

Genesis 28-33 Podcast Quotes and Notes

The Measure of a Man

The place to take the true measure of a man is not in the darkest place or in the amen corner, not the cornfield, but by his own fireside. There he lays aside his mask and you may learn whether he is an imp or an angel, cur or King, hero or humbug. I care not what the world says of him: whether it crowns him boss or pelts him with bad eggs. I care not a copper what his reputation or his religion may be: if his babies dread his homecoming and his better half swallows her heart every time she has to ask for a five dollar bill, he is a fraud of the first water, even though he prays night and morning until he is black in the face...But if his children rush to the front door to meet him and love's sunshine illuminates the face of his wife every time she hears his footfall, you can take it for granted that he is pure, for his home is a heaven...I can forgive much in that fellow mortal who would rather make men swear than women weep; who would rather have the hate of the whole world than the contempt of his wife; who would rather call anger to the eyes of a king than fear to the face of a child.¹

Genesis 28: Isaac is sent away from his home

1. Jacob's instructions – Gen. 28.1-5.
2. Esau took a wife from Ishamael's line – Gen. 28.9.²
3. Jacob journeyed to Haran – Gen. 28.10.
4. Jacob dreams – Jacob's מִלְאָךְ ladder – Gen. 28.12-22.
 - a. Joseph Smith: This is a vision of the mysteries of godliness.³
 - b. Marion G. Romney: This is a temple experience.⁴

¹ H. Burke Peterson CR, Oct. 1982, p. 61; W. C. Brann, "A Man's Real Measure," in Elbert Hubbard's Scrapbook, New York: Wm. H. Wise and Co., 1923, p. 16.

² Sarna notes that Mahalath is not mentioned among Esau's wives listed in Genesis 36.2-3, but that here is a Basemath who is said to be the daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth. Traditional Jewish exegesis assumed that the two names belonged to the same person. See: Nahum Sarna, [The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis](#), The Jewish Publication Society, 2001, p. 197.

³ Said the Prophet Joseph Smith: "Wherefore, we again say, search the revelations of God; study the prophecies, and rejoice that God grants unto the world Seers and Prophets. **They are they who saw the mysteries of godliness**; they saw the flood before it came; **they saw angels ascending and descending upon a ladder** that reached from earth to heaven..." Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Deseret Book, 1976, p. 12-13.

⁴ President Romney stated: "When Jacob traveled from Beersheba toward Haran, he had a dream in which he saw himself on the earth at the foot of a ladder that reached to heaven where the Lord stood above it. He beheld angels ascending and descending thereon, and Jacob realized that the covenants he made with the Lord there were the rungs on the ladder that he himself would have to climb in order to obtain the promised blessings—blessings that would entitle him to enter heaven and associate with the Lord.

"Because he had met the Lord and entered into covenants with him there, Jacob considered the site so sacred that he named the place Bethel, a contraction of Beth-Elohim, which means literally 'the House of the Lord.' He said of it: '... this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' ([Gen. 28:17.](#))

"Jacob not only passed through the gate of heaven, but by living up to every covenant he also went all the way in. Of him and his forebears Abraham and Isaac, the Lord has said: '... because they did none other things than that which they were commanded, they have entered into their exaltation, according to the promises, and sit upon thrones, and are not angels but are gods.' ([D&C 132:37.](#)) **Temples are to us all what Bethel was to Jacob. Even**

c. And he dreamed, and behold! A *sullam*⁵ was set up toward the earth:

וַיִּחְלֶם וַיִּהְיֶה סֹלָם מִצֵּב אֶרֶץ

Genesis 29: Jacob meets Rachel at the well, his marriages to Rachel and Leah, four sons are born

1. Jacob at the well, his conversation with the shepherds – Gen. 29.1-8.
2. Jacob meets Rachel – Gen. 29.9-12.
3. Laban meets Jacob, Laban's two daughters – Rachel and Leah, his love for Rachel – Gen. 29.13-20.
4. The deception: Leah is given unto Jacob instead of Rachel – Gen. 29.21-27.
5. Jacob, after 7 days, marries Rachel also – Gen. 29.28.
6. Bilhah is given as "her maid," meaning, the maid of Rachel – Gen. 29.29.
7. Jacob loved Rachel – Gen. 29.30.
8. The Lord "opened the womb" of Leah, she conceives, and bears **Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah** – Gen. 29.31-35.

