

Scripture Study



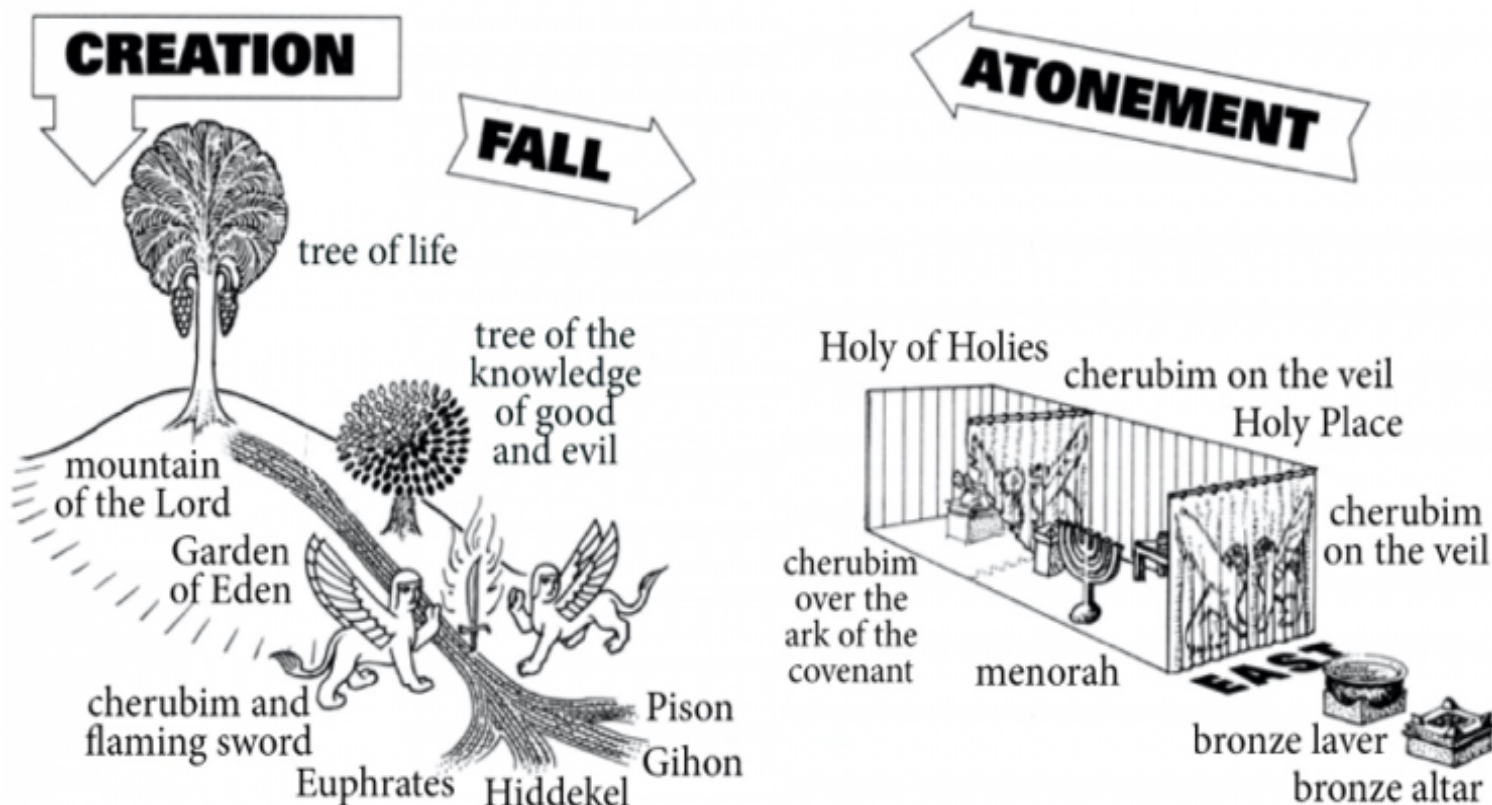
“In His Own Time, and in His Own Way”: Jacob Ascends the Ladder of Exaltation

By [Jeffrey M. Bradshaw](#) · March 2, 2022

This is article #9 in Jeffrey Bradshaw’s Old Testament article series. [See #8 here](#). The text is adapted from the detailed verse-by-verse commentary on Genesis 28 available at the [Interpreter Foundation website](#). Readers may also consult the commentary for the Book of Moses and Genesis [at Bible Central](#) or within the [ScripturePlus app](#).

Introduction: Jacob’s Journey of Departure and Return Along the Covenant Path

The story of Adam and Eve’s departure from the Garden of Eden and their return to the presence of God parallels a common pattern in ancient Near Eastern writings: departure from home, mission abroad, and happy homecoming.^[1] The pattern is at least as old as the Egyptian story of Sinuhe from 1800 BCE and can be seen again in scriptural accounts of Israel’s apostasy and return as well as in the lives of individuals in scripture. The pattern appears in modern literature and media as often as it did in those times.^[2]



Jesus’ life reflected the pattern of departure from and return to God along the covenant path that is described in ancient and modern temples. He said, “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father” (John 16:28).

Adapted from Michael P. Lyon, b. 1952: *Sacred Topography of Eden and the Temple*, 1994.

^[3]

To the ancients, however, it was more than a mere storytelling convention, since it reflected a sequence of events common in widespread temple ritual practices for priests and kings.^[4]

More generally, it is the story of the plan of salvation in miniature, as seen from the personal perspective. This pattern can be found in the Savior's parables of the Prodigal Son^[5] and the Good Samaritan.^[6] The life of Jesus Christ Himself also followed the pattern of departure from and return to the Father on the covenant path, though, unlike ordinary mortals, He was without sin: "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" (John 16:28).

Israelite Temples and the Salt Lake Temple. Adapted from Nathan Richardson.^[7]

Anciently, the covenant path would not have been seen as something like a modern drive on a highway *to* the temple, but rather as a walking journey through the various rooms of the temple, as John W. Welch^[8] and David Calabro^[9] have so beautifully described.

