

## RACHEL - WHO STOLE HER FATHER'S IDOLS

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Then went he [Laban] out of Leah's tent, and entered into Rachel's tent. Now 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. And 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 (Gen. 31:34-35).

Rachel was beautiful and desirable. The daughter of a wealthy farmer, she was admired by all the shepherds who watered their sheep at the communal well. Yet she never permitted them to become amorous. She enjoyed their attention but always remained aloof and never became involved in romance. Her father's wealth and reputation were probably a deterrent to overzealous young men. Her sister, Leah, had bewitching eyes but was not as glamorous as the younger girl. Why both remained unmarried remains a mystery, but probably they were protected by their father who thought his daughters too good for the available men.

Then Jacob arrived to ask the whereabouts of his kinsman, Laban. While he was conversing with the shepherds, Rachel arrived with her father's sheep, and he hastily removed the covering from the mouth of the well to help the girl. As she looked at the muscular stranger and appreciated the assistance being given, something stirred within her soul. It was love at first sight.

Rachel escorted Jacob to her home, and an exciting story of intrigue and deception began to unfold. Eventually, after being tricked on his wedding night, Jacob labored until he had earned the right to marry both daughters. As time passed he became wealthy, but the relationship between Laban and Jacob was never amicable; both were swindlers actuated by greed. Then Jacob became homesick and, with the sheep-shearing season approaching, began to make plans to leave. He warned his wives to make the necessary preparation, and when Laban went away for three days, Jacob and his family

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commenced their journey. Rachel stayed a little longer in her home and, seeing her father's idols, stole them.

### The Maid and Her Go.... Defiling

The theft caused great trouble, for when Laban discovered his idols were missing, he vowed that Jacob would pay with his life. God appeared to the angry man and averted a tragedy which seemed unavoidable. Jacob, who was unaware of Rachel's action, vehemently denied Laban's charges and suggested a search of the entire camp. When his wife saw servants proceeding from tent to tent, she placed the idols in her camel's saddle, sat upon them, and excused herself for remaining seated by saying, "Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise up before thee, for the custom of women is upon me." Laban accepted her explanation and did not recover his gods. From time immemorial men have debated the reason for Rachel's theft, and various explanations have been given.

Was she scared the idol might assist her father? Some teachers think she feared the gods might inform Laban where

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to find his runaway daughters. It is difficult to accept this reasoning, for an experienced rancher would know in which direction Jacob had gone. The herd of cattle would leave tracks which could easily be followed.

Did Rachel desire a special keepsake? She was leaving her home and had no guarantee she would see her father again. Did she desire something which would remind her of childhood days, something that would bridge the gulf between her past and future? When she saw the images, on the spur of the moment she stole them.

Was she being mercenary? She hoped all would go well for her husband, but being a cattleman was a precarious occupation. If bad times overtook them, or if enemies stole the cattle, financial resources could be a valuable asset. Idols that were the cherished possession of devotees were often studded with precious stones which, in an emergency, could be sold. Those images could become a means of survival in adversity.

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Did she want a backup God? This suggestion is most intriguing. Her family worshiped idols, and as a child she would have participated in the ritual. Her father was a man with two religions. He was aware of Jehovah whom his ancestors had worshiped, but he also liked his idols which never challenged his conduct. It was inspiring to know the God of his fathers could help, but when He did not respond, it was reassuring to have other gods who would be more cooperative. The images were excellent backup deities. Perhaps Rachel acquired these ideas from her father. Did she reason that if her husband's God failed to respond it would be nice to consult her own gods? It may be difficult to decide why she became a thief, but the Scriptures describe other people with similar desires.

The Missionary and His Goal... Defeated

There is a strange story in the second book of Kings which describes people who tried to walk in two directions at the same time. When the armies of Babylon overran Palestine and many Hebrews were taken as prisoners to a foreign land, the heathen monarch decided to leave behind an army of occupation. He believed this was the best way to prevent an uprising among the Jews who were permitted to stay in their own land. It would also help to colonize the country and extend the empire of Babylon. This appeared to be an excellent plan but, alas, the king ignored Jehovah. When ravenous lions descended from the hills to kill people and devour cattle, the superstitious Babylonians believed the wild beasts were the instruments of Israel's offended God. When they became afraid, they complained to their king. He decided to return one of the captive priests to Samaria to instruct the inhabitants concerning "the God of the land."