Genesis 30: Jealousy between the sisters, eight more children are born

1. Rachel gives Bilhah to Jacob in order to raise up seed, **Dan** is born, then **Naphtali** – Gen. 30.1-8.
2. Leah, not to be outdone, gives Jacob her handmaid, **Zilpah**, who bears **Gad** and **Asher** – Gen. 30.9-13.
3. Reuben brings in the mandrakes to his mother, who then conceives again, bearing **Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah**, a daughter – Gen. 30.14-21.
4. God "remembered Rachel," and "opened her womb," and she bears **Joseph** – Gen. 30.22-24.
 - a. Wombs belonging to God and his power is a motif throughout the Old Testament.⁶

more, they are also the gates to heaven for all of our unendowed kindred dead. We should all do our duty in bringing our loved ones through them." (["Temples—The Gates to Heaven,"](#) Ensign, Mar. 1971, p. 16.) See also: John Taylor, JD 17.172, and Orson Pratt, JD 6.353.

⁵ The word *sullam* - סֹלָם translated as "ladder" only occurs here in the entire Hebrew Bible. The traditional rendering of "ladder" is highly unlikely. This is probably a word associated with Mesopotamia and the Mesopotamian ziggurats of antiquity, as these were vast structures with terraced landings.

Sarna explains: "The Hebrew term *sullam*, here rendered "stairway," is unique in the Bible; its etymology is uncertain. It may derive from the stem s-l-l, "to cast up a mound," or may be connected with Akkadian *simmiltu*, "steps." *Sullam* could therefore be a ladder or a stairway ramp. The inspirational stimulus for the image seems to be the ladder of ascent to heaven known from Egyptian and Hittite sources, in which both divinities and the souls of the dead are provided with ladders to enable them to ascend from the netherworld to the abodes of men and the gods. Another explanation of the representational reality lies in the Babylonian ziggurat, the temple tower familiar from the Tower of Babel story in chapter 11. This edifice was equipped with an external stairway or ramp linking each stage of the tower with the next until "its top reached the sky." It should be noted, though, that in Jacob's dream, the *sullam*, whatever it be, does not function as a channel of communication between man and God." Sarna, p. 198.

⁶ See: Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Fortress Press, 1978. Tribble writes: In the Hebrew scriptures the wombs of women belong to God. Three stories make this point. Genesis 20:1-18 (E) tells of the patriarch Abraham betraying his wife Sarah. In order to save his own life, Abraham passes her off as a sister and so permits King Abimelech to take her into his harem. Immediately God acts to save Sarah from male abuse by informing and threatening the king. A person of integrity, Abimelech releases Sarah to Abraham, the prophet turned pander. Sarah is vindicated, Abraham prays, and fertility comes to the household of Abimelech. A

5. It is when Joseph is born that Jacob asks Laban to release him from his service – Gen. 30.25-43.
 - a. There is much going on in these verses connected to fertility and the things of the earth. Speckled and spotted animals, rods of green poplar, hazel and chestnut trees, rods and watering troughs. The general idea is that Jacob’s animals were more fertile than Laban’s, a clear sign of Jehovah’s approval of Jacob in this context.

Genesis 31: Jacob departs from Laban’s presence

1. The strain on Jacob and Laban’s relationship is visible – Gen. 31.1-2.
2. The Lord speaks to Jacob, “Return to the land of your fathers!” – Gen. 31.3.
3. Jacob explains to Rachel and Leah the issues with his wages and his disagreement with Laban, and his dream involving “the angel of God” – Gen. 31.4-13.

concluding line explains the significance of this happy ending: “For Yahweh had closed every womb [*kol-rehem*] of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.” But now, with the liberation of Sarah, divine blessing comes to the other females. Yahweh, who has closed wombs in judgment for sin, opens them for fertility.

A second narrative shows Yahweh intervening on behalf of another mistreated woman. Having been used by her father, Laban, to trick Jacob, Leah is now hated by Jacob her husband (Gen. 29:31-35[J]). Therefore, “when Yahweh saw that Leah was hated, **he opened her womb** [*rahmah*].” She bears four children, praising Yahweh, the God who has shown compassion to her. Significantly, this pericope does not contrast the favor of God for Leah with disfavor for Rachel. It says only that “Rachel was barren,” not that Yahweh had closed her womb. In other words, Yahweh is not punishing Rachel but rather blessing Leah, the rejected wife. Indeed, later, “God remembers Rachel,” harkens to her, and “opens her womb [*rahmah*]” (Gen. 30:22 [E]). By opening the wombs of Leah and Rachel, the deity blesses first the woman hated and then the woman loved by their shared husband, Jacob.