In the figure above, we see how a similar walking journey along the covenant path can also be discerned in the layout of modern temples. The figure has vertically aligned the rooms of the Salt Lake Temple with the corresponding areas in the Israelite temple.^[10] The process of repentance and return to God is beautifully reflected in the change in physical orientation of movement as the endowment progresses. As we leave the celestial glory of the World room and enter the Terrestrial room of the Salt Lake Temple, we make a U-turn from west to east. After making the turn, we are no longer moving away from God, but instead drawing near to Him again.

The rich significance of this symbolic reversal is captured by the rich Hebrew term *shuv*—meaning “to turn, return, or repent.” Remember the scriptural description of the fate of mankind spelled out in Genesis 3:19: “dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return” [*shuv*]. Consider also the way Psalm 90:3 (translated here following André Chouraqui, in the spirit of Rashi’s commentary) changes this pessimistic prediction into a harbinger of hope through God’s tender of repentance: “Thou [God] turnest [*shuv*] man back to dust [figuratively, that is, through mortal suffering], but [then] Thou sayest, ‘Return/Repent [*shuv*], O children of men.’”^[11] The 180-degree U-turn movement that reverses the course of the temple journey recalls the Jewish mystical tradition in which the term *teshuvah* is used to refer to “the moment that brings every thing and every being back to its supernal origin”^[12] (compare Moses 4:31; 6:52; 7:2). President Russell M. Nelson has discussed the complete change of our minds, our knowledge, our spirit, and even our breathing as we repent and move forward incrementally in the right direction.^[13]

Overview of Jacob's Journey to Haran and Back. The red line represents Jacob's itinerary and the purple line represents Esau's journey to meet Jacob after his return to Canaan.[\[14\]](#)

The general trajectory of departure and return along the covenant pathway is mirrored both spiritually and geographically in the story of Jacob (Hebrew "may God protect"). Taking leave of his family in Beersheba (Hebrew "well of the oath" — figuratively, the source of the covenant), he travels north and east by way of Beth-el (Hebrew "House of God" — a place of instruction about the covenant) to Haran (Hebrew *charran* = "Mountainous" — a place of testing for Jacob). Leaving Haran, Jacob at last returns to Beth-el, where God's previous promises are made sure. Each major step of the way along Jacob's personal covenant path, his experiences are remarkably infused with temple themes. The hope of Israel is that every corner of the promised land will eventually become a holy place, a Zion through which the land of Canaan will be filled with God's presence.

As a preface to our discussion of the ladder of exaltation the present article, let's summarize the major elements of the temple themes in Jacob's journey:

Jacob's Departure from Home: Initiatory Themes in Beersheba (Genesis 27:1–29; 28:1–4). In David Bokovoy's discussion of ritualization in Genesis 27,[\[15\]](#) he identifies ritualized performances related to Isaac's first blessing of Jacob: the meal prepared for Isaac as a preliminary offering or sacrifice, the hand placement on parts of the body, the putting on of clothing (identified as high priestly clothing in Jewish tradition[\[16\]](#)), the exchange of questions identifying the petitioner, and the description of the blessing itself (Genesis 27:1–29). All this, of course, was a deceptive attempt to obtain by stratagem the actual initiatory, birthright blessing that was obtained legitimately only later when Isaac conferred it on Jacob before he left on his mission to Haran (Genesis 28:1–4).

Jacob's Mission Abroad: The Ladder of Exaltation at Beth-el (Genesis 28:10–22). As a

result of Jacob's dream of a "ladder" that "reached to heaven" (Genesis 28:12), Beth-el became a holy place for Jacob, a place of instruction (Genesis 28:16–17) and covenant-making (Genesis 28:20–21). The early Christian idea of a ladder of virtues, inspired by Jacob's dream, was a symbol of the process of spiritual progression that corresponds to the Latter-day Saint idea of progression toward eternal life through the making and keeping of covenants.^[17] Speaking of Jacob's dream of the heavenly ladder in Genesis 28, Elder Marion G. Romney said: "Jacob realized that the covenants he made with the Lord 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."^[18] Thus, the Prophet Joseph Smith correlated the "three principal rounds of Jacob's ladder" with "the telestial, the terrestrial, and the celestial glories or kingdoms."^[19]

Jacob's Happy Homecoming: A Wrestle with an Angel and the Promise of a New Name at Jabbok (Genesis 32:24–32). After crossing the river Jabbok (a word that plays on the "pouring out" of the river into the Jordan, "wrestling," and the name "Jacob"), Jacob wrestled (or embraced, as this may also be understood^[20]) an angel who, after a series of questions and answers in a place that Jacob named Peniel (Hebrew "face of God"), gave him a new name (Israel; Hebrew *yisra'el* = "God struggles/has power/prevails"; alternatively, "struggle/have power/prevail with God"). Then Jacob, prepared by his encounter with the angel, reconciled with his brother Esau through a similar embrace, saying: "for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God."^[21]

Promises Made Sure by Divine Confirmation at Beth-el (Genesis 35:1–15). Jacob's second divine encounter at Beth-el is not merely a repeat of his previous one (Genesis 32:24–32). Significantly, this experience is a direct confirmation or ratification^[22] of Jacob's earlier temple-related blessings,^[23] making his promises sure,^[24] as his "name is changed to Israel for the second time."^[25] In addition, there is a difference with the earlier

encounter at Beth-el in that before “it was not God personally but an angelic being ... who made the pronouncement.”[\[26\]](#) Since Jacob had now seen the face of God literally rather than merely figuratively (“*as though I had seen the face of God*”),[\[27\]](#) Jewish wordplay provided an additional meaning to Jacob’s new name: “*ish-ra’ah-El*, the man who saw God.”[\[28\]](#) When Jacob acknowledged the truth “that God is God ... in his own heart, God revealed God’s Self to him at once.”[\[29\]](#)

Jacob’s path of discipleship and blessing that corresponds to his departure for Haran and his return to Beth-el is both a literary masterpiece and a valuable source of doctrinal and personal instruction. Through it we learn that although God will eventually “unveil his face” to Jacob, it will be “in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:68).

