

99-11-21b

Let's resume our study now in the book of Genesis, chapter 31. Although we have made a quick run-through of the last half of this chapter, we want to review one thing in particular, one or two things. At the point of confrontation between Laban and Jacob, Laban who has kept up an even greater pace, we saw how fast Jacob is moving.

Well, think how fast Laban is moving to overtake him. Of course, he's not burdened down with flocks and herds and women and children and so forth, but this is, for moving through the ancient world, this is quite a pace. There were some well-run or well-traveled roads going down from the area of Paddan Aram down through Damascus and on down the main road into Palestine along the, and also on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

And this would have been one way that he could make up some time to arrive where he is in the mountains of Gilead. But he obviously has left the main road and has gone up to a place that he considers to be a place of refuge and safety, or at least gives him the best chance in case of a confrontation. And you see all of this mention of swords.

Laban mentions, you've taken away my daughters like captives with the sword by force and so on. In verse 29, it is in my power to do you harm, but God came and spoke to me last night saying, be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad. Interesting, God addresses Laban the night before he catches up with him.

Laban, of course, doesn't know how much of, he obviously probably didn't anticipate having to make a journey of this length to catch Jacob. But the night before, God knows when he's going to catch up and speaks to him and says, don't speak to him either bad or good. You have done foolishly, he says, in not allowing me to kiss my sons and daughters and perpetrating all of this.

And then in verse 30, you have gone because you long for your father's house, but why did you steal my gods? And the word here for gods is Elohim, although earlier when it talked about the household idols in verse 19 that Rachel stole, this is the word teraphim, and these are used interchangeably for these objects. And I would argue that this may in fact be an object because Elohim as a plural, as a plural of majesty, teraphim may be the same way. It is plural in form and is treated as plural, and there may have been multiple objects, but it is also possible that it was one.

In order to understand what's going on here, we said last time that it's difficult to know what Rachel's motives are in taking the teraphim from her father's house. One thing we know for sure is that because she took them, it guarantees that Laban is going to follow and that there's going to be a confrontation. But I think upon further study and reflection, there may be a little bit more going on than just that.

Other scholars have looked and found ancient documents, wills, and contracts and so

forth that seem to indicate that possession of the teraphim somehow influences inheritance. It's difficult to see why Rachel would want to grab an object that would guarantee the inheritance of Laban's possessions when they are leaving the area and are unlikely to return. If Laban should die, what's she going to do? Travel back up there with the teraphim and say all of this stuff is mine? It just doesn't seem too likely.

But the connection between the teraphim and inheritance I think is important. It's certainly valid from looking at the ancient extra-biblical evidence. So what exactly is going on with this teraphim business? Well, one thing that would help us is to take a look at the mentions of teraphim elsewhere in Scripture.

One of the more outstanding cases where these turn up is over in Judges 17. And if you'll turn with me to Judges 17, this is a story that you may or may not be familiar with. We're real familiar with chapter 16, which is Samson and Delilah.

They make movies about that, but they never get around to making a movie about chapter 17. And the reason is that it's a little bit obscure. There is a man from the mountains of Ephraim whose name was Micah.

He said to his mother, 1100 shekels of silver that were taken from you and on which you put a curse, saying in my ears, here is the silver with me, I took it. His mother said, may you be blessed with the Lord, my son. When he returned the 1100 shekels of silver, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the Lord for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image.

Now, therefore, I will return it to you. He says, basically, the reason I took this silver is I wanted to make an image, an idol for my son. That's important.

The man Micah, in verse 4, he returned the silver to his mother. Then his mother took 200 shekels of silver and gave them to the silversmith, and he made it into a carved image and a molded image, and they were in the house of Micah. So all is well, and mother says, well, if that's all you wanted, here you go.

And she takes a portion of this, gives it to the silversmith, and he makes this image. The man Micah had a shrine in verse 5 and made an ephod and teraphim. Your new king James may say household idols, but this is teraphim.