As a preface to opening the womb, the phrase “God remembers” occurs also in the third story (1 Sam. 1:1-20). Unlike Leah, Hannah is loved by her husband. Yet she herself is sad because “Yahweh had closed her womb [*rahmah*]” (vv. 5, 6). Although in the tale of Sarah closed wombs meant judgment for sin, in this narrative no reason is given for God’s action. Divine freedom and mystery remain intact. But Hannah suffers, taunted by her female rival who has borne children. Not even the assurances of her husband Elkanah can erase the barrenness of her womb and the sadness of her heart. At the temple she prays directly to God, asking that her affliction be removed, and she enlists the support of Eli the priest. In time “Elkanah knew Hannah his wife and Yahweh remembered her” (v. 19cd, RSV); she conceived and bore a son. By the remembrance of Yahweh the womb of Hannah opened. In these three stories, the noun womb (*rehem*) is a physical object upon which the deity acts. Control of it belongs neither to women nor to their husbands, neither to the fetus nor to society. Only God closes and opens wombs in judgment, in blessing, and in mystery... (Trible, 63/235)

As we have already observed, the phrase “Yahweh merciful [*rahûm*] and gracious” repeatedly describes God in the Hebrew scriptures. The two adjectival forms, “merciful” and “gracious,” are used only for the Creator, never for creatures. Although it is a fixed formula, this divine portrait belongs to no one historical period, literary stratum, or religious viewpoint. Indeed, it appears in all three sections of the canon within a variety of settings, literary forms, and religious expressions, all of which expand and enhance its meaning. “Yahweh merciful and gracious” belongs to recitals of the saving acts of God in history, acts freely given for individual and corporate liberation (Ps. 111:4; 145:8; Neh. 9:17). It is also found in individual petitions for deliverance (Ps. 86:16). It is motivation for national and divine repentance (Joel 2:13; 2 Chron. 30:9; Jon. 4:2) as well as for the unmerited forgiveness of sins, even in the presence of deceit, apostasy, rebellion, and hypocrisy (Ps. 78:38; 103:8). Again, the merciful God restores after national defeat (Deut. 4:31) and sends blessings upon the righteous person (Ps. 112:4). **In many and various ways, then, the maternal metaphor *rahûm* witnesses to God as compassionate, merciful, and loving.** (Trible, p. 70/235, emphasis added.)

4. Rachel and Leah ask about the issue of inheritance – Gen. 31.14-16.
5. Jacob rises up, takes his property and family, and Rachel steals her father's *teraphim* – Gen. 31.17-24.⁷
 - a. God visits Laban in a dream saying, "Take heed that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad!" – Gen. 31.24.⁸
6. Laban accuses Jacob of stealing his daughters, but softens his accusation with an expectation of a celebratory send off – Gen. 31.25-42.

⁷ The story of the **stolen *teraphim*** is interesting. There is much debate among scholars about what the images were that were stolen by Rachel and what they represented. The Hebrew word which is sometimes used for small images of false gods is *teraphim*. Some translators render the word as "**household gods.**" Was Laban an idolator? If so, why did Jacob go all the way back to Haran to find a wife if they were idolators like the Canaanites? Others believe they were astrological devices used for telling the future. But this suggestion raises the same question. One scholar theorized that **these images were somehow tied in with the legal rights of inheritance** (see Guthrie, *New Bible Commentary*, p. 104. See also Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: Commentary*, p. 493). If this theory is correct, the possessor of the *teraphim* had the right to inherit the father's property. This circumstance would explain why Rachel stole the images, since her father had "stolen" her inheritance (see Genesis 31:14–16). It would also explain Laban's extreme agitation over their loss and Jacob's severe penalty offered against the guilty party (see Genesis 31:31). [Old Testament Institute Manual](#). Westerman (p. 493) claims that the reason for the theft of the *teraphim* had to do with their accusation against Jacob in Gen. 31.14-16, where Laban has taken away their inheritance. We read in Genesis 31.15 that Laban has *מְכַרְנוּ וַיֹּאכַל גַּם-אֶכֶל אֶת-כֶּסֶפֵּנוּ* – "he has sold us, also he ate our silver," suggesting that these women are owed something by Laban, and the theft of the *teraphim* somehow compensate for this injustice. **Nahum Sarna suggests** that these items were stolen in order that Rachel might deprive Laban from detecting Jacob's escape. (Sarna, p. 216)

Robert Alter explains the *teraphim* in this manner: The household gods, or *terafim* (the etymology of the term is still in doubt), are **small figurines representing the deities responsible for the well-being and prosperity of the household**. The often cited parallel with the Roman *penates* seems quite pertinent. **There is no reason to assume that Rachel would have become a strict monotheist through her marriage**, and so it is perfectly understandable that she would want to take with her in her emigration the icons of these tutelary spirits, or perhaps, symbols of possession. Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: Volume 1 The Five Books of Moses*.