Genesis 28:10–12: Jacob Comes to a “Certain Place” and Sees a Ladder to Heaven

The phrase in Genesis 28:11 that reads “a *certain* place”—implies a definite destination for the reader, though Jacob seems unaware.[\[30\]](#) The Hebrew term used for “place”—*maqom*—connotes a sacred site. “Archaeological evidence indicates that Beth-el had been a cultic site for the Canaanites centuries before the patriarchs.”[\[31\]](#)

Hugh Nibley comments on the parallel between the sleep of Jacob and the sleep of Adam:
[\[32\]](#)

According to a study of Altmann, Jacob actually repeats the entire experience of Adam, being visited by heavenly messengers who instruct him in the ordinances. The sleeping Jacob is “Adam who has forgot his image,” for “in his earthly existence, Jacob, who stands for Man, is sunk into sleep, which means he has

become forgetful of his image and counterpart upon the Divine Throne.” The visitation repeats the awakening of the preexistent Adam, “as it were, pushed out from the Chariot of the King. He is asleep here below.”^[33] This is the “*sem-sleep*” of the Egyptian temple rites,^[34] being pushed from the chariot and being thrust forth from the *merkābāh*, the presence of God or one’s heavenly home.

As an aside, we should not suppose that Jacob’s sleep was an awkward and uncomfortable one with “stones ... for his pillows” (Genesis 28:11). It has been more plausibly proposed by modern scholars that “the stone is not placed under Jacob’s head but alongside it, as a kind of protective barrier. The stone by which Jacob’s head rests as he dreams his vision will become the pillar, the commemorative... marker (*matsevah*) at the end of the story.”^[35]

As to the “angels of God ascending and descending” (Genesis 28:12), we presume that they came to and fro from the presence of God to give Jacob specific keys and guidance at different points in his instruction. Endowed Latter-day Saints will recognize similar patterns in the modern temple endowment.

Model of the Marduk Temple Tower at Babylon. Vorderasiatisches Museum, Staatlich Museen, Berlin, Germany, 1999.[\[36\]](#)

As to the “ladder” (Genesis 28, 12), Robert Alter concludes that the “structure envisioned is probably a vast ramp with terraced landings.”[\[37\]](#) To Nicolas Wyatt, the “ladder” of Jacob’s dream:[\[38\]](#)

looks suspiciously like a description of a Babylonian ziggurat, in all probability the temple tower in Babylon. This had an external, monumental stairway leading to the top story, which represented heaven, the dwelling-place of the gods.

Jacob will later claim a name with similar meaning to the Akkadian “gate of the god” (*bāb-ili*) [39] for the place of his vision: “gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:17). Michael Fishbane notes: [40]

As if to counterpoint the hubris of the tower [of Babel] building on the plain of Shinar (Genesis 11:1–9), the image of a staged temple-tower, whose “head” also “reaches to heaven,” emerges out of Jacob’s dream-work and humbles him (Genesis 28:12). He does not seek to achieve a name at the nameless place to which he has come on his flight to Aram, but is rather overawed by the divine presence there and extols His name: “Surely Yahweh is in this place,” explains Jacob, “and I did not know it” (Genesis 28:16). Nor does God collude with the pantheon in this text; but rather stands majestically above the divine beings whose “going up and coming down” the tower stairway provides the symbolic link between earth and heaven, and dramatizes the spiritual ascension inherent in the dream vision. [41] From atop this tower stairway promise and hope—not doom and dispersal [like the tower of Babel]—now unfold (Genesis 28:13–15).

Jacob’s Ladder, Bath Abbey, England, 1520. [42]

The Ladder of Heavenly Ascent in Ancient Tradition

Already a religious symbol in Egypt [43] and Babylon, [44] the Jacob’s ladder of heavenly ascent is also referenced in the Gospel of John. Alluding to the multiple deceits practiced in the story of Jacob/Israel and Laban, Jesus praised the approaching Nathanael at their first meeting, saying, “Behold an Israelite [that is, a descendant of Jacob] ... in whom [unlike Jacob himself] is no guile!” (John 1:47). Then, referring to the ladder in Jacob’s dream on which angels had ascended and descended, He solemnly asserted His preeminence over the

revered patriarch, declaring that *He* was the ladder of heavenly ascent personified: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending *upon the Son of man.*”^[45]

This, of course, echoes the idea expressed in Moses 7:53: “climbeth up *by me.*”

Later, John records a similar declaration: “*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*” (John 14:6, emphasis mine).

The Ladder of the Cross. Above: Tympanum of central portal, Notre Dame Cathedral, Strasbourg, France, 1276–1439.[\[46\]](#) Below: details illustrating justification, sanctification, and exaltation.

Echoing this symbolism used by Jesus in John, we see, in the tympanum above the central portal of the Strasbourg Cathedral, the “ladder” of the Savior’s cross, first as a means of overcoming death and then as opening the way to life eternal. The composition shows three levels:

- *Justification*. The body of Adam lying in hell with the crucified Christ poised on earth directly above him. The wooden cross, corresponding to a branch of the Tree of Knowledge that (in tradition) was planted in Adam’s grave and became an oil-bearing Tree of Mercy, is the axis that links the worlds of the dead and the living;
- *Sanctification*. The cross fleury borne by the victorious Jesus, positioned near a similarly flourishing tree and a depiction of Adam and Eve clasping hands. In this instance, the cross becomes the means whereby Eve, Adam, and all people gain access to heaven;
- *Exaltation*. Jesus ascended becomes the forerunner of those who are “lifted up” to eternal life by His cross.

This cross-related symbolism segues perfectly into the New Testament, Book of Mormon, and Book of Moses symbolism connecting the theme of Jesus being lifted up not only in His death but also in His exaltation.[\[47\]](#)

The Ladder of Virtues of St. John Climacus, north façade, Sucevita Monastery, Romania, 1602–1604.[\[48\]](#) Note the sequence of virtues that label each rung of the ladder.

