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The Integration of Temples and Families: A Latter-day Saint Structure for the Jacob Cycle

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THE INTEGRATION OF TEMPLES AND FAMILIES: A LATTER-DAY SAINT STRUCTURE FOR THE JACOB CYCLE

Jamie J. Huston

Abstract: Scholars from many religious backgrounds--including Latter-day Saints--have noted both temple themes and parallel structures in the Jacob Cycle (Genesis 28-35). The present paper surveys that body of work and then offers a new structural understanding of the text, one that is uniquely LDS. This interpretation focuses on the entwining of temple and family themes in the narrative, showing how the form of the text uses each to support the other.

Latter-day Saints believe that some important doctrines have been known among covenant peoples since the earliest eras of human history. Joseph Smith taught that this final dispensation included all the doctrinal truths that had been known in those primeval eras, but which had been lost: “The dispensation of the fullness of times will bring to light the things that have been revealed in all former dispensations.”¹

It should come as no surprise, then, that two of the most cherished features of the Church in this last dispensation — temple worship and the primacy of the family unit — should be attested to in the literature of the first dispensations. In fact, the story of one early patriarch in particular, Jacob, shows just how deeply interwoven these two areas of life are.

¹ *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011), 510.

Scholars from various backgrounds have studied the Jacob Cycle and discerned parallel structures, and with its instances of revelation, ritual, and altar building, many have seen a temple theme in the story of the life of Jacob. However, Latter-day Saints are in a position to see this text in a new way that is especially meaningful, as these details can be synthesized into a cohesive whole that is distinctively LDS.

In “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative,” Yehuda T. Radday states that “the story of Jacob may ... be said to end with [Genesis] chapter 35 and to start with his departure from his father’s house in chapter 28.”² Radday then explains that the structure of Jacob’s story is simple: Jacob “descends” from Canaan to Aram in the first half, ending in 31:45–32:1, and then returns to Aram to be reconciled with Esau. Radday also notes that Jacob’s encounter with a “messenger” at the central point was the defining event of the story, and he observes that Jacob erects a heap of stones at the beginning, middle, and end of his journey. But Radday’s analysis stops here, lamenting “that the Jacob Cycle is not more chiastically articulate.”³

However, the major structural scaffolding of the Jacob Cycle is achieved by chiasmus. Chiasmus is a style of writing where a series of words, phrases, or ideas is given and then repeated in reverse order. It is frequently used in ancient writings to create an aesthetic unit that can be easily memorized and to draw attention to the central turning point, the most important part of the story.

Of the Jacob Cycle in particular, Stanley D. Walters writes:

2 Yehuda T. Radday, “Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo: Research Press, 1981), 103.

3 Ibid.

*Placement and juxtaposition are among the writer's major techniques. ... Thus the cycle is not only a narrative sequence with its own inner movement, but an artful arrangement which invites the reader to compare each segment with its complement later (or earlier) in the sequence.*⁴

Wolfgang M. W. Roth implicitly notes that multiple valid interpretations of structural arrangement — and, therefore, thematic emphasis — are possible. He reviews the central episodes of one three-fold outline of the Jacob Cycle by focusing on concerns of divine appearance to confer physical blessings:

Two divine words reinterpret the Yahwistic change of name tradition (compare 35:10, P, with 32:23-3, J) and the promise of land and descendants (compare 35:11, P, with 28:13-14, J). Jacob's renaming of Luz as Bethel (35:15, P) and the listing of his twelve sons (35:22b-26, P) demonstrates the (preliminary) fulfillment of both promises.⁵

Roth then describes a second reading of this sequence, based on a structure that focuses on Jacob's relationships and need for conflict resolution:

While P *centered* the Jacob story in the divine appearance and blessing, condensed into brief divine statements (Gen. 35:10, 11-2, J) structured the Jacob story as *two arches*, more exactly, as one

4 Stanley D. Walters, "Jacob Narrative," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Volume 3, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, Doubleday, 1992), 600. Emphasis in original.

5 Wolfgang M. W. Roth, "The Text is the Medium: An Interpretation of the Jacob Stories in Genesis," in *Encounter with the Text: Form and History in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Martin J. Buss (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 105.

arch (the Jacob-Laban series) set within another (the Jacob-Esau series). ...

Where they touch each other, Jacob's encounters with the divine intervene: this occurs first at Bethel, after the Jacob-Esau tension had become so unbearable that Jacob had to flee and before Jacob reaches Laban (28:13-15). It occurs a second time at Penuel, on Jacob's return journey after that Jacob-Laban tension had been settled and before the crucial meeting with Esau was to take place (32:23-33).⁶

While Roth's two given arrangements of the Jacob Cycle are both compelling, each only accounts for part of the major divine encounters in that narrative: the first (that attributed to "P") favors Genesis 35, while the second (that attributed to "J") focuses on Genesis 28 and 32. Even if the present text of the Jacob Cycle represents a composite of various versions, the new schematic proposed here will show the value of reading that present text as a unified whole (for one thing, this arrangement will account for all three of those revelatory chapters).

Indeed, John G. Gammie, writing in the same volume as Roth, virtually says as much:

I reached a similar conclusion, *viz.*, that the material in Genesis 25-36 has been consciously arranged in a concentric or chiasmic pattern. The increasing awareness of such a pattern of arrangement by a number of persons laboring relatively independently strongly suggests that the pattern was consciously chosen by one of the biblical compilers-editors and therefore is of significance for interpreting the texts.⁷

6 Ibid. 106. Emphasis in original.

7 John G. Gammie, "Theological Interpretation by Way of Literary and Tradition Analysis: Genesis 25-36," in *Encounter with the Text: Form and History in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Martin J. Buss (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 120-21.

