

A Rood Awakening!

Presents

Awakening in the Word

By Glenn McWilliams of TK TORAH KEEPERS
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THE OVERVIEW

Our portion this week is a vital one, and it may be understood as the beginning of labor pains in the birth of a nation. Jacob has been in exile from the land of Canaan, and now YHWH commands his return to the land of his fathers. Jacob consults with his wives and discusses their situation. The wives agree to follow Jacob back to the land. Laban, who has not been made aware of their departure, sets off in hot pursuit when he discovers Jacob's stealthy exit. Upon overtaking Jacob, Laban accuses him of stealing his elohim and his heart. Jacob accuses Laban of stealing his fair wages and threatening his family. The portion ends with a peculiar covenant between the two separate families.

THE OUTLINE

- Genesis 31:3 YHWH commands Jacob to return home
- Genesis 31:4-13 Jacob explains everything to his wives
- Genesis 31:14-16 Jacob's wives give him their answer
- Genesis 31:17-21 Jacob steals away and Rachel steals her father's idols
- Genesis 31:22-23 Laban gives pursuit
- Genesis 31:24 Elohim warns Laban in a dream
- Genesis 31:25-30 Laban confronts Jacob with accusations
- Genesis 31:31-32 Jacob confronts Laban with accusations
- Genesis 31:33-35 Laban seeks to justify his complaint
- Genesis 31:36-42 Jacob justifies his complaint
- Genesis 31:43-54 Laban suggests a treaty with Jacob
- Genesis 31:55-32:3 Laban and Jacob part company

SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why does Jacob only talk to Rachel and Leah and not Bilhah and Zilpah?
2. What is significant about the fact that Jacob doesn't mention Laban's name?
3. What lesson does Jacob teach husbands?
4. What lesson is Jacob teaching his wives?
5. What are "household elohim"?
6. Why does Rachel steal them?
7. What do Rachel and Leah feel about their father?
8. What does Jacob steal?
9. Who is Jacob's constant companion?
10. What warning are we given about the words of our mouth?
11. What accusations are leveled against Jacob by Laban?
12. What accusations are leveled against Laban by Jacob?
13. What is the significance of the split?
14. What is the meaning of the covenant between Jacob and Laban?

THE TEXT

Genesis 31:3-32:3 And YHWH said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee. ⁴And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock, ⁵and said unto them, I see your father's countenance, that it is not toward me as before; but the Elohim of my father hath been with me. ⁶And ye know that with all my power I have served your father. ⁷And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but Elohim suffered him not to hurt me. ⁸If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages; then all the cattle bare speckled: and if he said thus, The ringstraked shall be thy hire; then bare all the cattle ringstraked. ⁹Thus Elohim hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me. ¹⁰And it came to pass at the time that the cattle conceived, that I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a dream, and, behold, the rams which leaped upon the cattle were ringstraked, speckled, and grisled. ¹¹And the messenger of Elohim spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob: And I said, Here am I. ¹²And He said, Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle are ringstraked, speckled, and grisled: for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee. ¹³I am the El of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto Me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred. ¹⁴And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? ¹⁵Are we not counted of him strangers? For he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money. ¹⁶For all the riches which Elohim hath taken from our father, that is ours, and our children's: now then, whatsoever Elohim hath said unto thee, do. ¹⁷Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels; ¹⁸and he carried away all his cattle, and all his goods which he had gotten, the cattle of his getting, which he had gotten in Padanaram, for to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan. ¹⁹And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's. ²⁰And Jacob stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled. ²¹So he fled with all that he had; and he rose up, and passed over the river, and set his face toward the mount Gilead. ²²And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled. ²³And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in the mount Gilead. ²⁴And Elohim came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad. ²⁵Then Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mount: and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mount of Gilead. ²⁶And Laban said to Jacob, What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters, as

