

"TERAPHIM"

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All through the ages interpreters of the Book of Genesis have puzzled over the account of Jacob's departure from his uncle, Laban. Something in this account has been absolutely obscure to most interpreters during that time. That is, the account of the way in which Rachel stole her father's household gods, ³² or "teraphim." Just why were these "teraphim" considered to be of tremendous importance? Rachel was so anxious to take them that she stole them and carried them off. Laban, when he returned and found that Jacob had already a three days' start away from home, was tremendously excited over the loss of these "teraphim." The thing which disturbed Laban does not seem to have been the fact that Jacob had left, nor the fact that he had taken away Laban's daughters without giving him a chance to say good-bye to them, nor that he had taken his grandchildren, nor the fact that he had taken away such great possessions of flocks and herds -- all of which, of course, Jacob had earned from him -- and yet which Laban was very loathe ~~to~~ indeed to lose. That which disturbed Laban was the loss of these "teraphim."

As a result of his disturbance over this loss, we find Laban pursuing after Jacob in order to get back his "teraphim." He gathered together an expedition sufficient to terrify Jacob when he came upon him, this in spite of the fact that Jacob had a very large number of herdsmen with him and would have been able to protect himself from quite a sizeable attack. Laban took with him a sufficient force to strike terror to the heart of Jacob -- and this was not the terror of remorse for Jacob did not even know that Rachel had stolen the "teraphim." When Laban overtook Jacob -- it must have been after a journey of a number of days, since Jacob already had a three days' start over him, and we are told the encounter took place down in