I will not take space here to trace the trajectory of Jacob’s ladder in Christian tradition,[\[49\]](#) including the well-known elaborations on the subject by theologians such as John Climacus (i.e., John “of the ladder”), Saint Augustine, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, and Saint Thomas Aquinas. Suffice it to say that faith, hope, and charity—the “three theological virtues”—became important symbols of the process of spiritual progression and were identified frequently with the three principal rungs on this ladder, just as they are in modern scripture

—especially in passages relating to the doctrine of Christ.[\[50\]](#) As Christians made their climb, some, sadly, as in Lehi's vision of the Tree of Life, "after they had tasted of the fruit ... fell away into forbidden paths and were lost" (1 Nephi 8:28). Those who endured to the end received the crown of life directly from the hand of the Lord Himself.

The Ladder of Heavenly Ascent in Joseph Smith's Teachings

The Prophet Joseph Smith correlated the "three principal rounds [rungs, landings, or levels?] of Jacob's ladder" with "the telestial, the terrestrial, and the celestial glories or kingdoms."[\[51\]](#) He also said that this was the same progression ascended by Paul (2 Corinthians 12:2)[\[52\]](#) Already in 1832, Joseph Smith had equated the "mysteries of godliness"[\[53\]](#) to Jacob's ladder.

Catherine Thomas observes that covenants like those made by Jacob are necessary prerequisites to celestial marriage:[\[54\]](#)

It was no accident that Jacob had a revelation concerning temple covenants as he was on his way to find his eternal companion. "Those married in the temple in the new and everlasting covenant of marriage become inheritors of all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the patriarchs and thereby enter into the patriarchal order. If the participating parties abide in the eternal marriage covenant, they shall reap the full blessings of patriarchal heirship in eternity where the patriarchal order will be the order of government and rule."[\[55\]](#)

John A. Tvedtnes summarizes parallels to these events elsewhere in the Bible and other ancient sources:[\[56\]](#)

The Bible describes the ceremony in which Aaron and his sons were ordained to the priesthood at the tabernacle. They were washed with water, dressed in "the

holy garments,” anointed and consecrated (Exodus 28:40-41; 29:4-9; 40:12-15; Leviticus 8:12-13, 30; Psalm 133:2; Ben Sirach 45:8-15). This investiture was partially repeated each time the priests prepared for service, when they were required to wash and don the “holy garments” (Leviticus 16:3-4), which they then removed after completing the ordinances of the tabernacle or the temple (see Leviticus 16:23-24). Dressing in special clothing in the temple denotes a change in role, from that of mortal to immortal, from ordinary human to priest or priestess, king or queen. A number of ancient texts, both in the Bible and elsewhere, discuss temple clothing, its symbolism and some of its uses.

Perhaps the most impressive investiture account is the one ascribed to Levi, ancestor of Moses and Aaron, in a vision at Beth-El, where his father Jacob had experienced his dream of the ladder ascending into heaven.[\[57\]](#)

And I saw seven men in white clothing, who were saying to me, “Arise, put on the vestments of the priesthood, the crown of righteousness, the oracle of understanding, the robe of truth, the breastplate of faith, the miter for the head, and the apron for prophetic power. Each carried one of these and put them on me and said, “From now on be a priest, you and all your posterity.” The first anointed me with holy oil and gave me a staff. The second washed me with pure water, fed me by hand with bread and holy wine, and put on me a holy and glorious vestment. The third put on me something made of linen, like an ephod. The fourth placed ... around me a girdle which was like purple. The fifth gave me a branch of rich olive wood. The sixth placed a wreath on my head. The seventh placed the priestly diadem on me and filled my hands with incense, in order that I might serve as priest for the Lord God.[\[58\]](#)

The Jubilees version of this story also has the event taking place at Beth-el but has Jacob

performing the ceremony for his son:[\[59\]](#)

And he [Jacob] abode that night at Beth-el. And Levi dreamed that he had been appointed and ordained priest of the Most High God, he and his sons forever. And he awoke from his sleep and blessed the Lord ... and [the lot of] Levi fell with the portion of the Lord. And his father put the garments of the priesthood upon him and he filled his hands”

The Sacred Nature of Beth-el (Genesis 28:13–19)

In Genesis 28:17, Jacob exclaims, “How dreadful is this place!” The Hebrew term means fearsome, awe-inspiring, or to be revered. According to some strands of Jewish tradition, Beth-el (Hebrew “House of God”) was located at the site of Moriah (where Abraham’s near-sacrifice took place) and was also the site of the future temple.[\[60\]](#) Of course, the identification of Beth-el with Moriah and Jerusalem wreaks havoc on historical geography. But if we take the idea to be typological—or perhaps literal if there was a “temple” of some kind at Beth-el at some point in Israel’s history, Beth-el became a holy place for Jacob, a place of instruction (28:16–17) and covenant-making (Genesis 28:20–21).

Meir Zlotowitz and Nosson Scheman cite ancient traditions suggesting that the Lord figuratively placed the whole land of Israel underneath him while he was sleeping:[\[61\]](#)

The Sages teach that when God promised Jacob the entire land upon which he lay, He folded all of *Eretz Yisrael* [= “the land of Israel”] beneath the sleeping Jacob to symbolize that it would be his (*Chullin* 91b, see *comm.* to 28:13). Why was this necessary in view of the Talmudic principle that a new owner need make [an] *act of acquisition* in only part of a tract of land in order to acquire possession of the entire property? If so, the fact that Jacob lay on one small part of Beth-

el/Moriah should have been sufficient to enforce Israel's eventual ownership of the entire land.