captives taken with the sword? ²⁷Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me; and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret, and with harp? ²⁸And hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters? Thou hast now done foolishly in so doing. ²⁹It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the Elohim of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad. ³⁰And now, though thou wouldest needs be gone, because thou sore longedst after thy father's house, yet wherefore hast thou stolen my elohim? ³¹And Jacob answered and said to Laban, Because I was afraid: for I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me. ³²With whomsoever thou findest thy elohim, let him not live: before our brethren discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them. ³³And Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the two maidservants' tents; but he found them not. Then went he out of Leah's tent, and entered into Rachel's tent. ³⁴Now Rachel had taken the images, and put them in the camel's furniture, and sat upon them. And Laban searched all the tent, but found them not. ³⁵And she said to her father, Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise up before thee; for the custom of women is upon me. And he searched, but found not the images. ³⁶And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban: and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass? What is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me? ³⁷Whereas thou hast searched all my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? Set it here before my brethren and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us both. ³⁸This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. ³⁹That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. ⁴⁰Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. ⁴¹Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times. ⁴²Except the Elohim of my father, the Elohim of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. Elohim hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight. ⁴³And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that thou seest is mine: and what can I do this day unto these my daughters, or unto their children which they have born? ⁴⁴Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee. ⁴⁵And Jacob took a

stone, and set it up for a pillar. ⁴⁶And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made an heap: and they did eat there upon the heap. ⁴⁷And Laban called it Jegarsahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed. ⁴⁸And Laban said, This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed; ⁴⁹and Mizpah; for he said, YHWH watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another. ⁵⁰If thou shalt afflict my daughters, or if thou shalt take other wives beside my daughters, no man is with us; see, Elohim is witness betwixt me and thee. ⁵¹And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee; ⁵²this heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm. ⁵³The Elohim of Abraham, and the elohim of Nahor, the elohim of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. ⁵⁴Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount. ⁵⁵And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place.

^{32:1}And Jacob went on his way, and the messengers of Elohim met him. ²And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is Elohim's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim. ³And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

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At the heart of our portion this week is the separation between Jacob and Laban. While this narrative may appear to be nothing more than an intense family squabble, the depth of this division is quite significant. The tension and drama surrounding Jacob's departure from the land of Haran and the family of his mother and wives are the birth pains of a new family, people, and nation. We may remember that from the very beginning of this patriarchal narrative, we have been emphasizing the sovereignty of the Creator. We have witnessed in the births of both men and animals the reality that YHWH Elohim is the Sovereign of Life. While this sovereignty over life and the universe is first made manifest in the very act of creation, its application to the children of Israel is made exceedingly clear through the election of Abraham and the numerous miraculous births in the patriarchal narrative.

Genesis 12:1-3 *Now YHWH had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:² and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:³ and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

Genesis 11:30 *But Sarai was barren; she had no child.*

Genesis 21:1-3 *And YHWH visited Sarah as He had said, and YHWH did unto Sarah as He had spoken. ²For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which Elohim had spoken to him. ³And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.*

Genesis 25:21 *And Isaac intreated YHWH for his wife, because she was barren: and YHWH was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.*

Genesis 30:1-2 *And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. ²And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in Elohim's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?*

Genesis 30:22-24 *And Elohim remembered Rachel, and Elohim hearkened to her, and opened her womb. ²³And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, Elohim hath taken away my reproach:²⁴ and she called his name Joseph; and said, YHWH shall add to me another son.*

Taken together, all of these stories affirm the reality that the children of Israel are indeed an intentional creation of the Sovereign Creator for a specific purpose and plan. The nation of Israel is no mere accident of nature or serendipitous political happening. We have been witnessing the ever-developing division and distinction of a particular people emerging from the masses since the election of Abraham after the dividing of the nations at the tower of Babel. We shall see in this portion the further advancement of the birth of the nation of Israel as a separate political and ethnic entity.

With the intention and will of the Creator made clear in the verses above, it should not surprise us that our current portion begins with the expressed commandment of YHWH calling Jacob to return to the land of his fathers.

Genesis 31:3 *And YHWH said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.*

Within this single verse we should note the very significant change in the identity of the "homeland." Let us contrast the above verse with earlier words concerning Abraham.