And he consecrated one of his sons who became his priest. In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

There was a young man from Bethlehem in Judah of the family of Judah. He was a Levite and was staying there. Isn't this interesting? Bethlehem in Judah, but he's a Levite.

When you get down, remember in our study of Luke, how Zechariah and Elizabeth are both from the tribe of Levi, and you look in the genealogy of Mary's father going back,

and you find these Levite names in there, and there is a mixture of the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Levi in the heritage of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is very significant in terms of his role as not only king but also priest. And you find an echo of this back in Judges. This young man from Bethlehem in Judah is of the family of Judah.

The Levites were scattered through the land. They had no land of their own. His lineage is Levite, but his location is Judah, Bethlehem specifically.

He departed from Bethlehem in Judah to stay wherever he could find a place. He came to the mountains of Ephraim to the house of Micah as he journeyed. Micah said, where do you come from? He says, I'm a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah.

I'm on my way to find a place to stay. Micah says in verse 10, dwell with me and be a father and a priest to me, and I will give you ten shekels of silver a year, a suit of clothes, and your sustenance. So the Levite moved in.

What a great deal. This is every pastor's dream. Find a sponsor like they did in the old days of Michelangelo and the Medici family and all this.

Later on, Mozart, Bach, and some of these people. You find a wealthy patron who foots your bills, and you get to do the thing that's closest to your heart. Well, this guy's a worship leader.

And so he goes on in. The Levite was content to dwell with the man, and the young man became like one of his sons to him. Micah consecrated the Levite, and the young man became his priest and lived in the house of Micah.

Micah said, now I know the Lord will be good to me since I have a Levite as a priest. So this is his rabbit's foot, his good luck charm. Obviously, his faith is not in the God of Israel in a real substantial way because he's got the teraphim, he's got the ephod.

None of this stuff corresponds to the law of Moses. But this is his version, this is his little twisted perversion of this. So then in chapter 18, in those days there was no king in Israel.

Remember, no authority, there's no leadership. Everybody's doing what's right in their own eyes. In those days, the tribe of the Danites was seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in.

For until that day, their inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them. Remember, they had the furthest north stuff, and they didn't bother to go up there and take it. We've seen in our review of the characteristics of the tribes that Dan had the least going for it in spiritual terms as a tribe.

They're not even mentioned in the list of 144,000 witnesses over in Revelation. They're

so bad. Then here, they don't go grab their assigned portion of the land that Joshua allocated to them.

They're hunting around just like this priest. The priest says, I've got to go find a place where I can hang my hat. Well, these Danites are doing the same thing.

So the children of Dan, verse 2, sent five of their men and their family from their territory, men of valor from Zorah and Eshtoel, to spy out the land and search it. They said, go search the land. They went to the mountains of Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and lodged there.

While they were at the house of Micah, they recognized the voice of the young Levite. They turned aside. It doesn't mean they knew him before.

It just means they heard his voice and what he was saying. They know he's a priest. He's doing some sort of mumbo-jumbo in there, praying or whatever.

They said, who brought you here? What are you doing in this place? What do you have here? He said to them, thus and so Micah did for me. I love that. It's in quotes.

Thus and so Micah did for me. He has hired me and I have become his priest. So they said to him, please inquire of God that we may know whether the journey on which we go will be prosperous.

This is just going from bad to worse. These superstitious, weird goings-on. The priest said to them, go in peace.

The presence of the Lord be with you on your way. Well, there's five armed men. What's he going to say? Turn back.

The Lord has cursed you. He's just making this up out of whole cloth. So the five men departed and went to Laish.

They saw the people who were there, how they dwelt safely in the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure. There was no ruler in the land who might put them to shame for anything. They were far from the Sidonians and they had no ties with anyone.

This is the way they like to picture the American Indians. Peaceful people, just minding their own business. They're content.

These are a bunch of pagans. But they're not warlike. So they're easy prey.

The spies came back to their brethren at Zorah and Eshtoel. And their brethren said to them, what is your report? They said, arise, let's go against them. We've seen the land.

