

## Parshah Vayeishev

- Parshat Vayeishev is the ninth parshat in the Torah. The text of this parshat is Genesis 37:1-40:23.
- We begin reading “And Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.” The parshat is named vayeishev after the first distinct word of this parshat which means “and [he] dwelt.”
- This parshat can be broken into the following segments: Joseph and his brothers; Judah and Tamar; Joseph and Potiphar’s wife; Joseph in prison; and, butler and baker.
- Joseph and his brothers: Jacob and his family journeyed in the land of Canaan. Joseph, being seventeen years old, tended the flocks with his brothers. Joseph was known to tell evil things about his brothers. Jacob loved Joseph more than his other children “because he was the son of his old age” and Jacob had a special cloak made for Joseph. Upon seeing that their father loved Joseph above his other children, Joseph’s brothers became jealous and could not speak peaceably with Joseph.
- Joseph had a dream where he and his brothers were harvesting in the field. He saw his sheaf rise up and his brothers’ sheaves bow down to his sheaf. He told this dream to his brothers who lashed out at him saying, “Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?” And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.” Joseph had yet another dream where the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed down to him. He told this dream to his brothers and his father. His father “rebuked him, and said unto him: 'What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brethren indeed come to bow down to you to the earth? And his brethren envied him; but his father kept the saying in mind.”
- Joseph’s brothers went tending to their flocks at Shechem. Jacob sent Joseph out of Hebron to go see if everything was well with his brothers and the flock. While wandering around, Joseph was approached by a man who told him where to find his brothers. The brothers saw Joseph coming and conspired to throw him in a pit and tell their father that he was devoured by a beast. Reuben spoke up and said that the brothers should not take the life of Joseph. Reuben tried to convince his brothers to throw Joseph in the pit but not to harm him for Reuben had planned on coming back to rescue Joseph. When Joseph approached his brothers stripped him of his cloak and threw him in a dry pit. As the brothers ate they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites that had come from Gilead. Judah stated that instead of killing Joseph they should sell him to the Ishmaelites. As the Midianites passed the brothers they pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him to the Midianites who took him to Egypt. Reuben returned to the pit, and seeing that Joseph was gone, became very upset. He asked his brothers what had happened to Joseph and they responded by killing a he-goat and dipping the cloak in blood. The cloak was taken to their father and they asked him to identify whether the cloak belonged to Joseph. Jacob answered in the affirmative and declared that his son was indeed torn apart by a wild-beast. “And Jacob rent his garments,

and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days.” His children attempted to comfort him but he refused any comforting. “And the Midianites sold [Joseph] into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, the captain of the guard.”

- Judah and Tamar: During the time of the incident with Joseph, Judah left his brothers and “turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.” He saw a Canaanite woman named Shua “and went in unto her.” She bore Judah three sons – Er, Onan, and Shelah. Judah took a wife for Er named Tamar but Er was wicked in God’s eyes and He therefore slew Er. “And Judah said unto Onan: ‘Go in unto your brother's wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her, and raise up seed to your brother.’” Onan, knowing that the seed would not be his, “went in unto his brother's wife, [and] he spilled it on the ground, lest he should give seed to his brother.” This was an evil thing in God’s eyes and God also slew Onan. Judah told Tamar to remain a widow in her father’s house until Shelah had grown at which time he would be given to Tamar as a husband.
- After the death of his wife, Judah “went up unto his sheep-shearers to Timnah, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.” Tamar was told that her father-in-law was going to shear his sheep at Timnah. Tamar took off her widow’s garments and “covered herself with her veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the entrance of Enaim, which is by the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she was not given unto him to wife.” When Judah saw her he thought she was a harlot because she had covered her face. He went to her and hired her – she asked what he would pay to her. He responded that he would pay her with a “kid of the goats from the flock.” She then asked what he would pledge to her until he sent the goat. Judah responded by asking what she would want him to pledge and she told him to pledge his signet, cord, and staff. Tamar conceived by Judah and then put on her garments of widowhood. Judah sent his Adullamite friend Hirah with the goat but he could not find the harlot. Upon inquiring of the men of the city, he was told that there was no harlot there. Hirah reported back to Judah telling him that she could not be found and the men of the city said that there was no harlot. Judah responded, “Let her take it, lest we be put to shame; behold, I sent this kid, and you have not found her.”
- After three months it was told to Judah that Tamar was pregnant by playing a harlot. “And Judah said: “Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.”” When Tamar was brought before Judah she showed the signet, cord, and staff to him saying that she became pregnant by the owner of these things; “and she said: ‘Discern, I pray you, whose are these, the signet, and the cords, and the staff.’” Judah acknowledged that those things were his and said, “She is more righteous than I; forasmuch as I gave her not to Shelah my son.” Tamar gave birth to twins – Perez and Zerah.
- Joseph and Potiphar’s wife: Joseph was brought down to Egypt and sold to Potiphar “an officer of Pharaoh's, the captain of the guard....” God was with Joseph and Potiphar recognized this fact. Potiphar recognized that God made Joseph prosper in everything he did. Potiphar appointed Joseph “overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand.” God blessed Potiphar and his household for being so gracious to Joseph.
- Joseph was beautiful and fair and Potiphar’s wife attempted to seduce Joseph into sleeping with her. Joseph refused saying that her husband trusted him and “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” Potiphar’s wife continued daily to attempt to seduce Joseph but he refused each time. One day, when no men were present in the house, “she caught [Joseph] by his garment, saying: ‘Lie with me.’ And he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got out.”

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She then called out to the men of her house saying, “See, he has brought in a Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice. And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment by me, and fled, and got out.” Upon hearing this story, Potiphar became very angry and placed Joseph into prison.

- Joseph in prison: God was with Joseph in prison and showed kindness to him. God “gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.” The keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of the other prisoners. All that Joseph did was blessed and “that which he did, [God] made it to prosper.”
- Butler and baker: In time, the chief butler and chief baker of Pharaoh had offended him thereby earning a place in prison where Joseph was being held. The captain of the guard put Joseph in charge of these men. The butler and the baker both had dreams and when Joseph came to them in the morning he saw that they were despondent. Asking what was wrong with them, they told Joseph that they both dreamed but there was no one to interpret the dreams for them. “And Joseph said unto them: ‘Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell it me, I pray you.’”
- The butler told Joseph that in his dream he saw three branches on the vine that brought forth ripe grapes. Pharaoh’s cup was in his hand and he took the grapes and pressed them into the cup. Afterwards, the butler gave the cup to Pharaoh. Joseph told the butler that in three days he will be lifted up out of prison and restored to his position. Joseph also told the butler to remember him him “when it shall be well with you, and show kindness, I pray, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house. For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon.”
- The baker, seeing the good interpretation of the butler’s dream, told his dream to Joseph. In the baker’s dream he saw three baskets of white bread upon his head. In the uppermost basket were baked goods of all kinds that belonged to Pharaoh but the birds were eating these goods. Joseph told the baker that in three days he will be removed from the prison and hung on a tree where the birds will eat his flesh.
- It came to pass that three days later, on Pharaoh’s birthday, he had a feast. Pharaoh restored the butler back to his position but the baker he had hanged. However, the butler did not remember Joseph.