Genesis 12:1-3 *Now YHWH had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:² and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:³ and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

Genesis 24:1-4 *And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and YHWH had blessed Abraham in all things.² And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh:³ and I will make thee swear by YHWH, the Elohim of heaven, and the Elohim of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell:⁴ but thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac.*

Genesis 24:7 *YHWH Elohim of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; He shall send His angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.*

Genesis 24:38 *But thou shalt go unto my father's house, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son.*

Again we witness similar words on the lips of Isaac and Rebekah.

Genesis 27:43-44 *Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran;⁴⁴ and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away.*

Genesis 28:1-2 *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.² Arise, go to Padanaram, 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.*

For Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Rebekah there is clearly an attachment to Mesopotamia and Haran as the land of their fathers. While Abraham and his descendants were promised an inheritance in the land of Canaan, they were clearly understood to be Arameans sojourning in the land of Canaan. Let us look for a moment at the genealogies of the patriarchs and matriarchs to clarify this point. The genealogy begins with Shem the son of Noah, but for the sake of brevity we will begin a little further on down the line.

Genesis 11:24-32 *And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat Terah:²⁵ and Nahor lived after he begat Terah an hundred and nineteen years, and begat sons and daughters.²⁶ And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran.²⁷ Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot.²⁸ And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees.²⁹ And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah,*

and the father of Iscah. ³⁰But Sarai was barren; she had no child. ³¹And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. ³²And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.

Genesis 22:20-24 And it came to pass after these things, that it was told Abraham, saying, Behold, Milcah, she hath also born children unto thy brother Nahor; ²¹Huz his firstborn, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel the father of Aram, ²²and Chesed, and Hazo, and Pildash, and Jidlaph, and **Bethuel.** ²³And **Bethuel begat Rebekah:** these eight Milcah did bear to Nahor, Abraham's brother. ²⁴And his concubine, whose name was Reumah, she bare also Tebah, and Gaham, and Thahash, and Maachah.

Genesis 24:15 And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, **Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother,** with her pitcher upon her shoulder.

Genesis 24:37-38 And my master made me swear, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell: ³⁸but thou shalt **go unto my father's house, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son.**

Here we clearly see the connections between Abraham, Nahor, Bethuel, Rebekah, Laban, and Jacob. We also witness that this family line begins in Ur, roughly 110 miles southeast of Babylon, and then migrates 550 miles northwest to Haran in Assyria, and from Haran, another 400 or so miles southwest to the land of Canaan. When Abraham's servant Eliezer returned to the land and family of Abraham, he went only to Haran. This is the land that Abraham was called from. Jacob likewise returned to the land of Haran to the house of Bethuel, Rebekah, Laban, Rachel, and Leah. While Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Rebekah considered Haran to be "the land of my father," Jacob does not. Since Isaac was born in the promised land of Canaan and lived his entire life there, Jacob clearly identifies the land of Canaan as his home and "the land of my father."

Genesis 30:25 And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, **that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country.**

In these words to Laban Jacob clearly draws a distinction between Haran, the land of Laban, and Canaan, the land of Jacob. We should take careful note that while the patriarchs live as sojourners in the land of Canaan, the claim to the land, like the very existence of the children of Israel, is by divine will. Thus, the land of Canaan is the land of Jacob's fathers because the Sovereign of the Universe willed it to be so.

Genesis 12:1 Now YHWH had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.

Genesis 12:7 And YHWH appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto YHWH, who appeared unto him.

Genesis 13:15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

Genesis 13:17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

Genesis 15:7 And He said unto him, I am YHWH that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.

Genesis 15:18 *In the same day YHWH made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.*

Genesis 17:8 *And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their Elohim.*

Genesis 26:3 *Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father.*

Genesis 28:13 *And, behold, YHWH stood above it, and said, I am YHWH Elohim of Abraham thy father, and the Elohim of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed.*

The fact that the patriarchs are now to take emotional ownership of this “promised land” is affirmed in the words of the Creator to Jacob to return to the land of his fathers.

Genesis 31:3 *And YHWH said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.*

It should be noted that Jacob is the first of the patriarchs to genuinely be able to call the promised land “the land of my father.”

