

## Parshah Vayishlach

- Parshat Vayishlach is the eighth parshat in the Torah. The text of this parshat is Genesis 32:4-36:43.
- We begin reading “And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the field of Edom.” The parshat is named vayishlach after the first distinct word of this parshat which means “and [he] sent.”
- This parshat can be broken into the following segments: Jacob’s messengers to Esau; presents for Esau; Jacob wrestles; Jacob meets Esau; city of Shechem and Dinah; journey to Beth-el; birth of Benjamin; Jacob’s descendants and Isaac’s death; and, Esau’s descendants.
- Jacob’s messengers to Esau: Jacob sent messengers to Esau in Seir. The messengers are to tell Esau that he had been living with Laban and grown wealthy in the hopes of finding favor with Esau. The messengers return to Jacob telling him that Esau and four-hundred men are coming to meet him.
- Jacob became afraid and “divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and the herds, and the camels, into two camps. ... [in case] Esau come[s] to the one camp, and strike[s] it, then the camp which is left shall escape.” Jacob prayed for deliverance from the threat and asked God to have mercy on him and his household.
- Presents for Esau: In the morning Jacob took “two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milch camels and their colts, forty kine and ten bulls, twenty she-asses and ten foals” and delivered them into the hands of his servants as a present for Esau. Jacob tells each servant that when he and the drove over which he has charge meets Esau the servant is to tell Esau that these are gifts for him and that Jacob is also coming to greet him.
- Jacob wrestles: That night Jacob remains in the camp alone having “took his two wives, and his two handmaids, and his eleven children, and passed over the ford of the Jabbok.” Jacob encountered a man and wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. The man, seeing that he could not win, touched Jacob’s thigh and caused Jacob’s thigh to become strained. The man told Jacob to let him go but Jacob said he would not release the man until he blessed him.
- “And he said unto him: ‘What is your name?’ And he said: ‘Jacob.’ And he said: ‘Your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.’” Jacob asked the man’s name but he would not give it. However the man did indeed bless Jacob. “And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: ‘for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.’” As the sun rose Jacob walked with a limp because of his injured thigh. “Therefore the children of Israel eat not the sinew of the thigh-vein which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day; because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, even in the sinew of the thigh-vein.”

- Jacob meets Esau: Jacob lifted his eyes and saw Esau and four-hundred men approaching. Jacob divided his wives and children – placing the handmaids and their children in the front, Leah and her children in the middle, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. Jacob went to the front and bowed seven times until he came near to his brother Esau. Esau ran to meet Jacob and fell upon him, embracing him and kissing him.
- Esau inquired as to who the women and children were with Jacob. Jacob explained that they were his wives and children that God had blessed him with during his time with Laban. The handmaids and their children came and bowed before Esau then Leah and her children bowed before Esau, and finally Rachel and Joseph came and bowed before Esau.
- Esau inquired about the camp that Jacob had sent to him. Jacob explained that he was trying to find favor in Esau’s eyes. Esau explained that he had enough and Jacob should keep that which is his. Jacob however insisted that if he has found favor in Esau’s eyes that Esau should accept the gift for God has blessed Jacob with much. Esau relented and accepted the gifts. Esau then inquired about journeying together but Jacob explained that he travels slowly because of the young children and the flocks. Esau offered to leave some of his men with Jacob but Jacob declined. Esau returned that day toward Seir and Jacob journeyed to Succoth.
- City of Shechem and Dinah: Jacob traveled to Shechem where “he bought the parcel of ground, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for a hundred pieces of money.” He also erected an altar there and called it “El-elohe-Israel.”
- Dinah went out to “see the daughters of the land” and “Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her; and he took her, and lay with her, and humbled her.” Shechem loved Dinah and went to his father saying, “Get me this damsel to wife.” Jacob heard that Dinah had been defiled but he held his tongue until his sons returned from the field. Jacob’s sons heard what had occurred to their sister and they were very grieved and angry. Hamor – Shechem’s father – went to Jacob and asked for Jacob to give Dinah to his son to marry. Hamor also proposed that Jacob’s sons marry the daughters of the city of Shechem and the daughters of Jacob marry the sons of the city. “And you shall dwell with us; and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade therein, and get possessions therein.”
- Shechem offered to pay any amount of dowry in order for Dinah to become his wife. The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and said “We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised; for that were a reproach unto us. Only on this condition will we consent unto you: if you will be as we are, that every male of you be circumcised; then will we give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. But if you will not hearken unto us, to be circumcised; then will we take our daughter, and we will be gone.” This response pleased Hamor and his son.
- Hamor and Shechem went to the city gate and spoke to the men declaring that they must be circumcised in order for the children of Jacob and the people of the city to marry. They declared that Jacob and his household live in peace with the city and “Shall not their cattle and their substance and all their beasts be ours? Only let us consent unto them, and they will dwell with us.” So every male of the city circumcised himself. On the third day when all the men of the city were in pain Simeon and Levi – Dinah’s brothers – took their swords, killed all the men of the city

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and took Dinah from Shechem's home. The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and took the possessions of the city.

- Jacob responded to Simeon and Levi's action by saying, "You have troubled me, to make me odious unto the inhabitants of the land, even unto the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and, I being few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and strike me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house." His sons responded simply, "Should one deal with our sister as with a harlot?"
- Journey to Beth-el: God called to Jacob telling him to leave Shechem and go and dwell in Beth-el. Jacob told his household to remove any foreign gods from their presence, purify themselves, and change their garments for they were going to Beth-el as God commanded. "And they gave unto Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hand, and the rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth which was by Shechem."
- As they journeyed, God placed terror upon the cities Jacob and his household passed so the inhabitants would not attack Jacob or his household. Jacob arrived in Beth-el where he built an altar "and called the place El-beth-el, because there God was revealed unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother." Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died "and she was buried below Beth-el under the oak; and the name of it was called Allon-bacuth." God again appeared to Jacob blessing him and calling his name Israel. God told Jacob to be fruitful and multiply. God said that the land that was given to Abraham and Isaac will also be given to Jacob and his descendants. "And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He spoke with him, a pillar of stone, and he poured out a drink-offering thereon, and poured oil thereon. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Beth-el."
- Birth of Benjamin: Jacob and his household left Beth-el and journeyed toward Ephrath. Rachel was in labor and gave birth to a son. As her soul was leaving her she named him Ben-oni but Israel called him Benjamin. "Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath--the same is Bethlehem. And Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave; the same is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day."
- Jacob's descendants and Isaac's death: Israel and his household traveled further "and spread his tent beyond Migdal-eder." It was while Israel dwelt in this land that "Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard of it."
- Jacob had twelve sons: the sons of Leah: Reuben, Jacob's first-born, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun; the sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin; and the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid: Dan and Naphtali; and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid: Gad and Asher.
- Jacob came to his father in Kiriatharba where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. "And the days of Isaac were a hundred and fourscore years. And Isaac expired, and died, and was gathered unto his people, old and full of days; and Esau and Jacob his sons buried him."
- Esau's descendants: The parshat ends with the listing of "the generations of Esau the father of a the Edomites in the mountain-land of Seir" from his wives Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite, and Basemath Ishmael's daughter. The chiefs of Esau's sons are listed as well as the cities they established.

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