Indeed, it's very good. Would you do nothing? Do not hesitate to go in or to possess the

land. When you go, you will come to a secure people in a large land.

God has given it into your hands, a place where there is no lack of anything that is on the earth. This is just a formula. God has given it into your hands.

This is sort of a perverse echo of what took place when Israel came into the land to begin with. They sent in spies. Joshua sent two spies to Jericho.

You have the Rahab episode. God has given us the land to possess it. So they're sort of taking this unto themselves as a mantra, as a good luck charm.

Oh, we're the spies. We're coming back giving you a report. So the 600 men of the family of the Danites went from there, from Zorah and Eshtoel, armed with weapons of war.

In verse 12, they went up and encamped in Kiriath Yarim in Judah. Therefore they call that place Mahana Dan to this day. There it is, west of Kiriath Yarim.

Mahana means camp. We're going to see that in our passage in Genesis 31 before this episode we're studying is over with. But Mahana means camp, so this is camp of Dan.

And he says, there it is west to this day. The author of Judges, writing some years after the fact, says it's still there. Go look at it if you have any doubt.

They passed from there, in verse 13, to the mountains of Ephraim and came to the house of Micah. There the five men who had gone to spy out the country of Laish answered and said to their brethren, Do you know that there are in these houses an ephod, household idols, a carved image, and a molded image? Now therefore consider what you should do. So they turned aside there and came to the house of the young Levite man, to the house of Micah, and greeted him.

Now why is this attractive to them? That they're going to turn aside, they're fixing to go up and seize this land and make a homestead and a place for themselves, carve out a place for their clan. But when the spies say, well we were up here last time, we saw there's a priest, there are these images and idols, and they say, this is a worthy objective, let's turn aside and go get that first. Well, you remember what Israel did when they were fighting the Philistines in the days of Eli? They went in and got the ark, let's carry the ark in with us.

You know, any good karma we can take with us, that's what we need. Any rabbit's foot, anything to aid the cause. Well, they figure, hey, here's some holy stuff, here's some good juice here, let's go get it.

So they armed with their weapons of war, who are the children of Dan. Notice it repeats that, that they are the children of Dan. All of this has greater significance in terms of Dan's identity in Israel.

Well, stood by the entrance of the gate, in verse 17, the five men who had gone to spy at the land went up. Entering there, they took the carved image, the ephod, the teraphim, and the molded image. The priest stood at the entrance of the gate with the 600 men who were armed with weapons of war.

When these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the teraphim, and the molded image, the priest said to them, what are you doing? Well, it stands to reason. They said to him, be quiet, put your hand over your mouth, and come with us. Be a father and a priest to us.

Is it better for you to be a priest to the household of one man, or that you be a priest to a tribe and a family in Israel? This is going to be a promotion for you. So the priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod. This will be the first passage that comes to my mind.

If somebody ever came down and said, Sam, why don't you candidate at this great big mega church, this 800,000 member church, this will be a promotion for you. Is it better for you to minister to a tiny group or to a big large clan? And, of course, this guy is just going from bad to worse. The priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod, the household idols, and the carved image, and took his place among the people.

They turned and departed and put the little ones, the livestock, and the goods in front of them. When they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men who were in the house, near Micah's house, gathered together, overtook the children of Dan. They called out, what ails you that you have gathered such a company? He said, this is Micah, you have taken away my gods, which I made, and the priest, and you have gone away.

Now what more do I have? How can you say to me what ails you? You have taken all of my stuff. The children of Dan said to him, do not let your voice be heard among us, lest angry men fall upon you, and you lose your life with the lives of your household. The children of Dan went their way, and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back to his house.

They took the things Micah had made, and the priesthood belonged to him, and went to Laish, to a people quiet and secure. They struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. They just massacred the population of this peaceful city, never harmed anybody, had no alliances, felt like they had no need.

There was no deliverer, because it was far from Sidon. They had no ties with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beit Rehob.

So they built the city and dwelt there. Actually, rebuilt the city. They called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel.