Mary Anne Isaak includes the chapters of the Jacob Cycle as the first six elements of an outline of eight units, where the last two units return to the story of Jacob's life after skipping over the story of Joseph (in Genesis 37-45) entirely.⁸ Isaak pairs Jacob's early life, up through the point where he departs his parents' home (Genesis 25:19-28:9) with Jacob's reuniting with Esau, receiving a vision at Peniel, and the episode of his children at Shechem (Genesis 32:1-34:31), each under the heading "Jacob in the Land." The two major spiritual manifestations at Bethel (Genesis 28:22 and 35:1-15) are paired together, as are the stories of Jacob's marriages, children's births, and his acquisition of land (Genesis 29:1-30:43) with Jacob's reunion with Joseph and meeting Pharaoh (Genesis 45:25-47:27), this latter pair sharing the label, "Jacob leaves the Land." Isaak's final section includes the agreement between Jacob and Laban (Genesis 31:1-55) being grouped with Jacob's blessings of his grandsons and his subsequent burial (Genesis 47:28-50:13).

Isaak gives her outline of the text as follows:

Jacob in the Land (25:19-28:9)

1. Jacob and Esau (25:19-28:9)

1. Birthright (25:19-34)

[The Story of Isaac (26:1-34)]

2. Jacob is blessed by his father (27:1-40)

3. Sent from the land (27:41-28:9)

B. Bethel Experience (28:10-22)

C. Jacob leaves the land (29:1-30:43)

1. Marriage (29:1-30)

2. Children (29:31-30:21)

3. Acquisition of Property (30:25-43)

D. Return to the Land (31:1-55) {70}

1. Bethel recalled (31:1-21)

2. Covenant between Laban and Jacob (31:22-55)

8 Mary Anne Isaak, "Literary Structure and Theology of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Three-fold Blessing," *Direction Journal* 24, no. 2 (Fall 1995), <http://www.directionjournal.org/article/?895>.

- A. Jacob in the land (32:1-34:31) (stet)
 - 1. Jacob prepares to meet Esau (32:1-21)
 - 2. Jacob wrestles with God — name change (32:22-32)
 - 3. Jacob and Esau (33:1-20)
 - 4. Shechem (34:1-31)
- B'. Bethel experience — name change repeated (35:1-15)

Ending to section of Jacob in the land (35:16-29)

 - 1. Rachel dies (35:16-20)
 - 2. Jacob's sons (35:21-26)
 - 3. Isaac dies (35:27-29)
 - [The account of Esau (36:1-43)]
 - [The story of Joseph (37:1-45:24)]
- C'. Jacob leaves the land (45:25-47:27)
 - 1. God promises Jacob will return (45:25-46:27)
 - 2. Jacob meets Joseph (46:28-34)
 - 3. Jacob meets Pharaoh (47:1-12)
 - [Joseph is administrator of Egypt (47:13-26)]
 - 4. Acquisition of property (47:27)
- D'. Return to the land (47:28-50:14)
 - 1. Bethel recalled (47:28-48:4)
 - 2. Jacob blesses his sons (48:5-49:28)
 - 3. Jacob is buried in Canaan (49:29-50:13)

Isaak explains that her arrangement is derived from the fact that “in the Jacob pattern, just as in the Abraham pattern, the name change occurs at the beginning of the second panel of the parallel structure.” She goes on to emphasize “the importance of the theme of land in Jacob’s story.”

This interpretation is novel but is not structurally holistic, as it must skip nine whole chapters without explanation and includes significant subunits with no parallel, and it focuses on one small aspect of the Jacob Cycle — land — but largely ignores other possible dimensions.

Michael W. Martin presents a more cogent arrangement of the Jacob material.⁹ Martin interprets the Jacob Cycle as an example of a betrothal narrative, according to the pattern he identifies in his article: 11 elements, including commission by parents to go to a foreign country, service for a spouse, return to the original land, and reunion with the rest of the family:

The full schema of the betrothal type-scene, with minor variation in order, is as follows: (1) Jacob travels to a foreign country (29:1), and both conventional motives are described. He is in flight from a relative, Esau (27:41-45; 28:10), and he is commissioned by both his mother (27:46) and his father (28:1-5). (2) Upon arrival in the foreign country, Jacob meets a woman, Rachel, at a well (29:2-9). (3) He draws water for her (29:10b) after (4) removing the large stone from the well (29:10a, cf. v. 8). (5) In the climactic moment of the scene (accompanied by kissing and weeping), Jacob reveals to her his identity as a kinsman (29:11-12a). Immediately afterward, (6) Rachel runs home with news of his arrival (29:12). (7) As in the scene above, a relative, Laban, returns to greet the man (29:13a). (8) Subsequently, a betrothal is arranged in connection with a meal (29:15-22), the terms of betrothal ultimately (9) requiring Jacob to remain many more years than the convention's norm. That is, a month-long stay (29:14) becomes a seven-year stay (24:20) and then is extended another seven years (24:27). Since in most scenes the betrothal happens in a matter of days and the suitor is required to stay with the family for only a short time, this extended stay underscores Laban's mistreatment of Jacob. The

9 Michael W. Martin, "Betrothal Journey Narratives," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70 (2008): 505-23.

stay also permits Jacob to beget several children, per the convention.

After the long residency, (10) Jacob returns to Canaan, commissioned by the bride's father, per conventional expectations (30:25–31:54). The departure, however, is unconventionally acrimonious in that Jacob flees because of Laban's growing resentment and without granting Laban the opportunity to bid farewell (31:28) — a fitting conclusion to the entire story of Jacob and Laban (normally the father-in-law graciously grants the young suitor's request to return home and the departure is wholly amicable). (11) Finally, Jacob is received by a relative, Esau (33:1–16), and thereafter lives with his family, first in the Transjordan (33:17), and then in Canaan (33:18; etc.), where he begets even more children, further establishing his household.¹⁰

Latter-day Saints will readily relate to Martin's recognition of the dominance of familial themes in the Jacob Cycle (not to mention a metaphor for the plan of salvation), but, like Isaak, his interpretation fails to sufficiently incorporate the crucial temple material found at intervals throughout the story, which Martin doesn't treat at all.

The most popular arrangement of the text's narrative parallels is summarized in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*:

The Biblical text presents the Jacob stories in a concentric pattern which has been independently observed by several scholars ... and which is signalled both by cross-references in vocabulary and by thematic similarities. The cycle breaks into 2 equal halves at Gen. 30:24–25, each having 7 matching segments, presented thematically in

10 Ibid., 510–511.

exact reverse order. The entire cycle is bracketed at beginning and end by genealogies of the 2 sons who stand outside the land of promise, Ishmael (25:12-18) and Esau (chap. 36), so that Jacob's role as the bearer of the promise is unmistakable.

