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Genesis 24-33 Podcast notes

Genesis 24: Abraham sends Eliezer to find a wife for Isaac

1. Abraham covenants with his “servant”¹ to find a worthy wife for Isaac – Gen. 24.1-9.
2. The servant takes ten “camels”² on his journey to Nahor in Mesopotamia – Gen. 24.10.
3. Eliezer’s prayer – Gen. 24.12-14.³
4. Rebekah’s response: She gives the camels water to drink, even “all his camels” – Gen. 24.15-21.
5. Quickly emptying her jar into the trough, she ran back to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels – Gen. 24.20.⁴
6. Rebekah introduces Eliezer to her brother Laban⁵ – Gen. 24.29-31.
7. The servant retells his story to Laban and Bethuel – Gen. 24.33-49.⁶
8. Their response: abide with us ten days (55), we will ask Rebekeh (57) – Gen. 24.50-57.⁷
 - a. The servant offers gifts to the family – Gen. 24.53.⁸

¹ The rabbinic tradition assumes that Abraham's senior servant is Eliezer, but the latter is never termed a "servant" (15.2-4), and precise identification of the man, unnamed throughout the story, is unnecessary. Thigh seems to be a euphemism for the male organ (cf. 46.26; Exod. 1.5). Perhaps by touching it, the person swearing the oath calls sterility or loss of children upon himself, should he violate it. The parallel in Gen. 47.29 suggests that ch 24 once functioned as Abraham's last request. See: Berlin and Brettler, [The Jewish Study Bible](#), Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 48.

² עֶשְׂרֵה גְמָלִים = ten camels. The problem with this existing in the text is that it is anachronistic, revealing the time period of the author of this text to be in the Iron age during the time of the Israelite monarchy, or later.

³ Legendary Jewish commentator [Rashi](#) (1040-1105 AD) points out the aptness of the sign that the servant requests: The woman appropriate to marry into Abraham's household must practice the extraordinary kindness and generosity characteristic of her future father-in-law. [The Jewish Study Bible](#), p. 49.

⁴ Rebekah's running to serve the visitor (who has not yet introduced himself) recalls Abraham's response to the visit of the unidentified men in Genesis 18.6-7.

⁵ Hebrew *lavan* meaning “white.” The feminine form *levanah*, “the white one,” is a poetic term for the moon. This association is in keeping with other names in Abraham’s family that have a connection with the lunar cult, such Terah, which has been connected with *yareah*, “moon”; Sarah, the Hebrew form of Akkadian *sarratu*, “queen,” used of the consort of the moon-god Sin; and Milcah, from Akkadian *malkatu*, “princess,” the name of Sin’s daughter. See: Nahum Sarna, [The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis](#), The Jewish Publication Society, 2001, p. 166.

⁶ This type of repetition, which doubtless has its origins in orally transmitted literature, is standard feature of the Near Eastern epic tradition and is carried over into various kinds of biblical prose narrative. Sarna, p. 167.

⁷ Laban and Bethuel... It is not only strange that Laban takes precedence over his father but also that the father plays no further role in the proceedings. In verse 53 he is not listed among the recipients of gifts, and in verse 55 it is Laban and his mother who carry on the negotiations. The conclusion that Laban occupies a special position in the family is inescapable and is confirmed by 25:20, where, in addition to being described as the “daughter of Bethuel,” Rebekah is also listed as being “the sister of Laban.” Radak suggests that the father was too enfeebled and incompetent to act, other than to indicate his assent to his son’s statement of agreement in principle. Numerous ancient Near Eastern texts demonstrate that in a patriarchal society the brother had important duties and powers in regard to his sisters. There are also legal documents that detail the joint exercise of authority by mother and son in the marriage of a daughter. Sarna, [Genesis](#), p. 168.