We may recall that Jacob left the land of his father at the behest of his parents.

Genesis 27:43-45 *Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran; ⁴⁴and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away; ⁴⁵until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done to him: then I will send, and fetch thee from thence: why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?*

Genesis 28:1-2 *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. ²Arise, go to Padanaram, 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.*

For twenty years Jacob remained in exile from the land of his father, but now it is YHWH who commands his return. Recalling that the original purpose of Jacob’s journey to Haran was refuge from the wrath of his brother Esau, YHWH comforts Jacob with the promise of His presence even on his return. We may likewise recall that Jacob’s journey began with a dream and the promise of YHWH’S presence, and now it concludes with a similar promise.

Genesis 28:15 *And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.*

Genesis 31:3 *And YHWH said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.*

While it is evident that Jacob has severed ties with Laban and the land of Haran, we must remember that his wives were born there and are direct descendants of Laban. Therefore, Jacob calls his wives to him in the field far from prying ears and shares with them all that YHWH has revealed to him. We should note that Jacob does not include his concubines Bilhah and Zilpah in this discussion. It would have been considered inappropriate for Jacob to discuss his wives’ father and family in front of their handmaids.

Jacob begins his discussion with his wives by sharing his observation of Laban's changed disposition toward him. Repeatedly Jacob points out to Rachel and Leah his own loyal service to their father. By way of subtle contrast Jacob also points out their father's deceptive behavior toward him. The true contrast being made in Jacob's report to his wives, however, is between the behavior of Laban and that of YHWH.

Genesis 31:4-13 *And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock, ⁵and said unto them, I see your father's countenance, that it is not toward me as before; but the Elohim of my father hath been with me. ⁶And ye know that with all my power I have served your father. ⁷And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but Elohim suffered him not to hurt me. ⁸If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages; then all the cattle bare speckled: and if he said thus, The ringstraked shall be thy hire; then bare all the cattle ringstraked. ⁹Thus **Elohim hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me.** ¹⁰And it came to pass at the time that the cattle conceived, that I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a dream, and, behold, the rams which leaped upon the cattle were ringstraked, speckled, and grisled. ¹¹**And the angel of Elohim spake unto me in a dream,** saying, Jacob: And I said, Here am I. ¹²And He said, Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle are ringstraked, speckled, and grisled: for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee. ¹³**I am the El of Bethel,** where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto Me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred.*

There are several themes in these verses that we should take note of. As we have already stated, the primary theme of the contrasts is Laban's treatment of Jacob and YHWH'S treatment of Jacob. Laban seeks to deceive, to rob, and to ensnare Jacob. YHWH protects, informs, and blesses Jacob.

The first sub-theme we should ponder is that of headship. Jacob is clearly the head of his family. YHWH honors this headship by speaking to Jacob directly. Jacob, in turn, speaks to his wives. We should take careful note that Jacob does not simply command his wives to leave with him. Instead, Jacob informs his wives of all that YHWH has revealed to him. By doing so, Jacob honors his wives and seeks their input. By consulting with his wives, Jacob avoids generating strife and gives opportunity for true consensus and unity in the family.

We may also note that Jacob never uses the name Laban; instead, he refers to his father-in-law by the epithet "your father." Jacob does not compare himself with his wives' father but with his Elohim. By revealing the contrast between Laban and YHWH Jacob honors YHWH before the eyes of his wives, giving Him credit for all the good that has befallen them while living in their father's home. Thus, Jacob educates his wives concerning the character and nature of YHWH. By giving all the glory and honor to YHWH, Jacob is at the same time revealing the impotency of Laban's elohim. Here we should recall that Laban and, presumably, his daughters, though familiar with YHWH, worship many elohim, as is evident in this portion.

Joshua 24:2 *And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith YHWH Elohim of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other elohim.*

Genesis 24:50 *Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from YHWH: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good.*

Genesis 31:19 *And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's.*

Genesis 31:30 *And now, though thou wouldest needs be gone, because thou sore longedst after thy father's house, yet wherefore hast thou stolen my elohim?*

In the previous portion it was revealed that not only was Laban an idolater, but that he practiced divination as well.

