

It is only within the last few years that the reason has been learned. A great many clay tablets have been excavated which were written in Nuzi in northern Mesopotamia. From them we learn that at that time the possession of a man's household gods by a son-in-law was acceptable in court in that region as evidence that he had designated that son-in-law as heir to all his possessions. This, at last, explains why Rachel was so anxious to keep the teraphim. She thought that Jacob would thus be able to take all her father's possessions after his death. It also explains why Laban was so anxious to get them back. Jacob had already secured, by his clever handling, a great part of his possessions. "Now," he thought, "if he has taken these household gods, it means he will take everything after my death and my own sons will get nothing." So it was worth every bit of the effort and expenditure which Laban put into it to try to get them back.

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

Thus these clay tablets discovered at Nuzi throw a wonderfully interesting and informing light upon the correct understanding of this narrative in Genesis, and at the same time give strong evidence of the fact that the narrative was written near the time of the event when it would have been clear to everyone and not long after when the meaning of this important feature had been long forgotten.