⁸ The two types of gifts—the one to Rebekah, the other to her family—most likely correspond to the “bride-price and gifts” mentioned in 34:12. In Akkadian these are known respectively as the *terhatum* and the *biblum*. The first was a fixed amount paid by the groom in compensation for the loss of the bride’s services and her potential

- b. Let her abide “days or ten...” – Gen. 24.55.⁹
- 9. The return journey¹⁰ and marriage – Gen. 24.58-67.
 - a. A mother of thousands of millions – Gen. 24.60.¹¹
 - b. Beer-lahai-roi, “The well of the living one seeing me” – Gen. 24.62.¹²
 - c. Jacob went out to *sûah* - נִוַּשׁ “meditate” – Gen. 24.63.¹³
 - d. The veil of Rebekah – Gen. 24.65.¹⁴

Genesis 25: The Genealogies of Abraham

- 1. Abraham marries Keturah – Gen. 25.1.¹⁵
 - a. The descendants of Abraham & Keturah – Gen. 25.2-6.
- 2. The death of Abraham – Gen. 25.7-10.
 - a. Abraham is buried near his wife Sarah in the cave of Machpelah – Gen. 25.9.
- 3. The generations of Ishmael – Gen. 25.16-18.
 - a. “Castles” (KJV) in Gen. 25.16 is the plural of *ṭîrâ* – טִירָה “encampment.” The LXX translators used ἐπαύλειον – their “dwellings.” Perhaps the KJV translators went with

offspring. These will now belong to her husband’s family. This is probably what is called elsewhere in Hebrew the *mohar* (Exod. 22:16). The *biblum* consisted of ceremonial marriage gifts to the bride’s family. Sarna, p. 168.

⁹ Literally, יָמִים אֹד עֶשְׂרִים אוֹ עֶשְׂרִים “days or ten,” a phrase interpreted by the Targums to mean “a year or ten months” and by the Septuagint as “a few days, say ten. Sarna, 169.

¹⁰ Gen. 24.65 identifies Isaac as master. Everywhere else in Gen. 24, *my master* refers to Abraham, and Isaac has been called “his/my master’s son.” Perhaps Abraham has died while his steward was on his sacred mission. If so, the events narrated in 25.1-18 had happened beforehand.

¹¹ “May you grow into thousands of myriads”... הֲיִ לְאַלְפֵי רִבְבָהּ

¹² בְּאֵר לַחַי רֹאִי - be-ayr' lakh-ah'ee ro-ee' from “well” (בְּאֵר) and living one (חַי), and the verb “see” (רָאָה). According to Genesis 16.14., this is the name a well situated in the Negeb. It was probably part of an oasis to which sheep-breeders seasonally repaired for water and pasturage. Isaac later settled there (25.11).

¹³ The meaning of Hebrew *la-suahk* is obscure. The present rendering is based on Arabic *saha*, “to take a stroll.” Another tradition has Isaac “chatting” with his friends, a translation derived from Hebrew *siah*, “to talk.” Still a third interpretation connects the word with Hebrew *siah*, “a shrub”; he strolled among the plants or went to plant shrubs. The most popular rabbinic understanding has Isaac “praying.” Sarna, p. 169.

¹⁴ The incident of Sarah in Egypt, as described in Genesis 12:14, shows that Israelite women were not normally veiled. Tamar put on a veil only to disguise herself before Judah (38:14.). In the Middle Assyrian law the veil is a mark of distinction and the prerogative of a free woman, but this is exceptional in the Near East, where wives generally went about unveiled. There is evidence, however, that the veiling of the bride was part of the marriage ceremony. In Akkadian the bride on her wedding day is called *kallatu kutumtu*, “the veiled bride.” *Pussumntu*, “the veiled one,” is another term for *kallatu*, “bride.” The Middle Assyrian laws make the raising of a concubine to the status of a wife contingent upon her being veiled in the presence of the court. In light of all this, Rebekah’s veiling herself has both symbolic and socio-legal significance. It is an unspoken signal to Isaac that she is his bride. Sarna, p. 170.

¹⁵ The “sons” of Keturah, six in number, are to be regarded as constituting the original core of the tribal confederation to which others, “grandsons” and “great-grandsons,” later adhered. The name “Keturah” is obviously related to Hebrew *ketoret*, “spices.” There was a universal and sustained demand in the ancient world for frankincense, myrrh, and other aromatic resins and gums.. Because of her name, it is reasonable to assume that the key factor behind the organization of the Keturah tribes was the spice trade—the production, shipment, and distribution of this precious commodity. It so happens that both biblical and Assyrian sources mention many of the names here listed as those of peoples or localities involved in this particular branch of international commerce. They controlled the trade routes that led from the Arabian Peninsula to the lands of the Fertile Crescent. Sarna, [Genesis](#), p. 171-2.

“castles” as these individuals are called princes (נְיָשִׁים) (Hebrew), ἄρχοντες (Greek) in the text.