The Unchosen Son (Ishmael) (25:12-18)

A. Beginnings. Birth, prediction, early conflict between Jacob and Esau (25:19-34)

B. Relations with indigenous population (26:1-22)

C. Blessing obtained ... (27:1-40)

D. Jacob's flight from Esau (27:41-28:5)

E. Encounter with God's agents (28:10-22)

F. Arrival in Haran: Rachel, Laban (29:1-30)

G. Children: Jacob acquires a family (30:1-24)

Jacob's return to Canaan begins as soon as Joseph is born

G'. Flocks: Jacob acquires wealth (30:25-43)

F'. Departure from Haran: Rachel, Laban (31:1-32:1 — Eng 31:1-55)

E'. Encounter with God's agents (32:3-3 — Eng 32:1-2)

D'. Jacob's approach to Esau (32:4-33 — Eng 32:3-32)

C'. Blessing returned ... (33:1-20)

B'. Relations with indigenous population (ch. 34)

A'. Endings. Death, fulfillment, Jacob and Esau together (ch. 35)

The Unchosen Son (Esau) (chap. 36)¹¹

This formulation has both literary merit and spiritual value for all students of the text, including Latter-day Saints. However, the most well-rounded extant consideration of the Jacob Cycle — and that most closely approaching the new, uniquely LDS

11 Walters, 599-600.

schema — has been that of Bernard Och. Och approaches the text from both the literary and the spiritual angles:

Structurally, the Jacob narrative (Genesis 25-35) moves along two distinct, dramatic lines: a horizontal one of human-profane activity and a vertical one of Divine-human encounter. ... God's revelations at Bethel (Genesis 28:11-22) and Penuel (Genesis 34:24-32) serve as the pillars upon which the entire narrative rests, and provide a theological gestalt which infuses the story with the concerns and fulfillments of Divine promise.¹²

Though Och shows how episodes in biblical drama are paired for thematic impact, he prefers to draw comparisons between the Jacob and Abraham narratives rather than seeing the many interdependent pairs within the Jacob text itself. For example, Och writes that, “Penuel [a site in the Jacob Cycle] is the theological counterpart to Moriah [a site in the Abraham Cycle]. Both are events of existential rebirth which are preceded by existential death.”¹³ He adds his name to the roster of scholars who note that the Jacob Cycle is composed of thematic “binary opposites.”¹⁴

These authors all add valuable insights to our understanding and appreciation of the Jacob Cycle. It is possible, however, to see a more specific spiritual dimension in the text because of two factors that may have influenced its composition, factors that Latter-day Saint theology emphasizes: temple work and family life. Temple worship involves more than can be readily apparent in a public text, and temple work is inherently family-oriented.

12 Bernard Och, “Jacob at Bethel and Penuel: The Polarity of Divine Encounter,” *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 42, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 164.

13 Ibid., 173.

14 Ibid., 168, 169.

There have been previous Latter-day Saint interpretations of the Jacob Cycle, such as Andrew C. Skinner's essay, "Jacob in the Presence of God."¹⁵ Skinner, while he presents a detailed doctrinal exegesis of the text, including both temple and family themes, does not cover the elegant literary structure in which the author embeds this information.

Here, I propose a new outline of the structure of the Jacob Cycle, one which is based on and is intended to highlight the specific doctrinal themes of Latter-day Saints. The elements of family and temple work can be seen symbiotically entwined in the Jacob Cycle like this:

A. Jacob leaves his father to be blessed with covenant wife and great posterity. 28:1-5

B. Jacob's brother, who had lost his birthright, rebels, dividing the family. 28:6-9

C. At Beth-el, Jacob:

a. Erects a pile of stones, 28:10-11.

b. Sees angels ascend and descend, 28:12.

c. Receives promises of temporal blessings of protection and future blessings based on endurance, 28:13-15.

d. Builds and consecrates an altar, 28:16-19.

e. Covenants to tithe. 28:20-22.

D. Jacob works to earn his first wife. 29:1-35

E. Jacob works for the welfare of his family. 30:1-43

F. Jacob's family is abused by Laban. 31:1-35

G. Jacob is reconciled with Laban. 31:36-55

15 Andrew C. Skinner, "Jacob in the Presence of God," in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2005), 117-32.

H. Jacob's endowment, 32:1-32

G'. Jacob is reconciled with Esau.

33:1-17

F'. Jacob's family is abused by Shechem
and Hamor. 33:18-34:5

E'. Jacob's sons scheme for the welfare of the
family. 34:6-24

D'. Jacob's sons retaliate against their sister's
abusers. 34:25-31

C'. At Beth-el, Jacob:

e. covenants obedience to the Lord, 35:1-5 [Make
capitalization consistent with preceding
section\

d. builds an altar, 35:6-8

c. is given a new name and is blessed with seed,
35:9-12

b. sees the Lord ascend, 35:13

a. derects a stone pillar. 35:14-15

B'. Jacob's son is lustful and rebels, losing his birthright.
35:16-26

A'. Jacob returns to his father, blessed with a large, righteous
family. 35:27-29

Once the Jacob Cycle is arranged in this chiasitic format,
the messages about temples and families — including what
they have to do with each other — can be read more clearly by
examining the paired episodes of the story.

A and A' (28:1-5 / 35:27-29). The first and last things we
read are that Jacob was sent out by his father to earn the eternal
blessings of a covenant family and that he returned successfully,
despite some mistakes and adversity along the way.

And Isaac called Jacob, and *blessed him*, and *charged*
him, and said unto him, *Thou shalt not take a wife of*
the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan-aram,

to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and *take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother.*

And God Almighty *bless thee*, and *make thee fruitful*, and *multiply thee*, that thou mayest be *a multitude of people*;

And give thee *the blessing of Abraham*, to thee, and *to thy seed* with thee; that thou mayest *inherit the land* wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham. (Genesis 28:1-4, emphasis added)

Though the importance of family is obvious here, the temple reference is subtler: references to blessings at the outset of a journey, injunctions to fidelity to a faith community, and promises of God's covenant with Abraham — specifically, its aspects of land and descendants — being renewed with an individual, should all alert the LDS reader to temple significance in the text.