Genesis 30:27 *And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by **divination**¹ that YHWH hath blessed me for thy sake.*

Divination may have been the very purpose of these small "household elohim" known as *terafim* (*tav, resh, fey, yud, mem*). Nahum M. Sarna gives an apt description of these images.

*The nature and function of these objects remain largely obscure, as does Rachel's motivation. Called "terafim" in Hebrew, they are translated as "idols" by ancient versions of the text such as the Aramaic Targums and the Greek Septuagint. Laban refers to them as "my gods" (v.30), and Jacob correspondingly speaks of "your gods" (v. 32). The Narrator, however, dubs them "terafim," suggesting that the term may be a contemptuous substitution-word such as is frequently used in the Bible in connection with idolatry. Thus, pagan gods may be variously characterized as *elilim*, "worthless things"; *boshet*, "shame"; *gillulim*, "pellets of dung"; *havalim*, "futilities"; and *shikkutsim*, "detestable things." In 2 Kings 23:24 *terafim* appear together with *gillulim* and *shikkutsim* in a list of idolatrous abominations outlawed by King Josiah of Judah. In line with this substitution-word practice, the term may be derived from a stem r-f-h, "to be limp, without energy," hence meaning "inert things." Another, perhaps more likely, origin is t-r-f, "to decay, become foul," known from Aramaic and post-biblical Hebrew. A derivation from Hittite *tarpi*, "spirit demon," then an object symbolizing the same, also cannot be ruled out.*

As to the size and shape of these objects, it is apparent from verse 34 that they are small enough to be hidden beneath a camel cushion. On the other hand, the story in 1 Samuel 19:13, 16 shows them to be large and anthropoid. They were clearly not of uniform size.

*What was their function? They have been widely understood as corresponding to the *ilani*, the family gods of the Nuzi household, and to the Roman *penates*, the household gods who were thought to protect the food supply and assure the general well-being of the family. That possession of the household gods was connected to birthright or clan leadership is to be inferred from an adoption contract from Nuzi, which stipulates: "If Nashwi has a son of his own, he shall divide [the estate] equally with Wullu, but the son of Nashwi shall take the gods of Nashwi. However, if Nashwi does not have a son of his own, then Wullu shall take the gods of Nashwi." In the case of Jacob, however, the *terafim* could not have assured inheritance rights since the patriarch claims nothing from Laban, and, in any case, is leaving Mesopotamia for good.*

*Several biblical texts leave no doubt of the cultic role that the *terafim* played and more specifically of their use in divination. Perhaps Rachel, by appropriating them, hoped to deprive her father of the ability to detect Jacob's escape.²*

If these *terafim* or "images" are indeed the means by which Laban practices divination, it would seem possible, as Sarna suggests, that Rachel steals them to prevent her father from divining the route of Jacob's escape. What is clear from the story is that Rachel's understanding of the impotency of Laban's elohim compared to Jacob's Elohim is still developing. Here we may remember the apostle Shaul's words concerning a mature faith which understands that there is no other Elohim than YHWH.

1 Corinthians 8:3-6 *But if any man love Elohim, the same is known of Him. ⁴As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we*

¹ The Hebrew word used here is *nachash* (*nun, chet, shin*), which means "divination," "to divine," and "enchantment." Cp. Genesis 44:5, 15; Deuteronomy 18:10.

² The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis, Nahum M. Sarna, Jewish Publication Society, Pg. 216

know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other elohim but one. ⁵For though there be that are called elohim, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be elohim many, and lords many,) ⁶but to us there is but one Elohim, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Yeshua Messiah, by whom are all things, and we by him.

What is both shocking and pleasing in our portion is the fact that Leah and Rachel both agree with Jacob concerning the character of their father and add their own reasons for leaving.