This unknown missionary traveled from city to city teaching listeners the laws of Moses, and this created a unique situation. The Babylonian immigrants began to fear the Lord but continued to worship idols. They were afraid of Jehovah's lions but, although they gave lip service to the God of Israel, they continued to revere their own gods. The people appeared

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to be devout believers but remained idolaters. They were nominal believers who had no love for the Lord.

This was reminiscent of Rachel who had idols in her home. It also describes people whose religion was only a ceremony. When lions of affliction appear, distressed people pray for divine assistance but afterward forget to give thanks, and they return to the gods of their own creation. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the ancient priest did his job, but his message was ineffective.

#### The Murmurers and Their Gospel... Distracting

Paul's most aggressive opponents were Jews who tried to unite Christianity with Judaism. They professed to be disciples of Christ, but never abandoned the Mosaic law. Their insistence that Gentile men be circumcised led to the first Church Council where Paul said non-Jews should not be compelled to observe laws which were given exclusively to Hebrews. Although James, the president of that august assembly, ruled in favor of Paul, the adversaries did not change their opinion. Throughout the apostle's missionary journeys, they promoted riots which threatened the lives of the preachers.

Many of these obnoxious people claimed to be Christians. They accepted the Messianic claims of Jesus, but believed sinners needed more (the law) upon which to rely. This suggested that if for any reason Christianity failed, they still pos-

sessed the teaching of Moses. Here again are found reminders of Rachel who stole her father's gods, and the priest who failed to remove the idols worshiped by his congregation. Paul denounced the teaching of his adversaries and said they should be accursed for preaching another gospel (see Gal. 1:8). The apostle would have appreciated the hymn written by P. B. Bliss:

Free from the law; O happy condition.  
Jesus hath bled, and there is remission.  
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,  
Christ hath redeemed us, Once for all.

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Once for all, O Sinner, receive it,  
Once for all, O Brother, believe it.  
Cling to the Cross, thy burden will fall;  
Christ hath redeemed us, Once for all.

#### The Man and His Guilt... Destroying

Judas had an incurable disease-the love of money. It spread throughout his being and destroyed his soul. His death was a tragedy, for he had lived with the Great Physician who cured all kinds of sickness. Unfortunately, he thought more of cash than he did of his soul, and ultimately he was buried in a grave for the homeless.

This pathetic man had ambitions to become famous. By night he dreamed of the kingdom of God and by day worked to establish it, hoping to be worthy of a place of eminence when his Leader became the King of Kings. When he met Jesus of Nazareth, he was convinced the Messiah had arrived. It was one of his greatest days when the Lord invited him to become a disciple. He enjoyed fellowship with his new friends and probably worked as hard as any of his colleagues. He became the treasurer of the party, but the inflow of cash was

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poor, for his Leader never appealed for financial assistance. Occasionally a grateful admirer gave a special offering, but there was never much money in the treasury. This made Judas long fervently for the prosperity which would be commonplace when the Master established His kingdom. Judas hoped he would become the Minister of Finances. One day he took some of the money for his own purposes, and since his books were never audited, no one discovered the theft. Helping himself became standard procedure.

When the bleak winds of adversity began to blow upon the disciples, Judas shuddered. He hoped his Master would succeed, but if He did not, things could be depressing. If Jesus did not take advantage of His popularity, the future could be in jeopardy. He was very apprehensive when the Lord seemed to be unconcerned. Judas sighed. Enthusiasm disappeared from his life. Had he chosen to follow the wrong leader? How could he recoup his losses and make amends for

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his mistake? His love for money became apparent when he decided to sell his knowledge and cut his losses. Those stingy money-grabbers would pay for information! They might argue and try to swindle him, but whatever he was given would be better than nothing.

Judas was depending upon his business instincts; something could be salvaged for future use. When he had betrayed his Master, his conscience became active, and the precious coins lost their attraction.

Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. . And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself (Matt. 27:3-5).

Judas built his house upon sand, and the storms left him homeless! His money could not purchase a dwelling in this world nor the next. He was a man without wisdom.

I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold,  
I'd rather be His than have riches untold;  
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or land,  
I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand.

That to be the king of a vast domain  
Or be held in sin's dread sway;  
I'd rather have Jesus than anything  
This world affords today.  
R. F. Miller

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