However, the name of the city formerly was Laish. The children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image, and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh,

and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. Now this says he's the son of Manasseh.

Well, this would make him a Josephite, wouldn't it? If you remember Manasseh. But you may have a note, if you have a New King James, it says Septuagint and Vulgate read Moses. I think Moses is the preferred reading here.

It's only one consonant different. You have Moshe, M, S, H, and H here, or an Aleph actually. And if you just stick an N in there, you can get Manasseh out of it if you repoint it.

So this Jonathan, this is the man from Bethlehem. This is the Levite that had come up and had served as a priest for Micah. And so Jonathan, the son of Gershom, Gershom is one of Moses' sons.

And Moses is a Levite. But the Moses Levites are not the priests in the land. It's the sons of Aaron that are supposed to be the priests.

But he's a Levite, and any Levite is better than nothing, so to speak. So you might correct that. I am sure that this is Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Moses.

And his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. So they set up for themselves Micah's carved image, which he made all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh. But you see the teraphim involved in here.

You have the image, and you also have the teraphim. And this was a mark of leadership. There's just one set of this stuff, and this is the central place.

It's tied to worship, and this harks back to pre-law of Moses' days. Before you had the Levitical priesthood, you had the family priesthood. And in the pagan cultures of the Assyrians, the Akkadians, and a lot of these other ancient Semitic peoples, the family priesthood operated much as it did in the patriarchal families.

But obviously since it wasn't worship of the true God, it would also be associated with idolatry. And even people who believed in God, it was the custom of the day that when you went into the head man's house, he had the teraphim. These were used for divination, for determining judicial decisions.

A man would say, well it's not just me, I consulted the teraphim, and I find you guilty of stealing the sheep, and the penalty is death, and so forth. So this was a mark of authority, of legitimacy, of leadership. And you can see how someone in the wills, you can go back to ancient documents in Akkadian and Ugaritic, and go all the way back to some cuneiform tablets that they have found in these regions from the Middle and Late Bronze Age, and there will be mention made in the wills.

He says, well, there's one case in particular where there's a man who has adopted another man as his son, and has married him to his own daughter. And he writes his will out, and he says, this man is adopted as my son, and if I have a son of my own, then my possessions and my teraphim go to my blood-born son. But if I don't have any issue, then this man gets my teraphim and my stuff.

This is the transfer of the head of household status, leadership in the clan, and so forth, to this man. There are also a couple of documents where even daughters, a man has a daughter, and apparently he has no sons, and he says, if I die, she gets my teraphim, and so forth. So that's where they get the idea that this was perhaps the way of proving that you had legitimate claim to inheritance.

But not so much that, I think that it is one of the privileges of the inheritor, is that you get the leadership role in the clan, if you're one of the leading families. And these wills are only going to be made up by the leading families in a clan, and that's why they find these. So these Danites, they're trying to establish themselves as the legitimate representatives of the tribe of Dan.

They have claimed, staked out their own land. They say, look, we've got our own worship, we've got our own priest, we've got our own place of worship, we've got the teraphim, we can make our own decisions, we're an independent entity up here. And that's what they do.

So much the better. I mean, how much better can it be that we have a Levite? Well, it could be that you were following God's law, for one. But they think this is great.

You can also find a reference to this over in Hosea 3.4. This is another reference to the teraphim, and it throws some light on our episode with Rachel. Hosea 3.4. God is speaking to Hosea, and he says in 3.1, Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery. Remember Hosea marries Gomer, who is a woman of harlotry.

He says in 1.2, Go take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, because the land has committed great harlotry. And Hosea's marriage is a picture and a symbol of what's going on in Israel. So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and born a son.

They call him Jezreel. And then she has a daughter, and they call her Lo-Ruhamah. And then he bears another son called Lo-Ami, and so forth.

All of this is symbolic and is a picture prophecy and a picture warning to Israel. Then in chapter 3, and of course she has departed. She's gone off and left him.