Jacob's story, as a complete biography and as a finished chiasm, constitutes a single discrete unit. By starting out with nothing and being sent away by his father in order to grow spiritually, and much later coming back to his father to announce his faithfulness and gain lasting approval in his sight, Jacob reminds us of Adam, the endowment's prototypical man, who in turn is meant to represent each of us and our journey through life.

Jacob, therefore, like Adam, Abraham (D&C 132:32), and Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:21), is presented to us as a model of how to live rightly, demonstrating the process of becoming exalted. Through these examples, we see a narrative microcosm of how our life can and should be lived; however, Jacob's model especially focuses on the importance of raising up a family in this sacred journey.

Of the typology inherent in this story from its start, Och writes:

God's initial encounter with His chosen one takes place at the start of a journey. ... Present reality has become untenable, and demands a struggle and a search for a solution, a "way out" — an exodus. The journey is made with the conscious awareness of being sought out and encountered by God, and requires an openness and obedience to the unconditional Divine claim on the totality of one's existence. ...

Man's journey with God is predicated upon an act of separation: removing oneself from the natural bonds of the past, from the kindred and parental ties which bind one to a specific place, a home. ... Jacob, like Abraham, must undertake a long and arduous journey of separation and transformation before he can return to reclaim the land of his forefathers.¹⁶

Gammie, though his structural arrangement of the text differs from this one, makes several observations about the usefulness of seeing the text through the opposing parallels of chiasmus, which also find application here:

Where the segments in the first half of the pattern record a movement of the leading character of the cycle away from the home of his parents, the corresponding segments in the second half record his movement back toward that home. ...

What transpires in the central ... segments allows a contrast to be drawn between the status of the main character who in the first half, at his departure,

16 Och, 166-67.

is alone and without wealth or progeny ..., but in the second half, at his return, is possessed with an abundance of both.¹⁷

B and B' (28:6-9 / 35:16-26). What could be learned by these sad examples? Esau, Isaac's son and Jacob's brother, perhaps jealous of his brother and angry with himself for previously discounting his covenant birthright (see Genesis 25:29-34), now moves closer to apostasy by marrying outside the covenant altogether. Later, Reuben, Jacob's son, in a position similar to Esau's, loses *his* covenant birthright by giving in to temptation and sleeping with one of Jacob's wives (see 1 Chronicles 5:1).

Agency cuts both ways, and when it comes to children, we can only prepare them and pray they'll choose the right as adults. Some have noted that the perfect Parent, our Heavenly Father, lost a third of *His* children when they poorly chose to rebel against Him (D&C 29:36). In the same fashion, even great patriarchs like Isaac and Jacob may still have an Esau or a Reuben who declines to live well.

Yet hope remains. As Brigham Young taught:

Let the father and mother, who are members of this Church and Kingdom, take a righteous course, and strive with all their might never to do a wrong, but to do good all their lives; if they have one child or one hundred children, if they conduct themselves towards them as they should, binding them to the Lord by their faith and prayers, I care not where those children go, *they are bound up to their parents by an everlasting tie*, and no power of earth or hell can separate them from their parents in eternity; they will return again to the fountain from whence they sprang.¹⁸

17 Gammie, 122-23

18 *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 173. Emphasis added.

Here's comfort for Isaac, Jacob, and every parent: obtaining and living true to the ordinances and covenants of the temple offers hope for reclamation of wayward children in eternity.

C and C' (28:10-22 / 35:1-15). Notice the five specific repeated elements in these portions of the story: the creation of a stone object, the vision of divine beings, the bestowal of blessings, the creation of an altar, and the making of covenants. The only significant difference is in the middle: in the first temple experience, relatively early in his life, Jacob is given the promise of future temporal blessings of land and seed, with the assurance from the Lord that He would "keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land" (Genesis 28:15). Clearly, the bulk of Jacob's work (and blessings) was yet to come.

The imagery of the ladder in this section illustrates this fact. President Marion G. Romney said this of the ladder's initiatory symbolism:

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.¹⁹

But near the end of Jacob's story, when he finally does return to Beth-el, the message is slightly different: the Lord reaffirms the new name that had been given Jacob in Genesis 32:28, and He reiterates the promise of land and seed. There is no attendant blessing of companionship on a forthcoming journey as there was in Genesis 28:15 because, presumably, Jacob has completed that journey and finished faithfully. If the first encounter at Beth-el, with its preparatory blessings, can be seen as a variant of the "washing and anointing" experience,

19 Marion G. Romney, "Temples — The Gates to Heaven," *Ensign*, March 1971, 16.

then the second experience may be more akin to being “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13) or making “your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10).

Of the doctrinal lessons in this section of the text, Skinner writes, in part:

Jacob learned that if he kept the covenant, God would be with him everywhere he went, and that God would fulfill everything He promised to do for Jacob. ... Jacob learned that sanctity and place can be, and often are, linked together. ... From Bethel, Jacob undoubtedly came away understanding the order of heaven, the possibilities for exaltation, and the promises of the Abrahamic covenant if he proved faithful.²⁰

Och writes:

The encounters at ... Bethel can be seen as rites of passage in a geographical and spiritual sense. ... This process of election and transformation involves both an outer and inner journey. The outer journey is the plot and moves through time and space; the inner journey provides the meaning, and moves towards a deeper understanding of one's true identity and being.²¹

Further, Och clearly sees a temple significance in the first Bethel passage, though he does not elucidate it in detail; his description of the power in this story is simple, reverent, and poetic: “Bethel is where heaven and earth meet. It is an axis mundi, a place of the incursion of the sacred into the profane

²⁰ Skinner, 120-21.

²¹ Och, 166.

world; a bridge between heaven and earth which is initiated, not by human hubris, but by Divine love.”²²

Gammie succinctly writes, “Theophanies, for the main character, Jacob, occur at critical moments in corresponding segments of both halves.”²³ The reference to theophanies is significant for Latter-day Saints studying the Jacob Cycle as a temple-centric text. A recent Sperry Symposium focused on clarifying the relationship between Old Testament texts and the temple as a place for seeing God:

A major theme in the book of Psalms is that worshipers could enter the Lord’s temple, come into His presence and see Him face to face if they met certain requirements, said BYU professor Andrew C. Skinner during the Sperry Symposium held at Brigham Young University on Oct. 26.