Sarna provides the following: The nature and function of these objects **remain largely obscure**, as does Rachel's motivation. Called "*terafim*" in Hebrew, they are **translated "idols"** (LXX Gen. 31.19: *ἔκλεψεν δὲ Ραχὴλ τὰ εἰδωλά τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῆς* = Rachel stole the **idols** of her father) by ancient versions of the text such as the Aramaic Targums and the Greek Septuagint. Laban refers to them as "my gods" (v. 30), and Jacob correspondingly speaks of "your gods" (v. 32). The Narrator, however, dubs them "*terafim*" suggesting that the term may be a contemptuous substitution word such as is frequently used in the Bible in connection with idolatry. Thus, pagan gods may be variously characterized as *'ellim*, "worthless things"; *boshet*, "shame"; *gillulim*, "pellets of dung"; *havalim*, "futilities"; and *shikkutsim*, "detestable things." In 2 Kings 23:24 *terafim* appear together with *gillulim* and *shikkutsim* in a list of idolatrous abominations outlawed by King Josiah of Judah. In line with this substitution word practice, the term may be derived from a stem *r-f-h*, "to be limp, without energy," hence meaning "inert things." Another, perhaps more likely, origin is *t-r-f* "to decay, become foul," known from Aramaic and postbiblical Hebrew. A derivation from Hittite *tarpi*, "spirit, demon," then an object symbolizing the same, also cannot be ruled out. Nahum Sarna, [The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis](#), The Jewish Publication Society, 2001, p. 216.

⁸ Literally, "guard yourself!" or "Watch yourself!" *הִשָּׁמֶר לָךְ* – this seems to be a message from Elohim that Jacob is doing his work. Alter's translation is as follows: And God came to Laban the Aramean in a night-dream and said to him, "Watch yourself, lest you speak to Jacob either good or evil!" See: Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: Volume 1 The Five Books of Moses*, p. 114.

- a. Laban accuses Jacob of stealing the *teraphim* – Gen. 31.30-35.⁹
 - i. Rachel stole them, unbeknownst to Jacob, and tricks her father into not finding them – Gen. 31.32-35.
- b. Jacob lays out his case that he was a worthy servant to Laban – Gen. 31.38-42.
 - i. “I worked 20 years!” – Gen. 31.38
 - ii. “I bore the loss of torn beasts!” – Gen. 31.39.
 - iii. “You have changed my wages ten times!” – Gen. 31.41.
 - iv. “If God were not my father, I would have nothing” – Gen. 31.42.
7. Laban’s response: everything you have is MINE! – Gen. 31.43.
8. Jacob and Laban make a covenant of peace – Gen. 31.44-55.
 - a. The Heap of Witness is constructed – Gen. 31.45-47.
 - b. The two men sacrifice an animal, covenant with one another, eat bread, and part ways – Gen. 31.53-55.

Genesis 32: Jacob’s Divine Experience

1. Angels of God meet Jacob – Gen. 32.1-2.
2. Jacob sends messengers to Seir, the land of the Edomites – Gen. 32.3-5.
3. The messengers return with the message that Esau is coming out to meet Jacob – Gen. 32.6.
4. Jacob is scared for his life at this point – Gen. 32.7-8.
5. Jacob’s prayer to God – Gen. 32.9-12.
6. Jacob prepares a gift for Esau – Gen. 32.13-23.¹⁰
 - a. The ford Jabbok – Gen. 23.22.¹¹
7. Jacob wrestles a divine being – Gen. 32.24-32.¹²
 - a. Jacob wrestles “a man” - וַיִּאָבֶק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ “there wrestled a man with him” – Gen. 32.24.¹³

⁹ תְּרַפִּים – *teraphim* comes from Genesis 31.19, “Rachel had stolen the images that were her father’s.” The word is translated as images in the KJV.

¹⁰ A diplomatic initiative aimed at softening Esau’s anticipated hostility is the final tactic. A munificent gift that bears the stamp of paying tribute is so arranged that the manner of presentation, a series of increasingly agreeable surprises, achieves the greatest psychological impact through its incremental effect. Esau is bound to be overwhelmed by it all. Sarna, p. 225.

