

# WHY LABAN PURSUED JACOB SEVEN DAYS

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Abstract: To look at the reason that Laban spent seven days pursuing Jacob after he left with what was his. Different commentators give different reasons, but none of these reasons hold true. There was a valid reason and that was that Rachel had stolen Laban's gods. But why would Laban work so hard to get these gods back? This is the question that we shall answer in this article.

## INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

Archaeology has long been friendly towards the Bible and has given Bible students great insights as to how and why things happened as they did. Without archaeology much of the Bible would be able to be called into question with no proof that the Bible is correct. For many years skeptics called the reliability of the scriptures into question over the fact that the scriptures mentioned the Hittites in the book of Exodus and other books of the Bible:

“And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites” (Exo 3:8).

And for years Bible critics claimed that the Bible was a work of fiction because there was no evidence that the Hittites existed. That is, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when they were discovered:

“The **Hittites** were an ancient [Anatolian](#) people who spoke a [language](#) of the [Anatolian branch](#) of the [Indo-European language](#) family<sup>[1]</sup> and established a kingdom centered at [Hattusa](#) (Hittite <sup>URU</sup>Hattuša) in north-central Anatolia (on the Central Anatolian plateau) ca. the 18th century BC. The Hittite empire reached its height ca. the 14th century BC, encompassing a large part of [Anatolia](#), north-western [Syria](#) about as far south as the mouth of the [Litani River](#) (a territory known as [Amqu](#)), and eastward into upper [Mesopotamia](#). After ca. 1180 BC, the empire disintegrated into several independent "[Neo-Hittite](#)" city-states, some surviving until as late as the 8th century BC.

The archaeologists who discovered the Anatolian Hittites in the 19th century initially identified them with the [Biblical Hittites](#). The term

"Hittites" was taken from the [KJV](#) (King James Version) translation of the [Hebrew Bible](#), translating חֲתִי *HTY*, or בְּנֵי-חֶת *BNY-HT* "Children of [Heth](#)". (Heth is a son of [Canaan](#).) Today the identification of the Biblical peoples with either the Hattusa-based empire or the Neo-Hittite kingdoms is a matter of dispute<sup>[2]</sup> (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hittites>).

Since their discovery there has been no apology, no admittance of error, no nothing. They simply went on with business as usual. Every time the Bible critic claims that the archaeology has destroyed the credibility of the Bible, with time, the proper evidence is found, once again archaeology proves the Bible to be true. When this happens, there is no apology from the critic, no admittance of error, they just pretend that nothing has happened and business continues as normal.

The truth of the matter is that archaeology is one of the greatest friends to the Bible that there is. The only time that I have found that archaeology has not agreed with the Bible is where all of the evidence is not in, and when all of the evidence is in archaeology will agree perfectly with the Bible.

## DISCUSSION

I have long wondered why, when reading the story of Jacob taking Leah and Rachel and all that was his and leaving, and Rachel stealing her father's false gods that Laban became so upset that he took a number of his men with him and pursued Jacob for seven days. When he overtook him he not only threatened him, but he tore he camp apart looking for these idols. What was so special about these idols that would make Laban act the way that he acted? One would think that after all the years he made Jacob serve him for Leah and Rachel and his flocks that, though he might be insulted, he would not be so angry and eager to get them back. Different commentators wrote different things about this. John Gill wrote:

**“yet, wherefore, hast thou stolen my gods?** what reason had he for that? if he took away himself, his wives, his children, his goods, what business had he with his gods? he could not claim these as his, meaning the images or teraphim before mentioned, [Gen 31:19](#); by which it appears that Laban was some way or other guilty of idolatry in the use of these images; looking upon them as types, or representations of God, as Josephus (I) calls them, and worshipped God in them, or along with them and by them; for he could never think they were truly and really gods, that could not preserve themselves from being stolen away, and that must be a poor god that a man may be robbed of” (*Exposition on the Entire Bible, e-Sword*).

Matthew Henry wrote:

“III. The diligent search Laban made for his gods ([Gen 31:33-35](#)), partly out of hatred to Jacob, whom he would gladly have an occasion to quarrel

with, partly out of love to his idols, which he was loth to part with. We do not find that he searched Jacob's flocks for stolen cattle; but he searched his furniture for stolen gods. He was of Micah's mind, *You have taken away my gods, and what have I more?* [Jdg 18:24](#). Were the worshippers of false gods so set upon their idols? did they thus walk in the name of their gods? and shall not we be as solicitous in our enquires after the true God? When he has justly departed from us, how carefully should we ask, *Where is God my Maker? O that I knew where I might find him!* [Job 23:3](#). Laban, after all his searches, missed of finding his gods, and was baffled in his enquiry with a sham; but our God will not only be found of those that seek him, but they shall find him their bountiful rewarder” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentaries on the Old Testament, e-Sword*).