“The Hebrew Bible or Christian Old Testament contains several episodes in which God appeared to mortals,” he said. “Such an appearance is called a theophany, from the Greek *theophaneia*, meaning ‘God appearance.’ They were not everyday occurrences, but neither were they so rare as to be puzzling to mortal participants.”

Passages of scripture suggest that theophanies were a result of faithful devotion to God, obedience, and covenant-keeping. The Old Testament says that the Lord would visit with the Israelites in the “tent of meeting,” and there He would dwell among the Israelites. The purpose of Solomon’s Temple — the first temple in Jerusalem — was to bring worshipers into direct contact with Deity.

22 Ibid, 170-71.

23 Gammie, 123.

Drawing from other scholars, Brother Skinner said that some believe that seeking the face or presence of the Lord had been at the heart of temple beliefs and rituals.²⁴

Matthew L. Bowen, in a paper based on a presentation at that same symposium, writes this of the connection between temple theophanies past and present:

On a mountain temple, Moses, who learned that fallen man was nothing, also learned that he was able to “behold” God because God’s glory had come upon him, i.e., he was transfigured (Moses 1:2, 11) and “cleansed” (cf. 3 Nephi 28:37). Isaiah, similarly overwhelmed by feelings of inadequacy as “a man of unclean lips in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5), had his iniquity “purged” (tëkuppār, atoned) so that he could be in the Lord’s presence (in the temple!) and participate in the divine council (Isaiah 6:7–8). For both prophets, not the blood of a sacrificial animal but rather of the Lord himself enabled them to remain in his presence: the Lord would “provide” himself in the mountain.

If our eyes could be “opened” like Adam’s and Eve’s (Moses 5:10–11), and if we could “see” with “purer eyes” (D&C 131:7) like Abraham, we would better appreciate that the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ is not only at the heart of the temple — both in its concept and in its ordinances — but that the temple is the Savior’s Atonement. That Atonement is gradually but surely exerting its intended effect upon the family of Adam and Eve through the temple (see Jacob 5:75). May the Lord “open [our] eyes” that we

24 Marianne Holman, “Sperry Symposium: Seeing God in His Temple,” *Church News*, Nov. 17, 2013, <http://www.ldschurchnewsarchive.com/articles/64140/Sperry-Symposium-Seeing-God-in-His-Temple.html>.

“may see” our promised redemption and “rejoice” with Adam and Eve, Enoch, Abraham, Sarah, our kindred dead, and all saints of ages past (cf. D&C 138:11–19).²⁵

To that list of exemplars could be added Jacob, whose life history shows multiple instances of theophany in temple locations.

There is also a pun made by pairing these segments of the text this way: in the *second* verse of section C, Jacob made a *stone pillow* (Genesis 28:11); in the *second to last* verse of section C’, he made a *pillar of stone* (Genesis 35:14). The pun on *pillow/pillar* appears to be peculiar to the King James Version.

J. P. Fokkelman also notices the repetition of stone and ascribes to it this spiritual significance:

Jacob immortalizes the vision in an action, the result of which, the massebe, reflects what he had seen. But what he had done earlier, put down a stone at random, in a place at random, he sets right, he completes under the influence of the vision. ...

Just as a dull drop of dew into a bright brilliant by the beams of the morning-sun, so, by the theophany, the unimportant trivial action of Jacob is transformed into a historical example in the dialogue of man and his God.²⁶

In section C, Jacob begins by making a stone object for a purely temporal, utilitarian reason: He merely needed a place to lie down. In section C’, however, Jacob has matured such that

25 Matthew L. Bowen, “‘In the Mount of the Lord It Shall Be Seen’ and ‘Provided’: Theophany and Sacrifice as the Etiological Foundation of the Temple in Israelite and Latter-day Saint Tradition,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, no. 5 (2013): 228.

26 J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 73.

even a simple action like that can now be repeated as a holy act: the creation of a consecrated altar: “And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, even a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon.” (Genesis 35:14) The difference is symbolic: just as the stone object has become fashioned from something originally crude into something sacred, so has Jacob.

D and D’ (29:1-35 / 34:25-31). Unlike the preceding three pairs, this section does not seem intended to offer a dual testimony of a principle as much as to offer a contrast. First we have Jacob humbly sacrificing seven years of his life for Rachel, the woman he has fallen in love with (but “they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her,” Genesis 29:20). Years later, after that family has flourished, we see the next generation in the horrible episode of Dinah’s rape, and the bloody revenge exacted by her brothers: the murder of all the men of the city.

The rape and revenge story in Genesis 34 seems so foreign to the text, and indeed to the very spirit of scripture, that some have wondered what purpose it serves there at all: A footnote on this chapter in the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* points out that the name of God is entirely missing from Genesis 34, and then refers to this chapter as “sordid.”²⁷ Fokkelman does not integrate this chapter into his arrangement at all and ultimately concludes, “The interpretation of the Jacob-cycle now turns out to be incomplete.”²⁸

Jacob’s final patriarchal blessing to the sons responsible for this disaster, in Genesis 49:5-7, shows that Jacob strongly disapproved of the tactic and that the sons were punished for giving in to anger. But what else could they have done?

27 *Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, ed. Kenneth L. Baker (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 2008), 59. fn.

28 Fokkelman, 238.

Perhaps the answer lies in the pious course of action displayed by Jacob himself in the juxtaposed section of the story. Laban, seeing that he had gotten seven years of excellent service from Jacob for Rachel, deceives Jacob and gives him Leah instead. Laban then demands another seven years service for Rachel. Does Jacob kill him, or illicitly kidnap Rachel and consider himself justified, or retaliate at all? No. Jacob simply continues to live and serve as he knows he should. Though they endure other conflicts, Jacob and Laban are ultimately reconciled in peace. One wonders what might have become of Shechem and Hamor had the sons of Jacob not denied them the chance to repent.