4. The generations of Isaac and the continuation of the lineage history – Gen. 25.19-23.
 - a. Two nations are in your womb! God speaks to Rebekah – Gen. 25.23
5. Jacob and Esau – Gen. 25.24-34.
 - a. Esau came out first, a pun on “red,” and “hairy” – Gen. 25.25.¹⁶
 - b. Jacob born second, another pun – Gen. 25.26.¹⁷
 - c. Therefore was his name called Edom – Gen. 25.30.
 - i. The Edomites were traditional enemies to Israel.¹⁸
 - d. Sell me this day thy birthright! – Gen. 25.31¹⁹

¹⁶ In addition to the pun on Seir and (שַׁעַר) *se'ar* ("hair"), there is also a play on red (אֲדָמוֹן) - *admoni* and "Edom," another name for Esau and the kingdom descended from him. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 53. Sarna writes, "This detail anticipates the crucial role of Esau's hairiness later on in the narrative. Hebrew *se'ar*, "hair" (*sa'ir*, "hairy"), is also an allusion to the land of Seir, the habitat of Esau/Edom, as mentioned in Gen. 32.4 and in other texts. **This region probably derived its name from the shaggy nature of the terrain.** Sarna, p. 180.

¹⁷ By folk etymology, the name is here derived from Hebrew (עֶקֶב) '*akev*, "heel." In reality, Hebrew *ya'akov* stems from a Semitic root '-k-v, "to protect." It is abbreviated from a fuller form with a divine name or epithet as its subject. *Ta'akov-'el*, "May El protect," is a name that has turned up several times in cuneiform texts over a wide area. The name Jacob is thus, in origin, a plea for divine protection of the newly born--most appropriate for the one who was to live his entire life in the shadow of danger. Sarna, p. 180.

¹⁸ According to Genesis 36.6-8, the clan of Esau originally lived in Canaan but later settled in "the hill country of Seir." The national territory of Edom lay east of the Jordan in the southernmost part of the country. It stretched from the Gulf of Elath northward for the distance of about 100 miles to Nahal Zered ([Wadi Hasa](#)), which formed the natural boundary between Edom and Moab. It shared a common boundary with Judea along the [rift of the Arabah](#), which extends from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Akaba.

It was this geographic reality that engendered the hostility between the two peoples. The western side of the Edomite homeland enjoyed a strategic and climatic advantage. Its steep precipices, rising to 5,000 1661 (1,525 m.) above sea level, overlook the Arabah. **Their westerly exposure assures the receipt of respectable amounts of precipitation, thereby sustaining agriculture and forests. The "king's highway," one of the main arteries of communication in the ancient world, traversed the country from north to south This gave it control over the precious caravan trade from India and southern Arabia and connected it with Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia.** Punon, an important copper mining and smelting site, was also situated within Edom.

On the western side of the rift lay the [Arabah](#), arid and far from the Judean centers of population. This necessitated long lines of communication and the hauling of supplies over considerable distances and treacherous terrain. The copper deposits of the Arabah were unexploitable without a local supply of fuel. A strategic highway led through the region from the Gulf of Akaba across the Negeb to Beer-sheba, where it split into a network of roads joining the important towns of Judea and Northern Israel. Without control of the Arabah, the nomadic tribes that roamed the Negeb were a constant menace.

Both Edom and Israel had abundant incentive to encroach upon each other's territory. **It was easier for the Edomites to infiltrate westward into the Arabah than for the Judeans to penetrate Edom. The Edomites exploited their strategic advantage to the full**, while the temptation to shorten communication lines, to have a supply source close by, and to have access to fuel for the copper mines as well as control over the lucrative spice trade proved irresistible to the Judean kings. It was David who defeated the Edomites, stationed permanent garrisons in their land, and made them vassals of his kingdom, as described in 2 Samuel 8:13f. Sarna, p. 177-178,

¹⁹ An extrabiblical reference gives information that may have bearing upon this story. We read that Esau slew Nimrod and cut off his head, taking the "valuable garments of Nimrod, which Nimrod's father had bequeathed to Nimrod, and with which Nimrod prevailed over the whole land, and he ran and concealed them in his house."

- e. Esau despised his birthright – Gen. 25.34.

Genesis 26: The Lord appears to Isaac

1. God appears to Isaac – Gen. 26.1-2
2. I will make they seed as the stars of heaven – Gen. 26.4.²⁰
3. “She is my sister...” another repetition in Genesis (triplet) – Gen. 26.6-12.²¹
4. Strife over wells with the “Philistines”²² – Gen. 26.14-22.