And he goes and finds her, and he says, Go love again a woman who is loved by a lover and committing adultery, just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look

to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans. So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver and one and a half omers of barley. Chapter 3, verse 2 of Hosea.

Then in verse 3, I said to her, You shall stay with me many days. You shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man. So too will I be toward you.

For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Methods of divining, symbols of security. When you have the ephod and the teraphim, you have guidance.

You have confidence about the future because you have these mystical things going for you. Afterward, the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. You'll notice that in these three pairs in verse 4, the first one is legitimate and the second is not.

The children of Israel shall abide many days. They're not going to have the legitimate or the illegitimate. The king is what God ordained in Israel.

They're not going to have the king, nor are they going to have a prince, which are their little local rulers that they've set up instead of the Davidic king. Without sacrifice, which is legitimate, or sacred pillar, which is illegitimate. Without ephod, that's the real ephod of the high priest, or teraphim.

I'm not going to give you access to the legitimate or even the illegitimate substitutes that you've taken. You're going to be in the position of a slave and have nothing. Afterward, the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king.

They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days. You can go on in chapter 4 and see the court case that God has against the children of Israel and all their problems. But that's another reference to the teraphim, and it is compared to the ephod of the high priest.

Of course, the ephod was where the breastplate was worn. That's where the urim and thummim were. It was the symbol of leadership and spiritual authority in Israel.

You can go also over to Zechariah chapter 10 in verse 2. I like going to these occasionally in the Minor Prophets just so the pages don't stick together in our Bibles. Zechariah chapter 10 verse 1 says, Ask the Lord for rain in the time of the latter rain. A favorite Pentecostal passage.

The Lord will make flashing clouds. He will give them showers of rain. Grass in the field for everyone.

For the idols, this is teraphim, speak delusion. The diviners envision lies and tell false

dreams. They comfort in vain.

Therefore the people wend their way like sheep. They are in trouble because there is no shepherd. So once again, the teraphim.

This is a place where people look for leadership, for judgments, for decisions, for what will happen in the future. God goes on to state his anger against the shepherds and the goat herds, who are supposed to be superintending the flock of God and are not. The use of such things is condemned.

You find passages such as 1 Samuel chapter 15 verse 23, where the episode of confrontation between Samuel and Saul. He's talking about Saul's disobedience there. He says in 1 Samuel 15 verse 23, Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you from being king. You'll notice is as is in italics in your Bible. Rebellion, the sin of witchcraft.

Stubbornness, iniquity and idolatry. This teraphim is idolatry. The rebellion and stubbornness, they are identified.

It isn't even is as. It's more of a direct link. They are identified.

They are one. Rebellion is witchcraft. Stubbornness is iniquity and idolatry.

If you get shocked at one, you ought to be equally shocked at the other. 2 Kings 23 verse 24. Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols, those are the teraphim, all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, so that he might perform the words of the law, which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord.

So, there's no doubt in Josiah's mind that the teraphim are an abomination. He put away, they are one with mediums and spiritists, idols and all the other abominations in the land of Judah. So that's another reference to teraphim.

Finally, you can look in Ezekiel chapter 21 verse 21. This is a little bit, it's versified differently in the Hebrew, but since you're not looking at Hebrew, that won't apply to you. Ezekiel 21, 21.

The king of Babylon stands at the parting of the road, at the fork of the two roads, to use divination. He shakes the arrows, he consults the teraphim, he looks at the liver. King of Babylon, this is something that he's going to use to make his decision about which fork of the road to take.

He shakes the arrows. You remember the case where the king, the prophet comes in and strikes the arrows on the ground? And he says, strike these arrows on the ground, and

he doesn't strike enough times, and the prophet's enraged at him. He says, you should have struck more times, but then your enemies would have been utterly destroyed.

But because you only struck a few times, you're not going to get rid of them. He shakes the arrows, consults the images, he looks at the liver. Of course, this liver reading has been a mystical idea.

It's kind of like reading tea leaves and that sort of thing. So, consulting the teraphim is how the king of Babylon is going to try to make his decision. Now, back to Rachel.