By so folding the land, God signified that more than legal possession was intended. As the commentary sets forth, Jacob lay upon the eventual site of the ... *Holy of Holies*. *Eretz Yisrael* could have easily become his without the symbolism of placing all of it beneath him, but Jacob's vision—and the mission he had adopted by seeking the truth behind all "garments"[\[62\]](#)—required that the utmost holiness be found in every aspect of life. God wanted Jacob to know that every corner of *Eretz Yisrael* was to be invested with the utmost degree of holiness. Jews must never be content to find sanctity only on occasional excursions to Jerusalem and the Temple; they must infuse every nook and cranny with holiness.

Following his experience, Jacob sets up a stone and "ritually dedicates this [pillar] by pouring oil over its top" (Genesis 28:18).[\[63\]](#) The pouring of the oil consecrates the stone to God and for a specific sacred purpose. A similar practice is described elsewhere in the Bible (Genesis 35:14; Leviticus 14:10-18; 2 Kings 16:13; Hosea 9:4; Micah 6:7).

Jacob's Covenants and His Parting Vow (Genesis 28:20)

Hugh Nibley summarizes the importance of the covenants made by Jacob at Beth-el:[\[64\]](#)

It was at Beth-el, the house of God, that Jacob had his vision, set up his stone circle and altar, and received the promise of progeny that was given to Abraham as well as a title to the promised land; he declared the place to be very special, "none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Genesis 28:17). There he made the covenant that his children thereafter made at the temple, that he would pay a tithe if God would give him this life's necessities and grant that

he return again to the presence of his Father (see Genesis 28:20-22). According to the Zohar, Abraham had been through all this before at the same place, where later Jacob made a covenant with Laban in the same manner: Let us make a covenant between us, properly recorded and notarized (compare Genesis 31:44).

Notwithstanding the seriousness of the covenants that Jacob made with God that day, he still seems to have “kept back” (Acts 5:2) part of his self-offering rather than consecrating himself wholeheartedly. Robert Alter comments as follows about Jacob’s parting vow (Genesis 28:20):[\[65\]](#)

The conditional form of the vow—if the other party does such and such, then I on my part will do such and such in return—is well attested elsewhere in the Bible and in other ancient Near Eastern texts. But its use by Jacob has a characterizing particularity. God has already promised him in the dream that He will do all these things for him. Jacob, however, remains the suspicious bargainer—a “wrestler” with words and conditions just as he is a physical wrestler, a heel-grabber. He carefully stipulated conditions of sale to the famished Esau; he was leery that he would be found out when Rebekah proposed her stratagem of deception to him; now he wants to be sure God will fulfill His side of the bargain before he commits himself to God’s service; and later he will prove to be a sharp dealer in his transactions with his uncle Laban.

Endnotes

[\[1\]](#) Avraham Gileadi, ed. *The Literary Message of Isaiah*. New York, NY: Hebraeus Press, 1994, 12.

[\[2\]](#) See, for example, Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of*

Romance. The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, 1974-1975. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976.

[3] Published in Parry, Donald W. "Garden of Eden: Prototype sanctuary." In *Temples of the Ancient World*, edited by Donald W. Parry, 126-51. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1994. [https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?](https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=8&article=1075&context=mi&type=additional)

[filename=8&article=1075&context=mi&type=additional](https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=8&article=1075&context=mi&type=additional). (accessed August 25, 2020), 134–135. I have modified Lyon’s original drawing by moving the Tree of Life to the top of the mountain. It was originally placed slightly downhill. For the rationale for this modification, see Bradshaw, Jeffrey M. "The tree of knowledge as the veil of the sanctuary." In *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament*, edited by David Rolph Seely, Jeffrey R. Chadwick and Matthew J. Grey. The 42nd Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium (26 October, 2013), 49-65. Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University and Deseret Book, 2013. <https://rsc.byu.edu/ascending-mountain-lord/tree-knowledge-veil-sanctuary> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfIs9YKYrZE>. (accessed June 21, 2021), 50–54.

[4] See, for example, Dexter E. Callender, *Adam in Myth and History: Ancient Israelite Perspectives on the Primal Human*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000, 211-18. From a ritual perspective, these three parts correspond to van Gennep’s classic stages of separation (*préliminaire*), transition (*liminaire*), and reintegration (*postliminaire*) (Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*. Translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1960, 11).

[5] Luke 15:11–32. See, for example, Robert L. Millet, *Lost and Found: Reflections on the Prodigal Son*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2001; Matthew R. Linford, "The Parable of the Benevolent Father and Son." *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scripture* 22 (2016): 149-78. <https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-parable-of-the->

benevolent-father-and-son/#sdfootnote12sym.

[6] Luke 10:29–37. See, for example, John W. Welch, “The Good Samaritan: A Type and Shadow of the Plan of Salvation.” *BYU Studies* 38, no. 2 (1999): 51-115; Welch, “The Good Samaritan: Forgotten symbols.” *Ensign* 37, February 2007, 40-47.

[7] Published in Bradshaw, Jeffrey M. *The First Days and the Last Days: A Verse-By-Verse Commentary on the Book of Moses and JS—Matthew in Light of the Temple*. Orem and Salt Lake City, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2021.

<https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/the-first-days-and-the-last-days/>. (accessed September 11, 2021), 54.

[8] Welch, John W. “Experiencing the presence of the Lord: The temple program of Leviticus.” In *Sacred Time, Sacred Space, and Sacred Meaning. Proceedings of the Third Interpreter Foundation Matthew B. Brown Memorial Conference, 5 November 2016*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and Jeffrey M. Bradshaw. Temple on Mount Zion 4, 265–300. Orem and Salt Lake City, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2020.

<http://www.templestudiesgroup.com/Papers/Leviticus%2008-Welch-Experiencing-TMZ3.pdf> (accessed March 1, 2022).

[9] Calabro, David. “Joseph Smith and the architecture of Genesis.” In *The Temple: Ancient and Restored. Proceedings of the 2014 Temple on Mount Zion Symposium*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry. Temple on Mount Zion 3, 165-81. Orem and Salt Lake City, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2016.

https://www.academia.edu/37488023/Joseph_Smith_and_the_Architecture_of_Genesis. (accessed August 25, 2020).