([Book of Jasher, chapter 27.10](#)) Later, we read that Esau was wearied from the fight (verse 11), and thus sold his birthright to Jacob (verse 12).

²⁰ Remember, stars are symbols for priests.

²¹ This is a triplet narrative in Genesis. The Wife/sister motif, or the Sacrifice of Sarah, occurs three times: Genesis 12:10-20 (J) and Genesis 20:1-18 (E) and Genesis 26 : 6 – 14 (J). (Triplet). See: [Stories told twice in the Bible](#).

²² As the Philistines do not arrive in the Levant until the end of the Bronze age, this is another probably anachronism in the text, demonstrating the time of the scribal activity that produced this story in its written form. Most historians consider the reference to Philistines in Gen. 26 to be anachronistic, since the Philistines did not arrive until 1200 BCE. See: *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 55.

Nahum Sarna does not view these texts as anachronisms:

These passages have occasioned considerable controversy. The Philistines are never listed in the various biblical registers of pre-Israelite peoples who inhabited the land, such as 15:18. They are not a factor in Joshua’s campaigns. They do not appear in the Tell el-Amarna letters of the fourteenth century B.C.E. In fact, the earliest historical reference to them so far discovered comes from the time of Ramses III. The *prst* (peleset) are among a group of peoples referred to by ancient Egyptian sources as the “sea peoples,” who invaded the Levant from the Cretan-Mycenaean area at the beginning in the twelfth century B.C.E. They tried to attack Egypt as well, but were repulsed by Ramses III... In light of what is known of the history of the Philistines, the references to them in the Abraham and Isaac narratives have generally regarded as anachronistic. Yet this conclusion itself raises serious difficulties. An anachronism is a chronological misplacing of events, institutions, concepts, objects, proper names, or place-names. That which is put in the wrong historical time frame must accurately reflect the time from which it is retrojected or into which it is projected. However, the picture of the Philistines in Genesis does not correspond to the realities the later period.

Unlike the depiction of the Philistines in Judges and Kings, these of the patriarchal period do not inhabit the Shephelah but are situated inland in the south. There is no pentapolis with *seranim* but a king of a single city who acts alone. The king has a Semitic name. Relationships between this people and the patriarchs are governed by formal treaties of friendship, whereas the later Philistines are inveterate enemies of Israel. Unless the Narrator had some particular reason for consciously falsifying history—and no such is forthcoming, especially since the ethnic identity of Abimelech and his subjects is of no significance for the understanding of the story—the references to the Philistines in the patriarchal narratives cannot be anachronisms. No later Israelite writer could possibly be so ignorant of the elementary facts of the history of his people as to perpetrate such a series of blunders, and to no purpose whatsoever.

Accordingly, **the “Philistines” of patriarchal times may have belonged to a much earlier, minor wave of Aegean invaders who founded a small city-state in Gerar long before the large-scale invasions of the Levant, which led to the occupation of the Canaanite coast.** The Narrator may be using a generic term for the sea peoples. At any rate, the Philistines of patriarchal times adopted Canaanite culture and lost their separate identity. Sarna, p. 390.

5. The naming of Beer-sheba, another doublet in Genesis – Gen. 26.15-33.²³
 - a. The well of opposition – Gen. 26.20.
 - b. The Lord appears to Isaac at night, “I will multiply thy seed!” – Gen. 26.24.
 - c. Isaac builds an altar there – Gen. 26.25.
 - d. An oath is made between Abimelech and Isaac – Gen. 26.28-29.
 - e. A covenant meal takes place – Gen. 26.30.
6. Esau marries Judith the Hittite – Gen. 26.34-35.²⁴

Genesis 27: Rebekah guides the Birthright Blessing

1. His eyes were dim – Gen. 27.1.²⁵
 - a. “Behold, here am I” הִנְנִי – Gen. 27.1²⁶
2. Esau sent out to hunt – Gen. 27.1-4.
 - a. Isaac's instruction to hunt him some game recalls the rather shallow reason for his favoring the uncouth Esau. There may also be a notion here that eating will fortify his innermost self, that is, his lifeforce (“nefesh,” נֶפֶשׁ v. 4) so that he may impart a more powerful blessing to his son.²⁷
3. Rebekah's efforts to thwart Isaac's plan – Gen. 27.6-13.
 - a. Two kids of the goats – Gen. 27.9.²⁸
 - b. Let the curse be upon me! – Gen. 27.13.
4. Jacob dresses up as Esau – Gen. 27.15-17.
5. The Deception – Gen. 27.18-27.
 - a. “Come near...” – 27.21.
 - b. “He felt him...” – 27.22.

