatedness by the way he has arranged the statements on the motif of *face*: (a) “Afterwards I shall see his *face*. . .” (32:20). (b) “For I have seen God *face to face*, and yet my life is preserved” (32:30). (c) “For truly to see *your face* is like seeing the *face of God*” (33:10). It is hard to identify the players. In the *holy God*, there is something of the *estranged brother*. And in the *forgiving brother*, there is something of the *blessing God*. Jacob has seen the face of God. Now he knows that seeing the face of Esau is like that. We are not told in what ways it is like the face of God. Perhaps in both it is the experience of relief that one does not die. The forgiving face of Esau and the blessing face of God have an affinity. Perhaps it is to meet the dread that can be measured. In both cases, there is a prevailing, but also a crippling. The crippling is not to death. The forgiving is not unqualified.<sup>58</sup>

55. Serge Frolov makes an argument that, the narrator tried to make it clear, without abandoning the laconic mode of discourse, that *two rivers had been crossed*.: cf. Serge Frolov, “The Other Side of the Jabbok: Genesis 32 as a Fiasco of Patriarchy,” *JSTOT* 91 (2000): 47. However, there is no mention of another “stream.” Furthermore, the *hiphil* of עבר can simply mean to “help across” (cf. Num. 32:5; Josh. 4:3,8; 7:7; Ps. 78:13; 2 Sam. 2:8; 19:16, 19, 41). Verse 23[22] simply describes the move of all of Jacob’s family across the ford. Verse 24[23] looks in more detail at his sending the entire family across and his remaining on the other side. This can further be seen after his wrestling match in 32:31 where he again “crosses over” (עבר) at the place he has just named Penuel. He then meets up with his family and rather than using them as a shield, he precedes them to meet Esau.

56. This refers to Jacob’s previous struggles with Esau and Laban, but is now embraced with confidence as he approaches his estranged brother.

57. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 273.

58. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 272–73.

Jacob has seen the face of God and survived, and is now unafraid to meet his brother. Furthermore, the one who formerly stole the blessing, now insists on being the bless-er. Although Esau initially and gracefully declines his gifts, Jacob insists (33:10). This is reminiscent of the tithe which he promised to God if he would bring him back to Canaan safely (28:20–22). Unlike Abraham's gift to Melchizedek after God granted him success in battle (14:20), we never read of Jacob giving a tenth to God, nor do we find out how much he has, just "two companies" (לשני מחנות; Gen. 32:7[8]). However, the detailed listing of the amount he gives to Esau in Gen. 32:13–15 slows down the narrative, emphasizing the gift. Furthermore, Jacob's prayer of deliverance from Esau (32:11) complemented by the subsequent vision of his brother's face "as the face of God" makes it likely that although he did offer it initially as appeasement (32:5), he now offers the gift as a tithe, just as he had promised. Like the face of God, Jacob has now seen Esau's face and lived. His response is one of gratitude, and staying true to his promise of a tithe for safe passage (cf. Gen. 28:20–22).

This marked change in Jacob's character, of course, is a result of his wrestling with God and God's "seeing" Jacob's undeterred passion for his blessing. The "seeing" establishes the reality of Jacob's prevailing, for there was no other witness, and hence his new identity. It is this new identity that is now borne out in his approach to and humility before Esau. Only one who has the confidence of having been seen to prevail over God and men can now face his past actions in a straightforward and nondefensive posture. This is required for his full reconciliation.

## Conclusion

In this narrative, divine sight presents a final conundrum. How can an almighty God "see that he did not prevail" over a mere man? Although Westermann posits a river demon (cf. Gunkel and von Rad), the context of the renaming of Jacob, his blessing, the etiology of Penuel, and allusions to the high god (אל) indicate otherwise.

The problem then shifts to what it might mean for God not to "prevail" and to see this as the case. In examining other biblical uses of this term (יכל), we discovered that it can indicate more a lack of defeat than an outright victory (e.g., Gen. 30:8). However, this still entailed a particular set of circumstances. For God to "see" that he did not prevail, there had to be a contest and an opponent. These elements function not merely to illustrate divine knowledge, but to form Jacob's character. Notably, there was no hint of deception in his "prevailing" here – a marked change from Jacob's earlier struggles with Esau and Laban. Rather than employing sleight of hand and crafty maneuvering, he wrestles face to face (Gen. 32:30), accepting the wound he so feared, and feeling blessed to have survived the fiercest opponent of all – his God.

The changes wrought in Jacob can further be observed in the marching order of his family. Before the match at the Jabbok, Jacob is skulking behind, using his family as a shield, whereas afterwards, he boldly goes on before them, in humility

and confidence, even demonstrating how his family should act towards others as well.<sup>59</sup> Jacob has not abandoned prudence, as he still takes precautions (Gen. 33:2), but he is a changed man, trusting not Esau, but God's protection.

All of this is facilitated by God's recognition of his "prevailing." Jacob, limping away, had obviously neither overpowered God, nor forced his hand. But his indomitable pursuit of blessing now from God, not men, had prevailed upon God. Seeing that no struggle would deter him, God caps off the contest with a final proving blow to Jacob's hip. Unable to continue the fight (or life) as he had previously known it, Jacob's true heart is borne out – he will never let go. It is the depth of Jacob's commitment which God "sees," and in "seeing," God both draws out and confirms this commitment.

In doing so, God established the reality which became Jacob's new name and character. Had God not entered into the fray with Jacob, causing there to be something to see, and duly recognized it, there would be no Israel – one who struggles with God and man and (is "seen" to have) prevailed.<sup>60</sup> The fear Jacob felt toward his brother was now dissipated by the fact that he had encountered God himself standing in his way and had prevailed upon him to give him the blessing he had always sought. What more was there to fear or to lose? Now he could approach Esau boldly, humbling himself before him, and insist on being the blessing God had always seen Jacob to be (cf. Gen. 28:14).

This passage demonstrates that the metaphor of divine sight functions as far more than an aesthetic background or prop to make God seem "personal." It is crucial to both the development of Jacob's character and the lynch pin upon which the greater plot hangs. Here also, we find the aspects of wrestling and naming to shape the metaphor. Within this struggle God, by seeing, rather than confessing a man to be stronger, confirms Jacob's true heart – his unconquerable desire for blessing. Like Genesis 18–19, there is an element of witnessing in the sight, but the naming itself pushes it beyond mere legal connotations. There is a new character being formed here, and it is initiated and confirmed by God's act of seeing.

What we find then is that one is able to draw out the fuller meanings within the text only by wrestling with the tension caused by metaphorical assertions concerning God. Instead of averting the question either by shifting the identity of the divine actor or by re-characterizing the action as existential or "metaphorical" (in the sense of "unreal"), a firm understanding of Stern's metaphor theory enables one to discover the meaning of metaphors by examining them in their context. This often leads us to discover nuances of the expressions and relationships within the text, and ultimately, more of what they claim about God in the narrative.

59. After Jacob bows seven times before Esau, his family follow suit (Gen. 33:2, 6).

60. "The name 'Israel' emphasizes that it was God who initiated the struggle, and the explanation that the 'man' gives emphasizes the outcome. Both are true. There is no other person who could legitimately bear the name 'Israel,' and it is not used of another person in the Old Testament (cf. Matt 1:16)" (Matthews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 559).