Genesis 31:14-16 *And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? ¹⁵Are we not counted of him strangers? For he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money. ¹⁶For all the riches which Elohim hath taken from our father, that is ours, and our children's: now then, whatsoever Elohim hath said unto thee, do.*

The reasoning of Rachel and Leah is very pointed. First, they recognize that there is no portion or inheritance in their father's house for them. The reason for this could be twofold. First, we may recall that when the story began, Laban had no sons, only daughters. With the advent of the birth of sons, the right of inheritance would pass from the daughters to the sons. The second possible reason for there being no inheritance or portion for them in their father's house is because Elohim has taken it from them and given it to Jacob. This may also explain why their father treats them as strangers. It is possible that Laban's affections shifted to his sons and away from his married daughters. Laban tries to contradict this later.

Second, Rachel and Leah object to the fact that their father did not marry them off in proper fashion; instead, he "sold" them for seven years of labor apiece. Their third complaint is that their father spent the money that should have been used as their dowry. Finally, they acknowledge that what would have been theirs through their father has now been given by Elohim to Jacob. There is, therefore, no more benefit to Rachel and Leah or their children in staying in the land of Haran and the house of Laban. Therefore, both wives agree that Jacob should indeed follow the commandment of his Elohim.

Having gained consensus with his wives, Jacob gathers his flocks, herds, servants, and family and heads for home. The Torah informs us that Jacob is a three-day journey away before Laban is informed that the "source of his blessing" has fled. When Laban hears the news, he sets off in quick pursuit and overtakes Jacob on the seventh day.

Genesis 31:20-23 *And Jacob stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled. ²¹So he fled with all that he had; and he rose up, and passed over the river, and set his face toward the mount Gilead. ²²And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled. ²³And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in the mount Gilead.*

Prior to Laban overtaking Jacob, Elohim appears to Laban in a dream and warns him not to speak either good or evil to Jacob. Here we should recall Laban's words concerning the marriage of his sister Rebekah to Isaac. Upon hearing Eliezer's convincing testimony as to the Sovereign's providence in directing him to his master's house and family, Laban responded:

Genesis 24:50 *Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from YHWH: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good.*

This was Laban's way of saying that it was clearly the will of YHWH that Rebekah marry Isaac and that there was nothing anyone could do about it one way or the other. So too in our portion we should understand that YHWH'S warning to Laban recalls his own words, thus indicating that Jacob's exit is YHWH'S clear and divine will. If Laban should try to interfere one way or the other, he would be walking contrary to the expressed will of YHWH. Although Laban intends to obey the will of YHWH, it does not stop him from expressing his original threatening intention.

Genesis 31:29 *It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the Elohim of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad.*

Laban makes his complaint against Jacob clear.

Genesis 31:26-30 *And Laban said to Jacob, What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters, as captives taken with the sword? ²⁷Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me; and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret, and with harp? ²⁸And hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters? Thou hast now done foolishly in so doing. ²⁹It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the Elohim of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad. ³⁰And now, though thou wouldest needs be gone, because thou sore longedst after thy father's house, yet wherefore hast thou stolen my elohim?*

Laban makes several bold accusations against Jacob. The first is to call Jacob a thief. While the King James Version covers up this accusation in the translation, the Hebrew is very clear. Laban accuses Jacob of "stealing his heart." A literal translation of verse 26 reads as follows:

Genesis 31:26 *And Laban said to Jacob, What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen my heart, and carried away my daughters, as captives taken with the sword?*

Laban goes on to describe his "heart" as being his daughters and grandchildren. He accuses Jacob of taking his daughters away against their will as though at the point of a sword. Here we should remember that Rachel and Leah agreed to leave their father's home of their own accord. Laban also accuses Jacob of robbing him of the opportunity to send his family off with mirth, fanfare, and celebration, which is contradicted by the change of countenance made evident to Jacob in earlier verses. Finally, he accuses Jacob of stealing his elohim. It is possibly this last accusation that provokes Jacob to forego the usual custom of saving face and throw down the gauntlet before Laban. Jacob responds with a heretofore unseen boldness.