¹¹ The word for “ford,” *ma’avar*, is a noun derived from the reiterated verb *avar*. “to cross over.” The Jabbok is a tributary of the Jordan running from east to west. Jacob has been traveling south from the high country of Gilead, Esau is heading north from Edom to meet him. Alter, p. 121.

¹² The story of Jacob’s encounter with Esau is suddenly interrupted. The restless Jacob gets up during the night and promptly decides to transfer his entire camp to the other side of the Jabbok. Left utterly alone, he is attacked by a mysterious assailant who wrestles with him until daybreak. When, in desperation, he wrenches Jacob’s hip. The patriarch, however, stubbornly holds on to extract a blessing, whereupon the stranger changes Jacob’s name to Israel. Refusing to reveal his own name, he vanishes as the sun’s rays shed their first light on a limping Jacob. In commemoration of the night’s events, the site of the encounter is named Peniel, and a dietary restriction is instituted. Sarna, p. 226.

¹³ Alter writes, “The image of wrestling has been implicit throughout the Jacob story: in his grabbing Esau’s heel as he emerges from the womb, in his striving with Esau for birthright and blessing, in his rolling away the huge stone from the mouth of the well, and in his multiple contendings with Laban. **Now, in this culminating moment of his life story, the characterizing image of wrestling is made explicit and literal.**” Robert Alter, [The Hebrew Bible: Volume 1 The Five Books of Moses](#), W. W. Norton and Company, 2019, p. 121.

- a. Various interpretations of Gen. 32.24-32. **The fateful encounter at the Jabbok is one of the best-known episodes in the life of Jacob, but also surely the most enigmatic.**¹⁴
- i. Joseph Fielding Smith: The wrestling and the visitation of the Lord are two different occurrences, thus two different beings.¹⁵
 - ii. Nahum Sarna: This being is **a celestial patron of Esau-Edom**, working to protect Edom's turf, as Israel will be the future enemy of Edom.¹⁶

¹⁴ *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 67-8. From this study Bible we read, "Peniel is on the north bank of the Jabbok (the wadi Zerka). Why Jacob returned there after fording his wives and children is unclear. In the Talmud, it is suggested that he had returned to retrieve some little jars he had forgotten there (b. *Hul.* 91a). In any case, his solitude and lack of property recall his status when he first fled his brother's wrath, before God had showered His bounty upon him (28.1 1). 25: **The identity of the man is as unclear as his reason for attacking Jacob** (d. Exod. 4.24-26). In the Tanakh, God and angels can appear in human form, as in 18.2 (d. 19.1); Josh. 5.13-15; Judg. 13.6, 10. Jacob's mysterious adversary is surely supernatural, and most traditional Jewish commentators have taken him to be angelic. **A well-known midrash sees him as the "patron angel of Esau" and thus interprets this episode as a warning to all future enemies of the Jewish people: "Your patron angel could not withstand him [i.e., Jacob/Israel] and you seek to attack his descendants?"** (Gen. Rab. 77.3).

¹⁵ Joseph Fielding Smith put it this way: "Who wrestled with Jacob on Mount Peniel? The scriptures say it was a man. The Bible interpreters say it was an angel. More than likely it was a messenger sent to Jacob to give him the blessing. To think he wrestled and held an angel who couldn't get away, is out of the question. The term angel as used in the scriptures, at times, refers to messengers who are sent with some important instruction. Later in this chapter when Jacob said he had beheld the Lord, that did not have reference to his wrestling." *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:17.

¹⁶ Sarna explains: The geographical locale of the incident is crucial to its understanding. Its true significance lies ... in its having occurred exactly at the crossing of the Jabbok. This river is otherwise mentioned in the Bible exclusively as **a frontier of Israel, the limit of Israel's first victory against the kingdoms east** of the Jordan after it emerged from the desert wanderings. The location at the Jabbok cannot be coincidental; it suggests that the purpose of the assault upon Jacob is to frustrate his return to his homeland, to prevent him from crossing over into the future national territory of Israel.