²³ See also Genesis 21.22-31, where this well receives its name from Abraham in the strife over water with Abimelech. See: Stories told twice in the Bible.

²⁴ **Source critics attribute these verses to P** and see them as the prologue to Genesis 27.46-28.9, the Priestly explanation for Jacob's flight to his uncle's homestead. In the genealogical notice in 36.2-4, Elon's daughter is not Basemath but Adah; Basemath is the daughter of Ishmael, not Elon; and Judith is absent altogether. Esau's intermarriages are a jarring contrast to Abraham's strenuous effort to find a wife for Isaac from within the clan (ch 24) and demonstrate Esau's unworthiness to serve as the next figure in the patriarchal line. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 55.

²⁵ In a way, there is a veil betwixt these two men. This will culminate in an embrace with promised blessing from father to son.

²⁶ We see this same statement in Genesis 22.1 – הִנְנִי. Esau's response to his aged father's summons, Here I am (v. 1), recalls the refrain of the 'Akedah (22.1, 7, 11), another but very different story of a loving father and the near-loss of his beloved son. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 55.

²⁷ *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 55. Sarna offers the following: Literally, “that my being (Heb. *nefesh*) may bless you.” This formulation, which appears again three times, is clearly of great importance to the understanding of the blessing. **We see from verse 28 that the source and sanction of the blessing is not man but God.** Isaac summons from the very depths of his own soul all the vitality and energy at his command in order to invoke God's blessing upon his son. He communicates the blessing to his offspring by virtue of his own special relationship with God and by dint of his power and authority as patriarch. Sarna, p. 190.

²⁸ **Kids will again be an instrument of deception, turned on Jacob, when his sons bring him Joseph's tunic soaked in kid's blood.** And in the immediately following episode (chapter 38), Judah, the engineer of the deception, will promise to send kids as payment to the woman he imagines is a roadside whore, and who is actually his daughter-in-law Tamar, using deception to obtain what is rightfully hers. Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary*, Norton and Company, 1996, p. 138.

- c. He takes him by the hand – 27.23.²⁹
- d. The embrace/kiss – 27.26-27.³⁰

²⁹ I see a connection to this and the sacred embrace. Hugh Nibley writes, "**The embrace is a perfect representation or metaphor for the word atonement.** The word atonement appears only once in the New Testament, but 127 times in the Old Testament. . . . In the other Standard Works of the Church, atonement (including related terms atone, atoned, atoneth, atoning) appears 44 times, but only 3 times in the Doctrine and Covenants, and twice in the Pearl of Great Price. The other 39 times are all in the Book of Mormon. This puts the Book of Mormon in the milieu of the old Hebrew rites before the destruction of Solomon's Temple, for after that the Ark and the covering (kapporeth) no longer existed, but the Holy of Holies was still called the bait ha-kapporeth. . . . It has often been claimed that the Book of Mormon cannot contain the 'fullness of the gospel,' since it does not have temple ordinances. As a matter of fact, **they are everywhere in the book if we know where to look for them, and the dozen or so discourses on the Atonement in the Book of Mormon are replete with temple imagery.** From all the meanings of *kaphar* and *kippurim*, we concluded that **the literal meaning of *kaphar* and *kippurim* is a close and intimate embrace, which took place at the *kapporeth*,** or the front cover or flap of the tabernacle or tent. **The Book of Mormon instances are quite clear, for example, 'Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you' (Alma 5:33). 'But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love' (2 Nephi 1:15). To be redeemed is to be atoned.** From this it should be clear what kind of oneness is meant by the Atonement—it is being **received in a close embrace** of the prodigal son." See Hugh Nibley, [Approaching Zion](#), p. 566-67.