Genesis 31:31-32 *And Jacob answered and said to Laban, Because I was afraid: for I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me. ³²With whomsoever thou findest thy elohim, let him not live: before our brethren discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them.*

We should note that Jacob fearlessly uncovers Laban's character by stating that he was afraid that Laban would take his family from him by force. He also challenges Laban to prove his accusation before a tribunal of the brethren. Laban is now forced to deliver the stolen property or bear the shame of accusing an innocent man. Laban frantically begins his search so that he may save face before his brethren.

Genesis 31:33-35 *And Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the two maidservants' tents; but he found them not. Then went he out of Leah's tent, and entered into Rachel's tent. ³⁴Now Rachel had taken the images, and put them in the camel's furniture, and sat upon them. And Laban searched the entire tent, but found them not. ³⁵And she said to her father, Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise up before thee; for the custom of women is upon me. And he searched, but found not the images.*

Laban instantly enters Jacob's tent and the tents of Leah, the two handmaids, and finally Rachel. Unbeknownst to Jacob, the stolen items are, in fact, hidden in Rachel's tent. When Laban goes to search her tent she feigns that her menses are upon her and that she cannot stand up. Laban cannot imagine that his daughter would dare to sit upon his elohim in such a state of impurity; therefore, he leaves off his search in frustration. The old fox has been outfoxed once again, this time by his own daughter.

With the failure of the search evident, Jacob again vents his frustration upon Laban, exposing all of his self-centeredness, covetousness, deceitfulness, and injustice before the brethren.

Genesis 31:36-42 *And Jacob was wrath, and chode with Laban: and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass? What is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me? ³⁷Whereas thou hast searched all my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? Set it here before my brethren and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us both. ³⁸This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. ³⁹That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. ⁴⁰Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. ⁴¹Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times. ⁴²Except the Elohim of my father, the Elohim of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. Elohim hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight.*

Here Jacob asserts his own integrity, giving glory to YHWH the Elohim of his father while at the same time shaming Laban for his great lack of integrity and wily dealings. With his tail tucked sufficiently between his legs and crow feathers sticking out of his mouth, Laban, now humiliated, makes one last ditch effort to save himself by suggesting that the two distinct families make a treaty one with the other.

Genesis 31:43-44 *And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, These daughters are **my** daughters, and these children are **my** children, and these cattle are **my** cattle, and all that thou seest is **mine**: and what can I do this day unto these **my** daughters, or unto their children which they have born? ⁴⁴Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee.*

Note carefully the innuendo that all that Jacob has belongs to Laban. Again, this is the familiar accusation – that somehow Jacob has become rich by cheating Laban out of what is rightfully his. All of this is refuted by the earlier words of both Laban and Jacob.

Genesis 30:27 *And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by divination that YHWH hath blessed me for thy sake.*

Genesis 30:29-30 *And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me. ³⁰For it was little which thou hadst before I came, and it is now increased unto a multitude; and YHWH hath blessed thee since my coming: and now when shall I provide for mine own house also?*

Clearly the suggestion of a treaty is merely a means for Laban to try to save face by not admitting defeat. While it may at first appear that this covenant is nothing more than a solution to an isolated family squabble, its significance cannot be overstated.

Genesis 31:45-55 *And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. ⁴⁶And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made an heap: and they did eat there upon the heap. ⁴⁷And Laban called it Jegarsahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed. ⁴⁸And Laban said, This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed; ⁴⁹and Mizpah; for he said, YHWH watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another. ⁵⁰If thou shalt afflict my daughters, or if thou shalt take other wives beside my daughters, no man is with us; see, Elohim is witness betwixt me and thee. ⁵¹And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee; ⁵²this heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass*

over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm. ⁵³The Elohim of Abraham, and the elohim of Nahor, the elohim of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. ⁵⁴Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount. ⁵⁵And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place.

We should note that the first thing that is done in this covenant is the establishing of witness stones. These stones are to serve two purposes. The first is to cause succeeding generations to ask about the meaning of these pillars and heaps of stones. By the repeated asking of the question, the story and reality of the covenant are likewise repeated and kept fresh in the minds of future generations. According to verse 52, the second purpose of these stones is to provide a clear border between the two peoples. We should note that each party in this covenant calls the heap by a name in his own language. Laban calls the heap "Jegarsahadutha," while Jacob calls it "Galeed." We should also note that they each swear by their own deity or deities. It is stated that Jacob swears by "the Fear of Isaac."