[10] There are three main areas associated with Israelite temples: the Courtyard, the Holy

Place, and the Holy of Holies. In Latter-day Saint belief, these rooms symbolize the glories of the telestial, terrestrial, and celestial worlds. The requirement to support a two-way journey through the Salt Lake Temple—first, outbound—in the story of the Creation and the Fall—and second, inbound—in the story of the Atonement (see figure 3–2)—is met by doubling its celestial and terrestrial rooms. In other words, instead of having one “terrestrial room” that is traversed in both directions as in Israelite temples, the Salt Lake Temple provides two “terrestrial rooms”—the first representing the outbound area of the Garden of Eden where the Fall takes place and the other representing the inbound area that leads to the veil. Similarly, the Salt Lake Temple features two “celestial rooms”—one representing the outbound area of the Creation prior to the Fall and the other representing the final destination of the righteous after their return to God’s presence. Note that in some modern temples, the Creation, Garden, and World rooms are combined, allowing a single space to successively represent different rooms at different points in time.

[11] Chouraqui, André, ed. *La Bible*. Paris, France: Desclée de Brouwer, 2003. <https://nachouraqui.tripod.com/id91.htm>. (accessed November 10, 2021), 1187.

[12] Eden, Giulio Busi. “The mystical architecture of Eden in the Jewish tradition.” In *The Earthly Paradise: The Garden of Eden from Antiquity to Modernity*, edited by F. Regina Psaki and Charles Hindley. *International Studies in Formative Christianity and Judaism*, 15-22. Binghamton, NY: Academic Studies in the History of Judaism, Global Publications, State University of New York at Binghamton, 2002, 16.

[13] Nelson, Russell M. 2019. We can do better and be better. In *April 2019 General Conference, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2019/04/36nelson?lang=eng>. (accessed June 17, 2019).

[14] <https://headwatersresources.org/map-of-jacobs-journey-to-haran-and-back/> (accessed February 20, 2022).

[15] David E. Bokovoy, "From the Hand of Jacob: A Ritual Analysis of Genesis 27," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 1 (2009): 35–50.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sba/vol1/iss1/3/> (accessed March 1, 2022).

[16] Rabbi Eliezer, among others, continues the intrigues of the garment of Adam that was stolen from Noah forward to the time of Esau, who murdered Nimrod for it, and to Jacob, who had been enjoined by Rebekah to wear it, as she supposed, in order to obtain Isaac's blessing (e.g., Marc-Alain Ouaknin and Éric Smilévitch, eds. 1983. *Chapitres de Rabbi Éliézer (Pirqé de Rabbi Éliézer): Midrach sur Genèse, Exode, Nombres, Esther. Les Dix Paroles*, ed. Charles Mopsik. Lagrasse, France: Éditions Verdier, 1992, 24, p. 148 ; Jacob Neusner, ed. *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis, A New American Translation*. 3 vols. Vol. 2: Parashiyot Thirty-Four through Sixty-Seven on Genesis 8:15-28:9. *Brown Judaic Studies 105*, ed. Jacob Neusner. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985, Parashah 65, Section 16, p. 393).

[17] Guénon, René. *Symboles fondamentaux de la Science sacrée*. Paris, France: Gallimard, 1962, 336-39; Smith, Joseph, Jr. 1938. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1969. <https://scriptures.byu.edu/tpjs/STPJS.pdf>. (accessed October 29, 2021), 7 April 1844, 346-48, 354.

[18] Romney, Marion G. 1970. "Temples—the gates to heaven." In *Look to God and Live*, 229-40. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1971, 239-40. See Nibley, Hugh W. "On the sacred and the symbolic." In *Temples of the Ancient World*, edited by Donald W. Parry, 535-621. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1994. Reprint, Nibley, Hugh W. "On the Sacred and the Symbolic." In *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple*, edited by

Stephen D. Ricks. *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* 17, 340-419. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2008, 579-81.

[19] J. L. Carroll, *Reconciliation*, p. 95 n. 18; J. Smith Jr., *Teachings*, 21 May 1843, p. 305. Only the words “Ladder and rainbow” appear in Willard Richards’ original notes for this statement, as they appeared in Joseph Smith’s diary (J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Journals, 1843-1844*, 21 May 1843, p. 21). These notes were later filled out under the direction of Elder George A. Smith, who continued the compilation of Joseph Smith’s *History of the Church* in the 1850s after the death of Elder Richards (J. Smith, Jr. et al., *Journals, 1843-1844*, p. 21 n. 68; D. C. Jessee, *JS History*, p. 470). See Bradshaw, Jeffrey M. “Now that we *have* the words of Joseph Smith, how shall we begin to *understand* them? Illustrations of selected challenges within the 21 May 1843 Discourse on 2 Peter 1.” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20 (2016): 47-150. <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/now-that-we-have-the-words-of-joseph-smith-how-shall-we-begin-to-understand-them/> , 61–66 for arguments regarding the possibility that the ideas behind the filled-out phrase originated in the teachings of the Prophet.

[20] See Nibley, Hugh W. 1975. *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*. 2nd ed. *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* 16. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2005, 434; Black, Jeremy, Andrew George, and Nicholas Postgate, eds. *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* Second ed. Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000. <https://books.google.com/books?id=-qIuVCsRb98C>. (accessed May 19, 2020), 74 s. v. epēqu(m).

For an insightful comparison of the “wrestles” of Jacob and Enos, see Bowen, Matthew L. “‘And there wrestled a man with him’ (Genesis 32:24): Enos’s adaptations of the onomastic wordplay of Genesis.” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 10 (2014): 151-60. <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/and-there-wrestled-a-man-with-him-genesis-3224->

enoss-adaptations-of-the-onomastic-wordplay-of-genesis/. (accessed January 21, 2015).

Bowen, Matthew L. "Jacob, Enos, Israel, and Peniel." In *Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and the Temple in Mormon Scripture*, edited by Matthew L. Bowen, 83-90. Orem and Salt Lake City, UT: The Interpreter Foundation and Eborn Books, 2018.