³⁰ Speaking of the **sacred embrace**, Nibley writes, "Nut, the Lady of Heaven, here symbolized by the grave itself, receiving the dead into its embrace. First the King is embraced by the Lady Nephthys, whose outspread waiting arms are represented and carved on the lid of the coffin. Passing over the Field of Reeds to his highest station, the same King is met by "his Sister Sothis, his mother the Dawn," representing a marital union at the rising of the Sirius. Finally he "flies to heaven among the gods," only to be met by Nut again, whom he hails with a joyful cry of recognition: "Hail to thee, O garden of my Repose!" —the journey ending as it began with a lady in a garden. The Book of Night opens with "the Great Lady, Mistress of all the Earth," the Lady of Life, receiving the initiate at the gate of the new world. In the 16th Hour of the Amduat comes the joyful announcement, "Thy Mother Nut joins herself to thee, she dispels thy sorrow ... **she embraces thee**.... Awake, awake, in peace! Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, part IV, The Garden Story. In his chapter explaining what kind of document the Book of Breathings is, Hugh Nibley states, "**First there is the idea of air and breath ... being to smell, breathe; (3) to exude an odor; (4) to inhale air or the breath of life; (5)... the breath of life itself;...** In charge of this department is the goddess Mert, identified with Maat, who enjoys considerable prominence in our Book of Breathings. Supervising the functions of esophagus and windpipe, she supplies both nourishment and breath of life (one actually eats and breathes her), and in that capacity enjoys a relationship of peculiar intimacy with every individual, even as she hangs on the kingly and priestly breast as a pectoral that both embraces and is embraced by the royal person. In this sense "The son of Atum-Re says, **He hath begotten me by his nose:** I came forth from his nostrils. Place me upon his breast, that **he might embrace me** with his sister Maat." *Snsn* is the air that infuses and pervades: "**Thy nostrils inhale (*snsn*) the air, thy nose breathes (*snsn*) the north wind, thy throat gulps in air, thou incorporatest life into thy body.**" Isis and Nephthys prevent decay and evil odor by fanning with their wings, but that is also the favorable wind which enables the dead to progress by ship on his journey in the hereafter.

But breathing is only half the story. It is significant that the clear statement of the purpose of the "Sensen" Papyrus as given in its introductory lines makes no mention whatever of breathing! **This bids us consider the broader and more venerable ritual background of the word. The rites set forth in the Shabako document, the earliest coronation drama and perhaps the oldest of all Egyptian ritual texts, culminate when the new king "unites himself with the royal court and mingles (*snsn*) with the gods of Ta-tenen.**" The expression for "mingle with," *snsn r*, Sethe finds also in the Pyramid Texts, and means, according to him, "sich zu jemand gesellen." He duly notes that "the writing is commonly used in later times for *snsn*, 'inhale,' being mistakenly regarded as a reduplication of *sn*, 'to kiss.'" Hugh Nibley, [The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment](#), p. 17-18. Nibley opens the door to see the use of *nefesh*, touching of the hands, the smelling of Jacob's raiment, the

6. The Blessing – Gen. 27.28-29.
7. Esau’s return – Gen. 27.30-37.
8. Esau lifted up his head and wept – Gen. 27.38.
9. Isaac blesses Esau – Gen. 27.39-40.³¹
 - a. “When thou shalt have dominion, thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck” – Gen. 27.40.³²
10. Esau hated Jacob – Gen. 27.41.
11. Rebekah commands Jacob to depart out of the land and go to Haran, he will never see his mother alive – Gen. 27.43-45.
12. Rebekah’s lament – Gen. 27.46.

Genesis 28

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.³³

embrace, as connected to Egyptian temple rites. The connection is there, and the question is only, “was this one of the intents of the author or Genesis 27?”

³¹ Here, Isaac’s default blessing to Esau (Genesis 27:39-40) **depicts the political world of the early monarchy**, specifically the realities of the 9th and 8th centuries BC when in fact Edom rebelled against Israel’ rule and broke free (2 Kings 8:20-22). Since Edom was an ethnic neighbor bordering the eastern territory of the southern kingdom of Judah, **this particular tradition probably was a product of a southern author, the Yahwist, writing in the late 9th century BC.** Thus, the prophetic announcement of Jacob and Esau’s discord and the latter’s servitude to and liberation from the former is a way of describing, explaining, and legitimizing the political realities of Israel and Edom known to a later historical period. In other words, the brotherly rivalry depicted in Genesis with its divine justification for Jacob/Israel’s supremacy over Esau/Edom is a story of etiology, a way of explaining why things are the way they are in the world of the author of this text.