The content of the covenant is very simple. Jacob will not take any wives other than those given to him in Haran, and neither Laban nor Jacob will cross the border to do harm to one another. The revelation brought forth in this covenant is profound. In the details of this covenant we witness the birth of a nation. No longer is Haran or Mesopotamia "the land of our fathers." With this covenant between Laban and Jacob, the division is made clear. No longer is this one family, one country, and one house. Instead, what we witness in the two languages, the differing deities, and the two separate directions are two completely distinct families, cultures, and political and ethnic groups. Laban is returning to the land of his elohim and his fathers, while Jacob is returning to the land of his Elohim and his fathers. Here the umbilical cord is cut and the people and nation of Israel begin life on their own. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this moment in history. The patriarchal connection with Mesopotamia is now severed, and we witness the beginning of a new house, a new people, and a new nation.

After a ritual meal and a night spent on the mountain, it is stated that Jacob and Laban each go their own way.

Genesis 31:55-32:1 *And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place. ^{32:1}And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of Elohim met him.*

It should not surprise us that our portion ends with the introduction of the first challenge to be faced by this nascent nation.

Genesis 32:1-3 *And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of Elohim met him. ²And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is Elohim's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim. ³And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.*

Once again, we witness Jacob's constant travelling companion. Though often unseen, YHWH'S presence is with Jacob every step of the way as He had promised. We too, as the children of Israel, should learn to cleave to the presence of YHWH in every circumstance, whether we are aware of Him or not. We have already stated repeatedly that Israel did not come into existence by chance or even political invention, but by the will of the Sovereign Creator. Thus, we may rest assured of His presence with us until His purpose and plan are complete.

Before I close this portion, I would like to point to one other detail concerning the words of our mouth. We should note that when Jacob is confronted with Laban's accusation that he has stolen Laban's elohim, Jacob quickly responds with a very clear curse.

Genesis 31:32 *With whomsoever thou findest thy elohim, let him not live: before our brethren discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them.*

While Jacob speaks in ignorance, the fact remains that Rachel, his beloved wife, has indeed stolen her father's idols. We may also note that Rachel dies prematurely in childbirth. Many of the sages connect the curse of Jacob and the early death of Rachel. There is nothing in the text itself to suggest such a thing; however, there are other such stories in the Scriptures that likewise warn us against making hasty oaths, vows, and curses.

Judges 11:30-40 *And Jephthah vowed a vow unto YHWH, and said, If Thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, ³¹then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be YHWH'S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering. ³²So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and YHWH delivered them into his hands. ³³And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel. ³⁴And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. ³⁵And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! Thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto YHWH, and I cannot go back. ³⁶And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto YHWH, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as YHWH hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon. ³⁷And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows. ³⁸And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. ³⁹And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel, ⁴⁰that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.*

1 Samuel 14:24-30 *And the men of Israel were distressed that day: for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted any food. ²⁵And all they of the land came to a wood; and there was honey upon the ground. ²⁶And when the people were come into the wood, behold, the honey dropped; but no man put his hand to his mouth: for the people feared the oath. ²⁷But Jonathan heard not when his father charged the people with the oath: wherefore he put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand, and dipped it in an honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes were enlightened. ²⁸Then answered one of the people, and said, Thy father straitly charged the people with an oath, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food this day. And the people were faint. ²⁹Then said Jonathan, My father hath troubled the land: see, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. ³⁰How much more, if haply the people had eaten freely to day of the spoil of their enemies which they found? For had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?*

In all of these instances impulsive words are spoken, which later cause confusion and hardship. We would do well then to think carefully before we speak such powerful and binding words. It would do us all good to heed the words of Yeshua and the apostle James:

Matthew 5:34-37 *But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is Elohim's throne: ³⁵nor by the earth; for it is His footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of*

the great King. ³⁶Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. ³⁷But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

James 5:12 *But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.*

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