

The documentary hypothesis maintains that this portion was not written by Moses, but by someone who lived many centuries later. If this were the case, we would expect to find an explanation of the importance attributed to the teraphim, since at that later time the reason for their importance would be as little known to the reader as it is to people today.

Very recently the solution to this mystery has come to light. A great many clay tablets have been excavated at the town of Nuzi in northern Mesopotamia in the region in which Laban lived and from approximately the same period. From them we learn that at that time the possession of a man's household gods by a son-in-law was acceptable in court in that region as evidence that he had designated that son-in-law as heir to all his possessions. This explains why Rachel was so anxious to keep the teraphim, and why Laban was so determined, if possible, to get them back, and thus to prevent Jacob from securing what was left of his property after his death.

We are glad indeed to note that Jacob made no use of the household gods. He never sank so low as to take advantage of the theft which Rachel had performed. Instead we find that later on he buried them at Shechem.

Thus these clay tablets discovered at Nuzi throw a wonderfully interesting and informing light upon this narrative in Genesis, and at the same time give strong evidence that the account was written near the time of the event, when it would have been clear to everyone, rather than long after, when the meaning of this important feature would have been forgotten.

In the light of these and many other archeological discoveries it is easy to see, at point after point, how various Biblical narratives fit into the time at which they were written. When we believe the Bible we are not following "cunningly devised fables," but a book which records facts and tells us what actually occurred.

It would be absurd, of course, to seek archeological confirmation of every part of the Bible. In many places it is difficult to see how archeological evidence would have any direct bearing on the statements of the Scripture. At the same time, with what has already been discovered, we can test the statements in the Bible at point after point, and wherever we are able to make a fair test we find that the Biblical statements stand the test of present knowledge.

We can trust the material statements of the Bible. If this is true, it is equally true that we can trust its spiritual statements. The Bible vividly pictures the condition of the human heart. As we examine our own hearts we see how true its statements are. The heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked. Even our good deeds are worthless in the sight of God. When we examine them closely we generally find that they are really actuated by selfish and unworthy motives. We deserve nothing good at God's hand.

If all that the Bible did was to describe the situation of the human heart, it would be of little help to us. It would lead only to despair and misery. Fortunately it does not stop there. It tells us the wonderful good news, that God sent His own Son to live among men and to die on Calvary's cross, in order that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish but have eternal life.

This is the great message of the Bible. May the American Council of Christian Churches be greatly used of God to open ever wider doors for the preaching of the Gospel, in order that many may be turned from darkness to light, and from the domain of Satan to the family of God.