³² Edom shall subsist, not from pastoral or agricultural pursuits but from violence and pillage, raiding its neighbors and plundering the caravans that pass through its land. For a long time it is destined to be a vassal of Israel. However, it will eventually free itself of domination. **Historically, it was King David who first made vassals of the Edomites.** The first sign of their restiveness occurred during Solomon’s reign, but in the time of Jehoshaphat (873—849 B.C.E.) it was still 8 province of Judah. However, Edom successfully revolted in the days of Jehoram (Joram, 849-842 BCE.), Amaziah (800-783 BCE.) had to war against Edom, and by the time of Ahaz (735—715 BCE.) Judah was forced to yield the port of Elath to the Edomites who settled the town. Sarna, p. 194.

³³ 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.

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. 28.9.³⁴
3. Jacob journeyed to Haran – Gen. 28.10.
4. Jacob dreams – Jacob's סֹלָם ladder – Gen. 28.12-22.
 - a. Joseph Smith: This is a vision of the mysteries of godliness.³⁵
 - b. Marion G. Romney: This is a temple experience.³⁶
 - c. And he dreamed, and behold! A *sullam*³⁷ was set up toward the earth:
וַיִּחְלֶם וְהִנֵּה סֹלָם מְצֹב אֶרְצָה

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ 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.

³⁶ 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 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.

³⁷ 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

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.³⁸

Jacob’s dream, the *sullam*, whatever it be, does not function as a channel of communication between man and God.” Sarna, p. 198.

³⁸ 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 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

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.
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. 31.17-24.³⁹

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.)

³⁹ 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 *מָכַרְנוּ וַיֹּאכַל גַּם־אֶכּוֹל אֶת־כֶּסֶּפֶנוּ* – “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)

- a. God visits Laban in a dream saying, “Take heed that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad!” – Gen. 31.24.⁴⁰
6. Laban accuses Jacob of stealing his daughters, but softens his accusation with an expectation of a celebratory send off – Gen. 31.25-42.
 - a. Laban accuses Jacob of stealing the *teraphim* – Gen. 31.30-35.⁴¹
 - 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.

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 *gillullim* 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.

⁴⁰ Literally, “guard yourself!” or “Watch yourself!” לִךְ הִשָּׁמֵר – 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.

⁴¹ 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.

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. 32.13-23.⁴²
 - a. The ford Jabbok – Gen. 23.22.⁴³
7. Jacob wrestles a divine being – Gen. 32.24-32.⁴⁴
 - a. Jacob wrestles "a man" - יָאֲבֹק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ "there wrestled a man with him" – Gen. 32.24.⁴⁵
 - 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.**⁴⁶
 - i. Joseph Fielding Smith: The wrestling and the visitation of the Lord are two different occurrences, thus two different beings.⁴⁷

⁴² 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.

⁴³ 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.

⁴⁴ 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.

⁴⁵ 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.

⁴⁶ *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).

⁴⁷ 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.

- 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.⁴⁸
- 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**.⁴⁹
- iv. Claus Westermann suggests that the being at the river crossing was a demon.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ 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 (*angelo*) 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.

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.

⁴⁹ Alter, p. 121-122.

⁵⁰ 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..."

- 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 Genesis 32.⁵¹
 - 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. 32.28.⁵²
 - a. Israel has some interesting possibilities and interpretations.⁵³
 - e. Jacob asks the person his name, and is not given a name – Gen. 32.29.⁵⁴

⁵¹ 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 *Yisrā’ēl* — a “man,” *’iš* or *’ēnôš* — who envisaged God and became like him through Jesus’s atonement and the resurrection that Jesus brought to pass.” [Bowen, p.160.](#)

⁵² כִּי־שָׂרַיתָ 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 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.

⁵³ 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.](#)

⁵⁴ 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.

- 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. 33.1-3.⁵⁵
 - b. **The embrace** – Gen. 33.3-4. This is a significant symbol directly attached to the idea of the **Atonement of Jesus Christ**.⁵⁶
 - 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-

⁵⁵ 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*, Harper One, 2005, p. 86-87.

⁵⁶ 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” יָבַק! (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.

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 יָבַק ‘bq (“wrestle”) and יָבַק ḥbq (“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.

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).⁵⁷

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 Shechem⁵⁸ will be contrasted with the Jahwist account of Dinah’s violation in Genesis 34 – Gen. 33.18-19.

⁵⁷ 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).

⁵⁸ 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.