Like Esau and Reuben, Simeon and Levi did not exercise patience and forgiveness when presented with an extreme test, as their father Jacob had. The character demonstrated by Jacob, incidentally, has likewise been encouraged in our day:

Now, I speak unto you concerning your families — if men will smite you, or your families, once, and ye bear it patiently and revile not against them, neither seek revenge, ye shall be rewarded;

But if ye bear it not patiently, it shall be accounted unto you as being meted out as a just measure unto you. (D&C 98:23-24)

With both a positive and a negative example given, we are shown clearly which method of sustaining the sanctity of family is superior. Consider the verbs attributed to Jacob's reaction in the wake of being deceived by Laban in having seven years of work repaid with a promised spouse withheld:

And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he *said* to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?

And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.

Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years.

And Jacob *did so*, and *fulfilled her week*: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also.

And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid.

And he went in also unto Rachel, and he *loved* also Rachel more than Leah, and *served* with him yet seven other years. (Genesis 29:25-30, emphasis added)

Contrast these peaceful, submissive responses with those of his sons a generation later:

And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, *took each man his sword*, and *came upon the city boldly*, and *slew* all the males.

And they *slew* Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and *took* Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out.

The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and *spoiled* the city, because they had defiled their sister.

They *took* their sheep, and their oxen, and their asses, and that which was in the city, and that which was in the field,

And all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives ***took they captive***, and ***spoiled*** even all that was in the house.

And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house. (Genesis 34:25-30, emphasis added)

The younger men “took” their swords to their enemies before they “took” their sister back, but this was inexorably followed by a note that they then “took” the children and wives of their enemies — an ironic act, considering the impetus for their revenge — part of a sequence where they “spoiled the city” and “spoiled even all that was in the house.” Whatever familial impulses may have motivated their attack, the text shows that such aggression quickly poisons the perpetrator, especially if we extend the meaning of “spoil” from its context here as “plunder” or “prey upon for profit” to its related meaning of “to weaken the character or integrity of something.”

Consider also that the D’ section ends with Jacob reacting in the same manner he did before in section D: by speaking only, with the operative verb again merely being “said.” Indeed, both times Jacob reacts to the challenge to his family by rhetorically employing three clauses:

And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban,
 What is this thou hast done unto me?
 did not I serve with thee for Rachel?
 wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?
 (Genesis 29:25)

And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi,
 Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the
 inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and
 the Perizzites:

and I being few in number, they shall gather
 themselves together against me, and slay me;
 and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.
 (Genesis 34:30)

In the latter verse, Jacob scolds his sons primarily for the impolitic nature of their actions: their short-term concern with revenge (and profit) conflicts with the family's long-term need for survival. Simeon and Levi's temporary victory in one dispute may counterproductively hurt the whole family later, Jacob explains. Jacob, always the temple-focused man, constantly keeps the big picture in mind

E, F and F', E' (30:1-31:25 / 33:18-34:24). A couple of major family-centered themes emerge in this part of the narrative. The first is a common priesthood topic in our day. According to *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*: "By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families."²⁹

Jacob embodies this responsibility to provide for his family, even under difficult circumstances of employment. Jacob has a reputation for cleverness and earns this with his strategy to increase his own holdings by manipulating the breeding of Laban's flocks. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare has the devious and greedy Shylock discuss this with the devoutly anti-materialistic Antonio:

SHYLOCK

When Jacob grazed his uncle Laban's sheep--

29 "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 2010, 129.

This Jacob from our holy Abram was,
As his wise mother wrought in his behalf,
The third possessor; ay, he was the third--

ANTONIO

And what of him? did he take interest?

SHYLOCK

No, not take interest, not, as you would say,
Directly interest: mark what Jacob did.
When Laban and himself were compromised
That all the eanlings which were streak'd and pied
Should fall as Jacob's hire, the ewes, being rank,
In the end of autumn turned to the rams,
And, when the work of generation was
Between these woolly breeders in the act,
The skilful shepherd peel'd me certain wands,
And, in the doing of the deed of kind,
He stuck them up before the fulsome ewes,
Who then conceiving did in eaning time
Fall parti-colour'd lambs, and those were Jacob's.
This was a way to thrive, and he was blest:
And thrift is blessing, if men steal it not.

ANTONIO

This was a venture, sir, that Jacob served for;
A thing not in his power to bring to pass,
But sway'd and fashion'd by the hand of heaven.³⁰

Antonio sees the success of Jacob's plan to gain wealth as a blessing from outside his own control, while Shylock sees it as mere natural consequence of physical law. Where Shakespeare draws this distinction to make foils of these characters, Brigham Young may not have seen a conflict at all;

30 William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, I.3.71-93

his philosophy often recognized that as people are in the course of their duty in serving their families, divine favor follows. Young once paraphrased a popular maxim: “We have none to depend upon for protection but God and his people; and God helps those who try to help themselves.”³¹

Though section E shows us Jacob creatively working in peace to provide for his family in a positive context, section E’ shows his sons resorting to obvious negative force in an attempt to serve their family.

Where sections D and D’ taught the importance of self-control in resolving conflict, this part of the story, which includes stories of the conflicts themselves, shows us exactly what should and should not be done.

Their sister having been raped, Jacob’s sons deal with the problem in a violently reactive way: They plot to trick the guilty parties and then murder them. Jacob handled the abuse of his family with greater wisdom. As Laban took advantage of Jacob’s situation as an indentured servant, Jacob relied on his faith and ingenuity to survive, not the impulsive guile his sons would later embrace. Genesis 30:25-43 explains how Jacob worked within Laban’s rules for dividing cattle to ensure an adequate sustenance for his family and recognized the Lord’s hand in rewarding him (later saying to his wives, “Ye know that with all my power I have served your father. . . . Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me” Genesis 31:6, 9).

It’s worth noting that Jacob let his family endure Laban’s extortion for fully 20 years before the Lord allowed Jacob to make a stand (Genesis 31:41), while his sons immediately prepared to exact revenge, waiting only three days before resorting to murder (Genesis 34:25).

31 William S. Harwell, ed. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1847-1850* (Salt Lake City: Collier’s Publishing Co., 1997), 331.

