

Background

Abraham-Sarah	Nachor-Milkah	
Isaac-Rebecca	Betuel	
Esav/Jacob	Rebecca	Laban
Twelve tribes		Leah/Rachel

1. Theft and deception in the saga of Jacob and Esav

Genesis 25:28	Esav deceives Isaac to gain his favour
Genesis 26	Isaac and Rebecca deceive Abimelech regarding their relationship to save Isaac's life
Genesis 27	Rebecca and Jacob deceive Isaac to switch the blessing to Jacob
Genesis 27:41	Esav deceives Isaac regarding his desire to kill Jacob
Genesis 27:46	Rebecca deceives Isaac regarding sending Jacob away to save his life
Genesis 29:18-26	Laban deceives Jacob in marrying off Leah to him
Genesis 31:19	Rachel deceives Laban by taking his <i>terafim</i>
Genesis 31:20	Jacob deceives Laban by running away without telling him, to save himself
Genesis 33:14	Jacob deceives Esav in pledging to meet him at Se'ir
Genesis 34:15	Jacob's sons, Simon and Levi, deceive the leaders of Shechem, to retrieve Dinah
Genesis 37	Jacob's sons deceive Jacob regarding their sale of Joseph
Genesis 38	Tamar deceives Judah regarding her identity
Genesis 39	Potifar's wife deceives Potifar regarding her assault of Joseph
Genesis 42:8	Joseph deceives his brothers and father regarding his identity

The story of the terafim

2. Genesis 31:19

וְלָבָן הָלַךְ לְגֹזֵז אֶת־צֹאֲנוֹ וַתִּגְנֹב רָחֵל אֶת־הַתְּרָפִים אֲשֶׁר לְאָבִיהָ:

And Laban went to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole the *terafim* belonging to her father.

3. Genesis 31:26-33

And Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You have stolen my heart, and you have led my daughters as if they were prisoners of war! Why did you hide, to run, and steal from me? And you did not tell me; I would have sent you with joy and song, with drums and lyres! And you did not let me kiss my sons and daughters! You have acted foolishly. I have the power in my hand to harm you, but the god of your fathers told me last night, 'Be careful not to speak to Jacob, either good or bad.' And now you have gone, because you longed for your father's house; why did you steal my gods?"

And Jacob replied and he said to Laban, "Because I feared; I said that you might steal your daughters from me. With whomsoever you find your gods, he will not live. Opposite our brothers, identify what of yours is with me, and take it for yourself!"

And Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them. And Laban entered the tent of Jacob and the tent of Leah and the tent of the two maids, and he did not find. And he left the tent of Leah, and he entered the tent of Rachel.

4. Genesis 31:34-35

וְרָחֵל לָקְחָה אֶת־הַתְּרָפִים וַתִּשְׂמֶם בְּכַר הַגִּמְלָה וַתֵּשֶׁב עֲלֵיהֶם וַיִּמָּשֶׁשׁ לָבָן אֶת־כַּלְהֵאָהָל וְלֹא מָצָא: וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־אָבִיהָ אֲלֵי־יָחַר בְּעֵינַי אֲדֹנָי כִּי לֹא אוּכַל לָקוּם מִפְּנֵיךָ כִּי־דָרְדַרְךָ נָשִׂים לִי וַיַּחֲפֵשׂ וְלֹא מָצָא אֶת־הַתְּרָפִים:

And Rachel had taken the *terafim*, and she placed them in the pillow of the camel and sat on them. And Laban felt the entire tent, and did not find. And she said to her father, "May my master not be angry! I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is with me." And he searched, and did not find the *terafim*.

5. Judges 17:5

And the man, Michah, had a house of god, and he made an *ephod* and *terafim*, and he appointed one of his sons as his priest.

6. Samuel I 19:13

And Michal took the *terafim* and placed them in the bed, and she placed the goatskin at his head, and she covered it with a garment.

7. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra to Bereishit 31:19

Some say these were copper implements used to determine the units of hours. Others say that astrologers can create forms which will speak at set times; they cite, "The *terafim* will speak corruption." That isn't what the sentence means, though. It seems to me that *terafim* are human forms created to receive celestial forces in a way I cannot explain. Proof to this explanation of *terafim* is in the *terafim* that Michal bat Shaul placed in the bed, such that the guards thought they were the body of David (Samuel I 19).

An approach from midrash

8. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 74:5

ותגנוב רחל את התרפים אשר לאביה, והיא לא נתכוונה אלא לשם שמים אמרה מה אנא מיזיל לי ונשבוק הדין סבא בקלקוליה, לפיכך הוצרך הכתוב לומר ותגנוב רחל את התרפים אשר לאביה.

She intended it only for the sake of Heaven. She said, "Will I go, and abandon this old man to his downfall?" Therefore the text needed to say, "And Rachel stole the *terafim* belonging to her father."

9. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 74:9

א"ר יוחנן תרפים לא מצא קיתוניות מצא נעשו תרפים קיתוניות שלא לבייש את רחל.

Rabbi Yochanan said: He did not find *terafim*; he found pitchers. The *terafim* were transformed into pitchers, so as not to embarrass Rachel.

10. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 74:9

לא יחיה, והוה כן כשגגה היוצאה מלפני השליט, ותגנוב רחל ותמת רחל.

"Shall not live" – And so it was. This was like the error that goes forth from the ruler (Ecclesiastes 10:5). "And Rachel stole" "And Rachel died".