This raises the question of the identity of the antagonist. **Who but Esau would have had such an obstructionist interest? But the wrestler is definitely not Esau himself.** Hence, he must stand in for Esau in some manner. He is, as it were, Esau's alter ego. The vocabulary employed in the narrative to identify the strange personage—a "man," "a divine being" *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים) is that used elsewhere of angels. Indeed, the prophet Hosea explicitly describes him as such in Hosea 12:4. The most plausible solution, therefore, is to see in this mysterious being the celestial patron of Esau. This, indeed, is the interpretation given in a midrash. Throughout the ancient world, the idea was current that each city-state, each people had its divine protector. In monotheistic Israel such a notion was intolerable. It therefore became transmuted into a belief in the existence of subordinate tutelary spirits who were part of the celestial host. This notion finds unambiguous expression in Daniel 10.13, 20, and 21, which speak of the celestial princes of Persia and Greece. But it is rooted in much earlier times. Psalm 82 is a classic example, and Isaiah 24.21 reflects the same picture. This idea is behind such passages as Deuteronomy 4.19 and 29.25, which state that God Himself allotted the nations their divinities. An interesting light on this belief is shed by the textual history of Deuteronomy 32.8, which reads as follows: "When the Most High gave nations their homes / And set the divisions of man, / He fixed the boundaries of peoples / In relation to Israel's numbers." In the last phrase, the Greek version of the Jews of Alexandria has "the messengers (*angeloi*) of God" presupposing a Hebrew reading *benei 'el/eloloim* instead of our received Hebrew text *benei yisra'el*. Such a Hebrew text actually turned up in Cave 4 of Qumran.

In summation, the mysterious creature who assails Jacob as he is about to cross the future border of Israel is **none other than the celestial patron of Esau-Edom**, who is **the inveterate enemy of the people of Israel**. The entire episode foreshadows the impending confrontation with Esau, whom Jacob can now meet with confidence. It is also emblematic of subsequent historic relationships between the peoples of Israel and Edom.

- iii. Robert Alter: The being 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**.¹⁷
- iv. Claus Westermann suggests that the being at the river crossing was a demon.¹⁸
- v. Another clue to the identity of this individual could come to us through a close reading of the Book of Mormon. In Enos 1.2, "I will tell you of the wrestle which I had before God, before I received a remission of my sins." There is a possibility that the text of Enos is an inspired midrash on the enigmatic text of Jacob 32.¹⁹
- b. The hollow of Jacob's thigh becomes "out of joint" – Gen. 32.25.
- c. The person asks, "What is your name?" Jacob tells him – Gen. 32.26-27.
- d. Jacob's name is changed to Israel, for he has "striven with Gods" – Gen. 32.28.²⁰

It is this antagonism that makes the blessing, the change of the name of Jacob to Israel, all the more meaningful. This act constitutes Esau's acquiescence in Jacob's right to the paternal blessings. It acknowledges the promised land to be Jacob's rightful heritage. It is entirely appropriate that the new name, that by which the future nation is to be known, should be bestowed at the frontier, just as the patriarch overcomes his opponent and can enter that land unhindered. Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, Excursus 24: Jacob's Struggle with the Angel, p. 403-404.

¹⁷ Alter, p. 121-122.

¹⁸ Claus Westermann, [Genesis 12-36: Continental Commentaries](#), Fortress Press, 1986, p. 515-516. He writes, "All three features suit the hostile demon or the evil spirit, as attested in many religions throughout the world. A hostile demon, an evil spirit, attacks someone so as to cause harm. This can happen in a variety of ways. In the New Testament it is predominantly the evil spirit that causes illness; here it is the demon of the night or the river, the embodiment of the danger involved in crossing the river. This notion which has its roots in animism is very widespread and is so accurately described in the three features mentioned that one cannot avoid it. The text speaks of a hostile demon or an evil spirit that attacks Jacob..."

¹⁹ Matthew L. Bowen, ["And there Wrestled A Man with Him" \(Genesis 32.24\): Enos' Adaptations of the Onomastic Wordplay of Genesis.](#) *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 10 (2014): 151-160. Bowen's article is insightful and offers some provocative avenues to explore in regards to Genesis 32 and Enos' account of his experience with the divine. Indeed, once one has analyzed the wordplay and the associations that Enos is making with the story of Genesis 32, the exact identity of the person wrestling with Jacob fades into insignificance when compared to the deeper meaning of the text. Enos gives us permission to relax our literalist lens and see the text in a whole new light. Bowen's analysis is powerful:

"There can be little doubt that Enos, in describing his transformative "wrestle before God" (Enos 1:2), alludes to his ancestor Jacob's transformative "wrestle" at Peniel, with a view to the name "Jacob" which was also borne by his father, whose teachings Enos also had to "wrestle" with and become reconciled to. Enos also subtly alludes to the meaning of his own name in using wordplay that recalls his uncle Nephi's autobiographical wordplay (1 Nephi 1:1) and the wrestling "man" and "men" of Genesis 32. Enos further insinuates through wordplay that he became "Israel," one who "struggled" with God and prevailed, and a "man" who had "seen" God." The breathtaking beauty of Enos's wordplay, however, cannot be appreciated until we recognize his allusions to Esau and Jacob's conciliatory "embrace" and Jacob's "seeing" the face of his brother, with mutual pleasure, as "the face of God." Enos too became *Yiśrā'ēl* — a "man," *īš* or *'ēnōš* — who envisaged God and became like him through Jesus's atonement and the resurrection that Jesus brought to pass." [Bowen, p.160.](#)