Gammie appropriately notes that chiasmus draws our attention to “ironic reversals” in the text; this might be best related to the dichotomies presented in sections D, E, and F, and their opposing parallels. “The concentric arrangement of traditions enables the interpreter to conclude with some certitude that the arranger of these texts viewed the slaughter of the Shechemites by the sons of Jacob/Israel (Genesis 34) as a culpable act,” he writes, though he compares the episode with an incident involving Isaac in Genesis 26. “The arranger of these texts thus urges Israel to reflect at once on the virtues of her antagonists and on her own offenses,” he adds.³² Contrast that assessment with Fokkelman, who surveys the complete story of Jacob handling his suffering under Laban and marvels: “The more he is oppressed the more he expands!”³³

G and G’ (31:36-55 / 33:1-17). When Laban overtakes Jacob’s family, Jacob simply explains his case, and when Laban is willing to end hostilities, Jacob readily agrees to the covenant of peace. Gammie observes: “Where the *dramatis personae* include the same two main characters in corresponding segments of both halves, the action in the corresponding segment of the second half usually brings to a clear resolution a strife or tension which connected in the first.”³⁴

Having given closure to the major antagonism of his life to this point by conquering the natural man’s instincts and conducting himself humbly (as the Lord would directly command the world during His mortal ministry in Matthew 5:23-25), Jacob was now ready for the passage into spiritual maturity. Before it even happened, he was preparing to live as righteously as possible by sending messengers to his long-estranged brother, collecting gifts for him, and praying for success in an eventual reunion (Genesis 32:1-23). When Jacob

32 Gammie, 124.

33 Fokkelman, 194.

34 Ibid., 122.

had obtained the spiritual gifts of power to endure that he had so well earned, he is able to face his brother.

One could imagine Esau as bitter towards the younger brother from their early history. Jacob had obtained the covenant birthright from Esau and then Esau, in light of Jacob's commission to marry righteously, married against his parents' wishes and moved away. Whatever Esau's state of mind was after all those years, Jacob had done all that he could to prepare for a reunion with his brother — a life of service and sacrifice had molded his spirit into one that would be eager for and receptive to his brother's good will — and Esau, like Laban, had his heart softened and was ready to forgive and forget.

Laban was Jacob's father-in-law; reconciliation was needed for the benefit of the family. Also in the best interests of the family was a restored relationship with Esau — Jacob had probably missed out on much of his brother's life (as their parents would have as well), and Jacob's wives and children had never known their brother-in-law and uncle.

But Jacob was deeply nervous about the meeting (Genesis 32:11). He worried that he wasn't ready or worthy (Genesis 32:10). How then did he finally prepare, after already proving his great spiritual strength through several trials, for this greatest test he would face? The Lord came and gave him the endowment — the dramatic centerpiece of Jacob's life.

The effect of the endowment on Jacob is immediate. Fokkelman describes the post-endowment reconciliation with Esau beautifully:

“To see your face is like seeing the face of god — with such favour have you received me.” [33:10] Jacob asks Esau to confirm the forgiveness implied in v. 4 by accepting his present. V. 10b states the reason Jacob dares to ask him: now Esau is to him like God. Esau is lord of the servant Jacob, as God is.

Esau is the ... authority which alone, by his mercy, can absolve Jacob's guilt and which can lend a new integrity to Jacob. ... A purified relationship to God necessarily goes with a purified relationship to his fellow-man. ...

Jacob, who once stole the blessing from Esau with complete self-assurance, now tries to make up for this, as far as possible, by returning a blessing.³⁵

An analysis of the temple material in the cycle's central episode may help us address a question raised here, one that echoes through the ages: How is the endowment able to aid people in making such positive progress in righteous relationships with their families?

H (32:1-32). Jacob had already made and kept covenants (including tithing), had proven himself a hard and honest worker, and was being a righteous husband and father. Now, on the eve of his great test — the bridging of the chasm between himself and his brother — he was blessed with a power that he had not before known, a power that would be able to sustain him for the rest of his days and fulfill all the promises that had ever been made to him.

Hugh Nibley describes the endowment summary in Genesis 32 in *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*: The “wrestling” in Genesis 32:24 “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.”³⁶

Also worthy of note in this context is that the messenger put a mark on Jacob's thigh that didn't affect the physical “contest” (Genesis 32:25), but that remained with him as a permanent

³⁵ Fokkelman, 226-27.

³⁶ Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, ed. John Gee and Michael D. Rhodes (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2005), 434.

reminder of the experience (Genesis 32:31-32). Joseph Fielding Smith wrote of this event: "Who wrestled with Jacob on Mount Peniel? ... More than likely it was a messenger sent to Jacob to give him the blessing."³⁷

The messenger would not reveal his name (Genesis 32:29), but this gift of power allowed him to be in the Lord's presence (Genesis 32:30). Indeed, the new name "Israel" itself refers to perseverance with God, one purpose of the endowment's gift of power. The word *preserved* in Genesis 32:30 may be symbolic of the Atonement: Jacob has literally been saved from a tragic future (the possible vengeance at the hands of Esau that Jacob feared) by the Lord's intervention.

Och likewise sees the spiritual importance of this passage, that it is elevated by a poetic structure:

At Penuel, the Jacob narrative reaches its theological climax in a Divine-human encounter which parallels the earlier theophany at Bethel. Both encounters are arranged symmetrically, at Jacob's departure from Canaan and upon his return, and can be seen as rites of passage in a physical and spiritual sense: Jacob is crossing over the threshold of the ancestral land and, at the same time, acquiring a new identity. At Bethel, Jacob is recognized as the bearer of promise and secures a special relationship with God, his Divine benefactor. At Penuel, Jacob receives his new name and new identity as "Israel." Both theophanies project an atmosphere of mystery and inscrutability. They occur unexpectedly, in the darkness of night when Jacob is alone, a frightened and vulnerable individual.³⁸

37 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954-56), 1:17.

38 Och, 172.

By the end of this narrative, Jacob had received all that one can receive on Earth: The final fulfillment of his promises could be received only in the next world. After Jacob establishes harmony with his brother, the Jacob Cycle turns primarily to the lives of Jacob's children; there we mostly see him as a wise father who teaches, praises, and reproves as needed.