[21] Genesis 33:10. See Porter, Bruce H., and Stephen D. Ricks. "Names in antiquity: Old, new, and hidden." In *By Study and Also by Faith*, edited by John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks. 2 vols. Vol. 1, 501-22. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1990, 506-7. On the parallel between Jacob's encounters with the angel and with Esau, see, e.g., Fox, Everett, ed. *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. The Schocken Bible: Volume I*. New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1995, xi-xii.

[22] Neusner, Jacob, ed. *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis, A New American Translation*. 3 vols. Vol. 3: Parashiyot Sixty-Eight through One Hundred on Genesis 28:10 to 50:26. *Brown Judaic Studies 106*, ed. Jacob Neusner. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1985, Genesis 35:10, Parashah 82:2:5, pp. 166-67; Zlotowitz, *Bereishis*, 2:1510n11. Critical scholars tend to see the two instances of the name change as reflecting different sources, but the two interpretive solutions are not 100% mutually exclusive and neither explanation fully exhausts the richness of the data.

[23] Midrash explicitly contrasts the lesser blessing received when God comes and blesses one who offers animal sacrifices to the greater blessing received when God personally appeared to bless Jacob (Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*, Vol. 3, Parashah 82:2:1-2, pp. 165-66).

[24] 2 Peter 1 :19. See Bradshaw, Jeffrey M. *Temple Themes in the Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood*. 2014 update ed. Salt Lake City, UT: Eborn Books, 2014.

<https://archive.org/details/151128TempleThemesInTheOathAndCovenantOfThePriesthood2>

014Update ;

<https://archive.org/details/140910TemasDelTemploEnElJuramentoYElConvenioDelSacerdocio2014UpdateSReading>. (accessed November 29, 2020), 59–65, 93–98.

[25] Sarna, Nahum M., ed. *Genesis. The JPS Torah Commentary*, ed. Nahum M. Sarna. Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989, 241n9–10.

[26] Sarna, *Genesis*, 241–42n9–10.

[27] Compare the language of Hebrews 11:19, which uses the language of death and resurrection in the description of Isaac being rescued from sacrifice. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 295, explains the Greek behind the phrase in Hebrews 11:9, stated that Abraham received Isaac “in a figure” (that is, “figuratively speaking”), consistent with the tradition that in his experience Isaac actually died, ascended to heaven, and was resurrected. This tradition makes more sense if we remember that the symbolism of death and resurrection fits not only actual heavenly ascents but also the figurative context of temple ritual. It seems Jacob experienced both of these modalities.

[28] Kasher, Menachem Mendel. *Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation: A Millennial Anthology*. 9 vols. Translated by Harry Freedman. Monsey, NY: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1957, Genesis 35:10, Anthology 41 (SER 28), 4:195. Cf. Braude, William G., and Israel J. Kapstein, eds. *Tanna Devei Eliyau. Seder Eliyyahu Rabbah*. Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1981, chapter 28, p. 302 (**).

[29] **Citing Braude, *Seder Eliyyahu Rabbah*, chapter 27 (25), p. 302.

[30] Sarna, Nahum M., ed. *Genesis. The JPS Torah Commentary*, ed. Nahum M. Sarna. Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989, 197n11.

[31] Alter, Robert, ed. *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*. New York City, NY: W. W. Norton, 2019, 100n11.

[32] Nibley, Hugh W. "On the Sacred and the Symbolic." In *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks. The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley 17, 340-419. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2008, 385.

[33] Altmann, Alexander. "The gnostic background of the rabbinic Adam legends." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 35, no. 4 (April 1945): 371–91. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1452657>. (accessed March 1, 2022), 390–91.

[34] Nibley, Hugh W. 1975. *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*. 2nd ed. *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* 16. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2005, 246–49.

[35] Alter, *Hebrew Bible*, 1:100n11.

[36] Art Resource, NY, image reference: ART464580, with the assistance of Liz Kurtulik and Michael Slade.

[37] Alter, *Hebrew Bible*, 1:100n12.

[38] Wyatt, Nicolas. *Myths of Power: A Study of Royal Myth and Ideology in Ugaritic and Biblical Tradition*. *Ugaritisch-Biblische Literatur* 13. Münster, Germany: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996, 74. LaCocque, André. *The Captivity of Innocence: Babel and the Yahwist*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010, 54 notes that unlike the Tower story, it is God that takes the initiative in the story of Jacob. Compare Sherman, Phillip Michael. *Babel's Tower Translated: Genesis 11 and Ancient Jewish Interpretation*. *Biblical Interpretation Series* 117, ed. Paul Anderson and Yvonne Sherwood. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2013, 57-

58).

[39] In this case, the god referred to is Marduk.

[40] Fishbane, Michael A. 1979. *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts*. Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2003, 113.

[41] See J. M. Bradshaw, *Creation, Fall*, figure 5-13, p. 351.

[42] Photograph by Stephen T. Whitlock (1951-), 9 October 2004.

[43] . See, for example, James P. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, (Atlanta: SBL, 2005), 50: "Stand up, you two uprights, and descend, you crossbars, that Unis may go up on the ladder that his father the Sun has made for him."

[44] . See Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and David J. Larsen, *Enoch, Noah, and the Tower of Babel. In God's Image and Likeness 2*. (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2014), 382–84 for an overview of the structure and function of Mesopotamian ziggurats.

[45] . John 1:51, emphasis added. According to Samuel Zinner, Jesus' mention of the Son of Man in this verse refers not only to Jesus but also to others, such as Enoch (see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, "The LDS Book of Enoch as the Culminating Story of a Temple Text." *BYU Studies* 53, no. 1 [2014]: 39–73, in particular 65–71), who had also ascended to heaven (Zinner, pers. comm., 9 February 2016). For further discussion of Jesus as Jacob's ladder and other ancient precedents for this idea, see Margaret Barker, *The Risen Lord: The Jesus of History as the Christ of Faith* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996), 185–87; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:488–91; Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 92–95; Jeffrey M. Bradshaw and Matthew

L. Bowen, "'By the Blood Ye Are Sanctified': The Symbolic, Salvific, Interrelated, Additive, Retrospective, and Anticipatory Nature of the Ordinances of Spiritual Rebirth in John 3 and Moses 6." *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 24 (2017): 189–192.