²⁰ כִּי־שָׁרִיתָ עִם־אֱלֹהִים "For you have striven with Gods..." This is translated as "thou hast power with God' in the KJV. Robert Alter gives the following insightful commentary on the use of Elohim in this context: The Hebrew term *'elohim* is a **high concentration point of lexical ambiguity that serves the enigmatic character of the story very**

- a. Israel has some interesting possibilities and interpretations.²¹
- e. Jacob asks the person his name, and is not given a name – Gen. 32.29.²²
- f. Jacob states, “I have seen God face to face” – Gen. 32.30.
- g. Commentary on Jacob’s thigh – Gen. 32.31-32.

Genesis 33: The Reunion of Jacob and Esau

- 1. Reconciliation – Gen. 33.1-15.
 - a. The ordering of the families of Jacob – Gen. 33.1-3.²³
 - b. **The embrace** – Gen. 33.3-4. This is a significant symbol directly attached to the idea of the **Atonement of Jesus Christ**.²⁴

well. It is *not* the term that means “divine messenger” but it can refer to divine beings, whether or not it is prefixed by “sons of” (as in Genesis 6). It **can also mean simply “God,” and in some contexts**—could this be one?—**it means “gods.”** In a few cases, it **also designates something like “princes” or “judges,”** but that is precluded here by its being antithetically paired with “men.” It is not clear whether the anonymous adversary is referring to himself when he says *’elohim* or to more-than-human agents encountered by Jacob throughout his career. In any case, he etymologizes the name *Yisra’el, Israel, as “he strives with God.”* In fact, names with the *’el* ending generally make God the subject, not the object, of the verb in the name. This particular verb, *sarah*, is a rare one, and there is some question about its meaning, though an educated guess about the original sense of the name would be: “God will rule,” or perhaps, “God will prevail.” Alter, volume 1, p. 122.

²¹ Bowen offers the following: There seems to be a further pun envisaged by the use of the verb *rā’â*, to “see” in Genesis 32:20, and the giving of Jacob’s new name “Israel” (*Yisrā’ēl*) in connection with the verb *rā’â*, to “see” in Genesis 32:28–30 (it is a key word that also occurs at Genesis 32:2, 20, 25; 33:1, 5, 10; cf. Enos 1:8, 19, 27). The force of this implied or hidden non-etymological pun seems to be **’iš –rā’â –’ēl*: A “man” (*’iš*) has “seen” (*rā’â*) “God” (*’ēl[ōhîm]*), and his “life is preserved.” Bowen, [Interpreter, p. 155](#).

²² In primitive thought to know the name of a deity or supernatural being would enable one to use it for magical manipulation or power (A. S. Herbert, *Genesis 12-50* [TBC], 108). For a thorough structural analysis of the passage discussing the plays on the names and the request of Jacob, see R. Barthes, “The Struggle with the Angel: Textual Analysis of Genesis 32:23-33,” *Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis* (PTMS), 21-33.

²³ This kind of ranking according to favoritism probably helped to foment the jealousy over Joseph that later becomes an important element in the narrative of the last chapters of Genesis. It must have been painful to the family to see that they were ranked in this sort of arrangement. According to Friedman, these verses come from the Elohist tradition. See: Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, p. 86-87.

²⁴ After his “wrestle” with the “man” in Genesis 32, the very next pericope describes Jacob’s “reconciliation” or “at-one-ment” with his estranged brother Esau. Jacob’s humility is evident in his obeisance, to which Esau responds with an embrace:

And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. And Esau **ran** to meet him, **and embraced him** [*wayēḥabbēqēhū*], and **fell on his neck**, and **kissed** him: and they wept (Genesis 33:3–4).

In the biblical account, the word “embraced” constitutes a paronomasia on the name “Jacob” (Similar wordplay on “Jacob” in terms of embrace can be found in Genesis 29:13 and 48:10) similar to the paronomasia on “wrestle” *יָרָבַע* (*yē’ābēq*) and Jacob (*Ya’āqōb*). This wordplay is a sublime pun on “Jacob” that emphasizes his transformation from his former identity: **he is no longer the “heel [-grabber]” or “usurper,” but “the embraced,” i.e., “the at-one-ed.”** This pun confirms Hugh Nibley’s suggestion that “the word conventionally translated as ‘wrestled’ (*yē’āvēq*) can just as well mean “embraced.” See: [Bowen](#), p. 157.