Why is Rachel taking the teraphim? Well, if you remember when Jacob confronts his wives and says, God has spoken to me and it's time for us to leave. Verse 14, Rachel and Leah, this is 31 of Genesis. Verse 14, Rachel and Leah answered him and said, Is there any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? Are we not considered strangers by him? He has sold us and completely consumed our money.

All these riches which God has taken from our father are really ours and our children's. Now then, whatever God has sent to you, do it. So, the one speech we have that reflects what's in Rachel's heart at this time, and Leah is in on this as well, but Rachel in particular is looking at the material goods.

Looking at the fact that they feel like an injustice has been done to them by Laban. We saw in the case of Micah over there in Judges, that these teraphim are typically intrinsically valuable. Made of silver, made of something expensive, so it has monetary value.

You can add the idea that perhaps Rachel figures, Well, I can sell this when we get down the way and this is more of what is due us. There are material goods that Laban has taken away that rightfully belong to Jacob. Some of those spotted and streaked and striped animals that he kept changing the wages and taking them away, maybe those belong to us because they belong to Jacob.

But, and I think that's another possibility, that it's for its intrinsic value. She looks around and this would be like taking the family silver on the way out the door. But, I think here is the key and the clue.

What is the timing here when all of this is taking place? What was the signal that precipitated all of this? Remember back in chapter 30, verse 22. God remembered Rachel. God listened to her and opened her womb.

She conceived and bore a son. After all of the birth of these other sons through Leah and Bilhah and Zilpah, Rachel has finally had a son. It is right after that, that Jacob says, Send me away that I may go to my own place and my own country.

And then they negotiate another six years. But, Rachel has finally had her own son. And

you remember all the competition back at the end of chapter 29 and in the first part of chapter 30, between the sisters trying to one up the other and trying to elbow their way into their husband's affection in competition with the other.

And Rachel saying, give me children or I die. And all of the statements that are made at the birth of the sons. Now I will be in my husband's affections and so forth.

Well, Rachel has finally gotten a son. But, he is way down the list of sons. He is the eleventh son.

Rachel feels like she should have been the first wife. She was the one that Jacob wanted to marry. She should have gotten pregnant and had the first born son.

Her son, even though she has gotten him now, at long last, and he is six years old at this point, he is number eleven. Can you really count on ten catastrophes taking place as your son is now the first born? And gets all of the things that she feels belong to her? Well, think now about the significance of the terapheme. Not just as a symbol letting you claim the inheritance of Laban.

But, look at the Danites. This legitimizes us. We can stand on our own.

We are a people unto ourselves. And, you get the idea that Rachel, this makes sense to her on a number of levels. She can get back at her father.

This is a little bit of a spiteful thing to take his terapheme. They are valuable. She feels like he owes them some things that he hasn't paid.

The idea is still there that he is going to pursue and she is going to get the satisfaction of seeing him wringing his hands because he can't get his terapheme back. He has lost a face. He has lost his status.

Because he has lost this symbol of independence and of patriarchal authority. What is she going to do with it? Maybe she is going to give it to Joseph. Joseph is going to be a little split off of the family tree here and establish in the same way the Danites do.

We will have our own worship. We will have our own authority. We will have our own independent existence.

And, this is another expression perhaps of Rachel's desire to elevate herself, to elevate her sons, to legitimize her place in the family and in the clan. There is a lot of reason why she might be doing this. We know that Rachel is characterized by a fierce desire for children and a fierce love for her son Joseph.

When she cries out and says, Give me children or I die. Give me sons or I die. Well, when son becomes sons, when Benjamin is in the process of being born, she is going to get her wish.

She is going to die in the process of giving birth to Benjamin. Later on, it was mentioned during the break, you have that passage over in the Prophets. There is the sound of crying in Israel.