[46] Photograph by Annie B. Schaeffer, 21 February 2016. With kind permission. Published in Bradshaw, Jeffrey M. *Enoch and the Gathering of Zion: The Witness of Ancient Texts for Modern Scripture*. Orem, Springville, and Salt Lake City, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, Book of Mormon Central, and Eborn Books, 2021.

<https://interpreterfoundation.org/books/enoch-and-the-gathering-of-zion/>. (accessed September 11, 2021), 137.

[47] See Bradshaw, *Enoch and the Gathering of Zion*, 138–43.

[48] Public Domain. With thanks to Everett Potter, <http://www.everettpotter.com/tag/sucevita/>.

[49] For an overview, see René Guénon, *Symboles fondamentaux de la Science sacrée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 336–39. Cf. Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 7 April 1844, 346–48, 354; M. Catherine Thomas, "The Brother of Jared at the veil," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 388–98; M. Catherine Thomas, "Hebrews: To Ascend the Holy Mount," in *Temples of the Ancient World*, 479–91; Nahum M. Sarna, "The mists of time," in *Genesis: World of Myths and Patriarchs*, ed. Ada Feyerick (New York City: New York University Press, 1996), 82.

[50] See Bradshaw, Jeffrey M. "Faith, hope, and charity: The 'three principal rounds' of the ladder of heavenly ascent." In *"To Seek the Law of the Lord": Essays in Honor of John W. Welch*, edited by Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson, 59–112. Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2017. <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/faith-hope-and->

charity-the-three-principal-rounds-of-the-ladder-of-heavenly-ascent/ , 75–111. See pp. 68–75 for examples of “verbal ladders” in lists of virtues in ancient and modern scripture, a rhetorical form called *sorites*, *climax*, or *gradation*.

[51] For more on Joseph Smith’s teachings about the ladder of heavenly ascent, see Bradshaw, Jeffrey M. “Faith, hope, and charity: The ‘three principal rounds’ of the ladder of heavenly ascent.” In *“To Seek the Law of the Lord”: Essays in Honor of John W. Welch*, edited by Paul Y. Hoskisson and Daniel C. Peterson, 59-112. Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2017. <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/faith-hope-and-charity-the-three-principal-rounds-of-the-ladder-of-heavenly-ascent/> , 66–77.

See Bradshaw, Jeffrey M. “Now that we *have* the words of Joseph Smith, how shall we begin to *understand* them? Illustrations of selected challenges within the 21 May 1843 Discourse on 2 Peter 1.” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20 (2016): 47-150. <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/now-that-we-have-the-words-of-joseph-smith-how-shall-we-begin-to-understand-them/> , 61–66 for difficulties in the textual history of some of the statements by Joseph Smith..

[52] Smith, Joseph, Jr. 1902-1932. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Documentary History)*. 7 vols. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1978. <https://archive.org/details/HistoryOfTheChurchhcVolumes1-7original1902EditionPdf> ; <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record/50e98e37-2746-494a-adba-21cbeacc72ef/0>. (accessed November 20, 2021), 5:402.

[53] Smith, *Teachings*, August 1832, 12–13: “They are they who saw the mysteries of godliness...they saw angels ascending and descending upon a ladder that reached from earth to heaven.” Cf. 1 Tim. 3:16; Doctrine and Covenants 19:10; 84:19–21.

[54] Thomas, Catherine. "Jacob rightly received blessings." Salt Lake City, UT: Church News, June 25, 1994. <https://www.thechurchnews.com/archives/1994-06-25/jacob-rightly-received-blessings-younger-twin-foreordained-to-play-a-major-role-in-covenant-priesthood-line-139586>. (accessed January 14, 2022).

[55] McConkie, Bruce R. *Mormon Doctrine*. 2nd ed. Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1966, 559.

[56] Tvedtnes, John A. "Priestly clothing in Bible times." In *Temples of the Ancient World*, edited by Donald W. Parry, 649-704. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1994, 665–67.

[57] *Testament of Levi* 7:4–8:1.

[58] Kee, Howard C. "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs." In *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by James H. Charlesworth. Vol. 1, 775-828. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1983, *Testament of Levi* 8:2–10, p. 791.

[59] Wintermute, O. S. "Jubilees." In *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by James H. Charlesworth. Vol. 2, 35-142. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1983, 32:1, 3, pp. 116–17.

[60] For example, "Jacob lay upon the eventual site of the ... *Holy of Holies*" (Meir Zlotowitz and Nosson Scherman, eds. 1977. *Bereishis/Genesis: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* 2nd ed. Two vols. *ArtScroll Tanach Series*, ed. Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz. Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1986, 2:1187).

[61] Meir Zlotowitz and Nosson Scherman, eds. 1977. *Bereishis/Genesis: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic*

Sources 2nd ed. Two vols. *ArtScroll Tanach Series*, ed. Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz. Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1986, 2:1187.

[62] This idea, from the Jewish mysticism of the *Kabbalah*, refers to the fact that just as the body blocks our perception of another person's soul, so the glory of God is hidden to view even in the outward appearance of an angel. In this strand of Jewish tradition, Jacob was to be commended because he persisted until he obtained "direct knowledge of God. He wanted to be shown the ultimate truth for which he had striven all his life" (Zlotowitz, *Bereishis*, 2:1185).

[63] Alter, *Hebrew Bible*, 1:101n18.

[64] Nibley, Hugh W. "On the Sacred and the Symbolic." In *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks. *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* 17, 340-419. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2008, 383–84.

[65] Alter, *Hebrew Bible*, 1:101n20.

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