

May 21, 2017 - Gen. 31:3 – 32:3 - Jacob Flees From Laban

Torah readings: Gen. 31:3 – 32:3 - Jacob Flees From Laban

Psalm 26

Haftorah - (1) Jeremiah 30:10-18 + 22-25

(2) Micah 6:3-9 + 7:18-20

Complaint Against Laban

Genesis 31:9 - "Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me."

Genesis 31:10-12 - "And it was at the time the flocks were heated, and I lifted my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the he-goats that mounted the flock were ringed speckled and checkered. And an angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob', and I said, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Lift up your eyes and see all the he-goats that are mounting the flocks, are ringed speckled and checkered. For I have seen all that Laban has done to you.'"

As stated in the previous notes, Jacob was now being informed that God is providing for him. He didn't have to try to outwit Laban any longer, and he actually never needed to.

Genesis 31:15 - "Are we not counted of him strangers? for he has sold us, and has quite devoured also our money."

"He has sold us" refers to the bargain by which Jacob had obtained his two wives at the price of 14 years' service.

"and has quite devoured also our money." - Laban had taken to himself the full profits of Jacob's fourteen years' service as the gift, or *mohar*, to the bride's family; but had assigned nothing of it as the dowry or gift to the two brides. This conduct, they imply, was contrary to usual custom, and was expressed his stinginess.

Genesis 31:16 - "...now then, whatever God has said to you, do."

(Compare Mary's words of Jesus: His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." **John 2:5**)

Genesis 31:22 - "And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled."

A Jewish tradition says that when Laban returned from his sheep-shearing, he found the overflowing well in the city suddenly empty and dry - a disaster that told him of Jacob's flight.

Teraphim?

Genesis 31:19 - "...and Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's."

The images were the *teraphim*, the household gods, gods of the family hearth, sometimes made of gold or silver. Used for divination, and later condemned in the Law of Moses, various kinds of idols and high places were used (in error) to worship even the true God until the temple was established in Jerusalem. The narrator here takes them for granted, offering neither an explanation of their presence nor a condemnation of it.

Readers are not told whether Laban is a follower of Yahweh, but most signs point the other way. Although he is Rebekah's brother, he lives far from Canaan, and he refers to Yahweh as "the God of 'your' father" in Genesis 31:29.

Teraphim also had another significance. About 5,000 cuneiform tablets written in Akkadian from the 15th-14th century B.C. (The Nuzi Tablets) were discovered and translated in the 1930s. They revealed a trove of information about marriage and inheritance customs and laws in the Patriarchal Age. These tablets have been described as showing parallels between the Bible and Hurrian culture such as making a slave an heir (for instance, Eliezer) and using a surrogate for a barren wife (Hagar, handmaids, etc.).

Relating to the teraphim, the Nuzi Tablets show that possession of household gods could be part of a legal title to the paternal estate. By taking the gods, Rachel could give Jacob primacy over Laban's own sons; ensuring that he would inherit the estate.

A simpler explanation could be that Rachel, in a panic to leave but knowing she'll never see her family again, instinctively grabbed the teraphim because she wanted a reminder of her home to take with her. These gods probably represented the figures of Laban's ancestors and acted as bonds of family and domestic ritual.

The rabbis later take pains to absolve Rachel of wrongdoing: she took the teraphim not only to prevent Laban from using them through divination to disclose Jacob's flight, but also to rid her father's house of idolatry. Rachel, by sitting on the teraphim while she is menstruating (Gen 31:35), deliberately defiles them (Lev. 15:19-20) in order to make them unfit for worship: thus she saves Laban from his paganism.

But in the end, the story shows us how ingrained idolatry is in our hearts.

Although Laban is an outsider in the history of Israel, his bloodline flowed through Rachel and Leah and their sons. Jacob tried meticulously to make a break with Laban, to differentiate both his flocks and his faith from that of Laban. But the story of Rachel and the teraphim shows how easy it is to reach out for old idols. The same was true of the nation of Israel throughout its history. Teraphim persisted in Israel up through the time of David (1 Samuel 19:13-16)

— - Some of this was taken from "Rachel and the Household Gods: An Interpretation of

Genesis 31” by Susannah Rutherglen
<http://books.wwnorton.com/books/aboutcontent.aspx?id=16915>

A Covenant

Genesis 31: 51 - “And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee;”

The pillar, really a pile of stones or a boundary “cairn,” marked a covenant between Jacob and Laban, but also a boundary that separated them. It represented an important and respected demarcation line (**Deuteronomy 27:17**).

BY the setting up of the boundary, Jacob has no business entering the realm of Laban; and Jacob is protected from Laban’s interference in the Promised Land.

This is spiritually significant:

Psalms 125:3 - “For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity.”

2 Corinthians 6:14 - “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?”

Angels!

Genesis 32:1-2 - “And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God’s host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.”

The rabbis explain that Jacob was accompanied by two angelic hosts, one going up with him from Haran to the borders of the Holy Land, where he was received by the other host, the angels assigned to Palestine. Each of the hosts consisted of 600,000 angels. When Jacob saw them, he said, “Ye belong neither to the host of Esau, who is preparing to go out to war against me, nor the host of Laban, who is about to pursue me again. Ye are the hosts of the holy angels sent by the Lord.” He gave the name Mahanaim (double-host) to the spot on which the second army relieved the first.
— “The Legends of the Jews”