Jamison, Fausset & Brown wrote:

**“Laban said ... What hast thou done?”** — Not a word is said of the charge ([Gen 31:1](#)). His reproaches were of a different kind. His first charge was for depriving him of the satisfaction of giving Jacob and his family the usual salutations at parting. In the East it is customary, when any are setting out to a great distance, for their relatives and friends to accompany them a considerable way with music and valedictory songs. Considering the past conduct of Laban, his complaint on this ground was hypocritical cant. But his second charge was a grave one - the carrying off his gods - *Hebrew*, “teraphim,” small images of human figures, used not as idols or objects of worship, but as talismans, for superstitious purposes” (*Jamison, Fausset & Brown Commentary on Genesis, e-Sword*).

These are the main thoughts of commentators past and present, and while to many these things make sense I never felt that it made sense to me. One might argue that they were important to Laban because he was an idolater and he worshipped those Gods. However, he could have purchased new ones, but maybe these were handed down and were family heirlooms. There doesn’t seem to be any evidence of that. Another question that often came to my mind was why Rachel would steal these gods. It wasn’t as though she needed them. Was she so bitter against Laban that she would take something of his? Did she want something personal to remember him by? Why not just ask, I’m sure he would have given her what she desired. And while they were tearing the camp apart why did Rachel lie and say that she was in her menstrual period and couldn’t move when she knew that she was sitting on the idols. All of these were questions that have been in my mind for many years.

Now I do not believe that we must achieve every answer in this lifetime. Dad used to say that if a person lived to be 100 years old he would never learn

everything about the Bible because there is so much there to learn. At 56, I am still learning, and I am finding out that I can learn from people who are even younger than I am. Our local preacher, Robert Notgrass preached a sermon last Sunday evening in which he brought up a point which caught me totally by surprise. He was dealing with archaeology and he pointed out that archaeology had shown that whoever possessed the “teraphim” was the head of the entire family and he could pretty well do as he pleased. Below is a quote backing this up:

“We read in the Bible of Rachel taking the Teraphim and sitting upon them in the tent. In Genesis 31:30, 32 the Teraphim are called gods, as is the case also in the Nuzi texts. **The possession of these gods, it seems, implied a position of leadership in the household.** By this time Laban had sons of his own and hence we may understand his question, ‘Why hast thou stolen my gods?’ (Genesis 31:30). Laban’s indignation, in the light of this tablet, apparently was justifiable. On the other hand, Jacob and Rachel were not going to abide by custom. Jacob evidently did not want any secondary position in the household. It would seem that the birth of Laban’s sons proved to be a hindrance to Jacob’s desires (and Jacob was a man who got what he wanted)”  
([http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/his/accuracy-genesis\\_young.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/his/accuracy-genesis_young.pdf)).

So now my questions were answered. As long as Laban possessed these gods he was the leader of the entire family, and he would be able to make all the decisions concerning Leah and Rachel as well as the flocks he promised Jacob. He had already been dishonest with Jacob three times and Jacob knew that Laban was not going to allow them to leave, so he took his family and his flocks and left unannounced. Rachel being knowledgeable of the idea of the “teraphim” making Laban the leader of the family, took them and hid them among her things. By doing this she made her father powerless. She knew that he would come to make them return, but if he didn’t have the “teraphims” then he was not the leader of the family and he no longer had any legal rights. When Laban accused Jacob of stealing his gods, he knew that without his gods he had no rights and he wanted them back so he could have standing to take his family back. However, when he could not find them, he had no recourse than to let them proceed on with their journey.

## CONCLUSION

All of this tells us that archaeology is our friend. Sir Fredrick Kenyon once wrote “the more firmly a student believes in the Bible, the more firmly convinced he must be that no new fact that the spade may reveal can be really incompatible with it” (*The Bible and Archaeology*, p.261). This is just as true today as it was when he penned it those many years ago. Let us never forget that archaeology can teach us great things about the Bible, we just have to be willing to study it and look at the evidence.

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