Michael Fishbane says of this point: "Jacob awakens with the deep conviction that he had faced his struggle with courage and had been blessed by divinity. He greets the morning light with the glow of his own self-transformation and illumination."³⁹ Fishbane also offers an understanding of the spiritual themes in the Jacob Cycle that Latter-day Saints might recognize and appreciate:

Three issues are of primary importance in [the Jacob Cycle]: *birth*, *blessing*, and *land*. These correspond, as will be recalled, to the threefold patriarchal blessing given to Abraham (12:1-3). ...

A series of polarities pervade the text and charge it with life force and dramatic tension. The first issue, birth, functions together with its opposite: barrenness. ...

The second issue, blessing, also functions together with its opposite. ... The hope for a blessing and the fear of a curse clearly charge the actions of this Cycle.

Land functions in this Cycle as subject of the binary pair *exile/homeland*. ... The shrines mark the transition of action from sacred to profane space and back. The promises of land inheritance in the divine blessings to ... Jacob (28:13, 35:12) underscore this

39 Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998), 53.

value of settlement on the land as a sign of divine grace and favor.⁴⁰

The three “issues of primary importance” Fishbane sees in the Jacob Cycle may also be read into the promises of the modern temple endowment, which also suggest blessings of eternal inheritances both physical and spiritual.

Fokkelman concurs with Fishbane: “we see that the texts appear to us in three perspectives; the themes of land and of family-history are a function of the even larger perspective that God’s plan of salvation means to a chosen people on its way to a promised land.”⁴¹

It’s instructive to consider how Jacob’s faithful experiences and temple blessings influence the lives of his posterity; not just of the next generation, but of every generation of the House of Israel. Besides the expected success with Esau, what was the practical effect of the endowment on Jacob’s life? Considering that he had already demonstrated faith in living by the covenants of the endowment, what was left?

In spite of all his spiritual successes, we cannot overlook Jacob’s imperfections. When working for Laban, part of his efforts to be productive involved employing the superstitious practice of putting rods in the animals’ water to help them conceive (Genesis 30:37-43). Even among his family, such primitive superstition was a problem — Rachel and Leah apparently thought mandrakes could help them get pregnant (Genesis 30:14-22), and Rachel even stole her father’s idols when Jacob and his family left Laban (Genesis 31:19).

Of this latter incident, Ktziah Spanier theorizes that Rachel stole these “cultic objects” as “part of her continuing struggle

40 Ibid. 60-61, emphasis in original.

41 Fokkelman, 241.

for primacy within Jacob's household. ... Her objective was to prevail over her sister in the contest for family supremacy."⁴²

Spanier further explains:

The teraphim are known to have been used for the purpose of divination, as personal deities, in the dispensation of justice, and as emblems of authority. Rachel stole her father's teraphim in order to enhance her position in the family and to secure Joseph's position among his brothers.⁴³

This insight into the relatively silent role of the women in this text contributes more to our understanding of the nature of family strife in the first half of the pattern. Not only were there Jacob-centric conflicts — with Esau, Laban, and himself — but there may have been intra-familial conflicts as well, as manifested by paganism.

But after the majestically intimate experience of the Lord that is the endowment, no trace of paganism can be found in Jacob. In fact, when preparing his family to travel through Beth-el with him, Jacob tells them to “put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments” (Genesis 35:2). The work and blessings of the temple had fully converted Jacob, and he raised his family better accordingly.

Of Jacob's growth and success, Skinner writes, “At Bethel, Jacob had his first temple experience. ... For twenty years thereafter, Jacob proved himself at every hazard and under every circumstance.”⁴⁴ This evaluation may be slightly hagiographic when Jacob's life is considered closely, but his ultimate victory warrants the praise. Like each individual later pilgrim that Jacob represents, that final victory is in spite of his

42 Ktziah Spanier, “Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim: Her Struggle for Family Primacy,” *Vetus Testamentum* 42, Fasc. 3 (July 1992), 405.

43 Ibid. 410.

44 Skinner, 132.

flawed, stumbling path toward God, a victory made possible by his reliance on the grace of God, as seen in Jacob's prayer in Genesis 32:10: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant."

The Jacob Cycle could be arranged into another pattern, this one simply identifying the primary thematic concerns of the narrative sections. Here we see how totally entwined temple work and family life really are:

- A. Family 28:1-9
- B. Temple 28:10-22
- C. Family 29:1-32:23
- D. Temple 32:24-32
- C'. Family 33:1-34:31
- B'. Temple 35:1-15
- A'. Family 35:16-29

Family life is paramount, and the temple will periodically provide both the impetus and ability to a family to collectively lengthen their stride, as is so beautifully shown in the Jacob Cycle. Whenever Jacob has reached his limit and needs the light of God to move forward, the work of the temple is given to him. Thus refreshed, he sets out to make progress in his journey back to his father (and his Father), keeping his covenants, raising his family, and cherishing the work of the temple.

Julie B. Beck, speaking as Relief Society General President, spoke about the integrated nature of family and temple work in a 2009 Church Education System broadcast:

In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we have a theology of the family that is based on the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. ... God created a man and a woman who were the two essential halves of a family. It was part of Heavenly Father's plan that Adam and Eve be sealed and form an eternal family. ...

The Atonement allows for the family to be sealed together eternally. It allows for families to have eternal growth and perfection. ... The rising generation need to understand that the main pillars of our theology are centered in the family. ...

Where are these blessings Abraham received? They come only to those who have a temple sealing and marriage. ...

This generation will be called upon to defend the doctrine of the family as never before. If they don't know it, they can't defend it. They need to understand temples.⁴⁵

President Gordon B. Hinckley said this of the inherent relationship between temple work and family life:

If we are a temple-going people, we will be a better people, we will be better fathers and husbands, we will be better wives and mothers. I know your lives are busy. I know that you have much to do. But I make you a promise that if you will go to the House of the Lord, you will be blessed; life will be better for you.⁴⁶

Jacob's history is an endowment-like story that itself revolves around the temple, ever for the practical purpose of improving his role as a husband and father. Thousands of years separate us from Jacob, but in all that time, the most important things in life have not changed.

⁴⁵ Julie B. Beck, "Teaching the Doctrine of the Family," *Ensign*, March 2011, 12, 16, 17.

⁴⁶ Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1997), 624.

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