- c. **“As though I had seen the face of God...”** – Gen. 33.10. This is an important connection between the text of Gen. 32 and Enos’ work. Following this “divine” embrace, Jacob articulates his feelings about this “reconciliation” or “at-one-ment” in words that recall his “wrestle” at Peniel (“face of God”) where he saw God “face to face” (Genesis 32:30) and his earlier words (“I will see his face, and he will [lift up my face],” 32:20): And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore **I have seen** [rā’itī] **thy face** [pānēkā], **as though I had seen** [kir’ôt] **the face of God** [pēnē ’ēlōhîm], and **thou wast pleased with me** [or, “thou hast been reconciled to me”] (Genesis 33:10). Enos, who goes down to the grave with the knowledge that the Lamanites will one day be reconciled to God (Enos 1:12-17), anticipates his final “reconciliation” and “atonement” to God in words that directly recall Genesis 32:20 and 33:10: And I soon go to the place of my rest, which is with my Redeemer; for I know that in him I shall rest. And I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall put on immortality, and shall **stand before him; then shall I see his face with pleasure**, and he will say unto me: Come unto me, ye blessed, there is a place prepared for you in the mansions of my Father. Amen. (Enos 1:27).²⁵
2. Esau returns to Seir – Gen. 33.16.
 3. Jacob journeys to Succoth, then Shechem, in the heart of Canaan – Gen. 33.18.
 4. His purchase of the land in Shechem²⁶ will be contrasted with the Jahwist account of Dinah’s violation in Genesis 34 – Gen. 33.18-19.

See: Hugh W. Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 2nd ed. [CWHN 16; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005], 434. Nibley writes, “One of the most puzzling episodes in the Bible has always been the story of Jacob’s wrestling with the Lord. When one considers that the word conventionally translated as ‘wrestled (yē’āvēq)’ can just as well mean ‘embrace’ and that it was in this ritual embrace that Jacob received a new name and the bestowal of priestly and kingly power at sunrise (Genesis 32:24-30), the parallel to the Egyptian coronation embrace becomes at once apparent.” Notably, the Hebrew verbs אָבַק ‘bq (“wrestle”) and אָבַק חֶבֶק ‘hbq (“embrace”) may both be related to Akkadian *epēqu(m)*, “to embrace; grow over, round.” See *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, ed. Jeremy Black, Andrew George and Nicolas Postgate; SANTAG 5 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2000), 74.

²⁵ Bowen, p. 157. He writes, “Enos’s words here, adapting Jacob’s words from the Jacob-Esau story, constitute a marvelous play on both “Peniel” and “Israel.” Enos rejoices in the eventual at-one-ment of his body and spirit, i.e., his becoming an immortal man, and he foresees that when **he finally stands “before” God** (cf. Peniel), he will “see his face with pleasure,” just as when Jacob “saw” Esau’s “face” and was finally reconciled to him (Genesis 33:1–4). **He knows the Lord will embrace him.**” (cf. 2 Nephi 1:15; 4:31–35; Alma 34:16; Mormon 5:11; Luke 15:20; Moses 7:63).

²⁶ Genesis 33.18-19 is the Elohist version of the settling in Shechem. This peaceful version will be countermanded in the J version of the story, where Levi and Simeon, both sons of Leah, violently take the land of Shechem through deception and violence. There are two accounts in the book of Genesis detailing how the Israelites came to possess Shechem, which became the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. The southern Yahwist account of the story of the taking of Shechem ([Genesis 34](#)) is provocative. It reveals how the southern storytellers viewed their northern brethren, for we must remember that much of these stories were textualized during or after the monarchy (1000 BCE). I contend that this story was written or inserted into the Tanakh after the separation of the kingdom and its splitting into two, in 921 BCE. When this southern version of the story was written, we see how these southern priests, scribes, poets, or prophets viewed their northern neighbors. For according to this version, the founding of Shechem was achieved through a deceptive, brutal, and bloody affair. [Genesis 34](#) It recounts how Dinah gets raped by one of the princes of Shechem and how her brothers persuaded all the males in the city to be

circumcised so that these two clans could become one. After they had agreed to this arrangement, Simeon and Levi decide to annihilate them in their weakened condition. Of course those in the north told the story much differently. And so in this way we read the simple and peaceful transition of land in the Elohist account in Genesis 33.18-20.