Rachel weeping for her children. Why not Leah or Bilhah or Zilpah or Rebekah or Sarah or anybody else? Why is it Rachel weeping for her children? Because Rachel had become a symbol of fierce love for offspring. Who would be more grief stricken at the loss of a child than Rachel? Of course, it also is a reminder of the geographic location, which is near the tomb of Rachel down in that part of the land.

But Rachel weeping for her children, there is no greater grief than what she might have. Of course, it is interesting the idea that the children have been slain, which is fulfilled, as quoted by Matthew, when you refer to the slaying of the two-year-old and under children in the time of Jesus' infancy. But the reality is Rachel did not lose her children.

The children lost their mother. In the process of birthing Benjamin, she dies. She calls him Ben-Oni, son of my pain, and Jacob changes his name to son of the right hand, and they all turn out to be lefties.

But this idea, when you think what would Rachel's motivation be, or what is she known for, and you get the idea that maybe she is going to try to pass that patriarchal authority down to Joseph. Of course, this ultimately does not take place. But the teraphim are always associated with bad things.

You look at that story of Micah and the slaying of those innocent people and the illegitimacy of the priesthood and everything else, and here Rachel, in hiding these teraphim from her father, if you will recall, you may just want to make a note of this, Leviticus chapter 15 and verse 23 and following. Actually, Leviticus 15 is the chapter that talks about bodily discharges. It talks, beginning in verse 19 of Leviticus 15, if a woman has a discharge and the discharge from her body is blood, we know what this is, she shall be set apart seven days.

Whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening. Everything that she lies on during her impurity shall be unclean. Everything that she sits on shall be unclean.

Rachel claims that she can't rise before her father and bow because she's in the time of her monthly cycle. She has hidden the teraphim in a basket or camel saddle, and she's sitting on that. Here are these teraphim.

They can be stolen. They can be hidden. They can be sat upon by a menstruating woman and rendered unclean by anybody's definition.

How valuable are these really going to be to pass on to someone? Oh, yeah, that's the idol I sat on and rendered unclean when Laban was looking for it. You get the idea there's a little bit of a tongue-in-cheek. This is the first reference to teraphim in the Bible.

So all these people later on that set these teraphim up, what are they doing? Teraphim doesn't have a great history in the biblical literature. Of course, you have a lot going on there. You have the tension when Jacob declares the death penalty.

He is sure that no one in his party has stolen the teraphim, and he's outraged, and he says, you look around, he's sure that he won't find it. He says, if you find it, death upon the person who you find it with. Well, someone has in fact taken it without his knowledge.

We're going to see a very similar thing, and I'm going to save our analysis of it until we get there, but you will recall, if you're familiar at all with the story of Joseph and his brothers, that when they come down to see him, and he has hidden his identity, and they're fixing to return to Jacob with the sacks of grain, he tells his steward, take my silver cup, and put it in the sack of the youngest. So they put it in Benjamin's sack. After they've gotten a day or so away, Joseph sends his steward, he says, now you go tell him that the cup has been stolen, and search and find it, and thus and so.

And the brothers say, are you kidding? You've been so gracious to us to sell us this grain, why on earth would we steal your master's cup? If you find this cup with any one of us, let the man you find it with die. Very same thing, where you have someone in a strange land, departing with many goods, someone pursues and catches and institutes a search, and the person is sure the thing is not there, in this case it is found. And they pronounce the sentence of death on the person with whom it is found.

But then you hear Joseph speaking, and he says, let him be my slave. And he changes the sentence from death to slavery, because obviously he doesn't want to pronounce the death sentence on Benjamin. But there's an echo, but if you want a little treat for yourself, go look closely at that story, and see what Joseph says about that cup.

What kind of cup is it? What is it made of? And what is it used for? And I'll let you look that up on your own. But there's a strong parallel there, to what we find here. But the bottom line is, this confrontation, Jacob expresses his fear, when Laban catches up with him.

And says in verse 31 of chapter 31, Why did you steal my gods? Why did you leave in this fashion? Because I was afraid. And perhaps you would take your daughters from me by force. And this is a strong word for take.

This means to take by violence. There's two words used for stealing. And the one word is used when Rachel steals the teraphim, and it's used all through this passage, seven or eight times.

But here, the word is the strong word, to take by force. I was afraid you would seize them from me. With whom you find your gods, do not let him live, and so forth.

But this is another learning experience. God preserves Jacob in this. God is with him.

God speaks to Laban, and prevents him from doing violence, or from undoing what is supposed to happen, which is for Jacob to return. And Jacob is going to find that his fears are groundless. That he should have had confidence in God, and God is in fact preserving and fulfilling his promises.

And this is the thing that we need to remember. And even when we fail, even when we flee, even when we pitch our tents in the mountains and try to work out our own salvation, so to speak, apart from God, God is with us. God will preserve us in spite of ourselves.

And there will come a point of recognition. There will come a point where we realize, I'm really acting out of fear. It's my insecurity that's motivating me to do this, to think this way, and to act this way.

And at the point that we recognize it, we need to confront it, and we need to eradicate it. God has not given us a spirit of fear, Paul tells Timothy, but of power and love and a sound mind. And to remember the promises of God, it is the function of a sound mind to treat the promises of God as fact.

We sometimes think, well, that faith is fine as long as it doesn't interfere with my daily life. You know, that religion and worshipfulness, and I kind of enjoy the mystical aspect of it, and I feel like it can kind of charm my future and be a good luck rabbit's foot and that kind of thing. But in terms of actually allowing a transformation and having it be a reality and making common sense decisions, well, that's just not the better part of wisdom.

You've got to live in the world and you've got to play by the world's rules or you're going to suffer. Paul says, if you're operating in fear, you're going to fail. It is faith.

God has not given us a spirit of fear. There's power, love, and a sound mind. Look out for the interests of others, but don't operate in fear.

And I doubt that there's any of us that can look closely at our lives and not find some areas where our insecurities are driving our priorities and our decisions, and we are not claiming the promises of God by faith. Even if we step out in a wrong direction, God will preserve us. Even when we fail and we are motivated by fear, God will preserve us.

But why be a negative example? Why end up being sort of scurrilous and unadmirable and not reflect the glory of God the way Jacob is here? Why not seize the opportunity to reflect the glory and the grace of God, to be an example of those who by faith and patience inherit the promises? God will use situations like this, and it's an opportunity to learn. Jacob is going to learn here. This is a precursor to his confrontation with Esau.

And God is giving him the opportunity to get ready, to get his thinking straightened out about where is your security, where is your deliverance, where is the foundation on which your life rests. And Jacob has learned a lot, but he's got more to learn. And even as he returns to the land, God is teaching him.

We are sojourning in this life. We are citizens of the heavenly kingdom, but we are in the process of facing circumstances and dealing with people, and God will use these to teach us as well. And every day in many different areas of our life, we have to analyze and figure out, am I operating in faith, or am I operating in fear? Am I using the world's ways to make things come out all right, or am I putting the things of God first? It is a small thing that we are asked in most cases.

We're not asked to give our lives. We're not asked to sacrifice our families and our goods. We're not in danger of being thrown to the lions.

And yet we don't seem to find the faith to trust God for the small things, the daily things in life. But that's our calling. And as we exercise our faith, exercise our senses to discern good and evil, God is pleased and God is glorified.

And that is the fulfillment of our calling. Let's close here in prayer. Father, we thank you for the examples that you have provided for us in Scripture that are so clear.

We thank you for the truth, the substantial nature of the promises that you have made to us that are not just esoteric and spiritual, but they apply in the daily realities that we face as believers on this earth. We pray that as we continue to make our way through the days and weeks that are left to us, that God the Holy Spirit will make these truths real in our souls, that we will see the application of them as we make decisions and set priorities, and that as a result, our lives will reflect your glory, will reflect your transforming power, and that the thoughts and intents of our heart will be imbued and will reflect the confidence that we are to have in your word and in your promises. We pray that in everything, the Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified in us.

We ask these things in his name. Amen.