

# THE OPEN BIBLE



## Parasha Vayishlach

Genesis 32:3-36:43

Obadiah 1:-21

Hebrews 11:11-20

### The Torah Portion at a Glance

Jacob returns to the Holy Land after a 20-year stay in Charan, and sends angel-emissaries to Esau in hope of reconciliation, but his messengers report that his brother is on the warpath with 400 armed men. Jacob prepares for war, prays, and sends Esau a large gift (consisting of hundreds of heads of sheep and cattle) to appease him.

That night, Jacob ferries his family and possessions across the Yabbok River; he, however, remains behind and encounters the angel of YHWH, with whom he wrestles until daybreak. Jacob suffers a dislocated hip but vanquishes the supernal creature, who bestows on him the name Yisra'el, which means "He who prevails over the Divine."

Jacob and Esau meet, embrace and kiss, but part ways. Jacob purchases a plot of land near Shechem, whose crown prince -- also called Shechem-- abducts and rapes Jacob's daughter Dinah. Dinah's brothers Simeon and Lewi avenge the deed by killing all male inhabitants of the city after rendering them vulnerable by convincing them to circumcise themselves.

Jacob journeys on. Rachel dies while giving birth to her second son, Benjamin, and is buried in a roadside grave near Bethlehem. Reuben loses the birthright because he interferes with his father's marital life. Jacob arrives in Hebron, to his father Isaac, who later dies at age 180 (Rebecca has passed away before Jacob's arrival).

Our par shah concludes with a detailed account of Esau's wives, children and grandchildren, and the family histories of the people of Se'ir among whom Esau settled.

(adapted from chabad.org)

### The Messiah in the Torah Portion

The identity of Jacob's wrestler has perplexed Bible students for millennia. Judaism traditionally explains the wrestler was the guardian angel of Esau. Genesis 32:24, "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." The word in this verse for "man" is the Hebrew word "ish" and is translated properly. The text makes no mention that he wrestled with an "angel" or "mal'ak." Ya'acov wrestles for a blessing and doesn't give up until his name is changed to "Yisra'el." This new name

literally means “one who wrestles with El.” At the end of the wrestling match the man says “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with Elohim and men and have prevailed,” Genesis 32:28.

Later, Jacob names the place of such strife “Peniel, meaning, ‘I have seen Elohim face-to-face, and yet my life has been spared,’” Genesis 32:40. This word “elohim” is used throughout the Hebrew texts and literally means “mighty one or ruler.” Usually elohim is translated as “god.” Sometimes it is translated as “angel” and even once, in Psalm 82:6, mankind is called “elohim.”

The book of Hosea adds to the confusion. Jacob “took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with Elohim: Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us,” 12:3-4. In this passage from the Prophet, the word “mal’ak” is used for “angel.”

So, taken together, Jacob wrestled with an ish-elohim-mal’ak! The wrestler is a man-god-angel. Who could this be?

Consider these verses:

- John 1:1, 14
- Hebrew 1:7
- Psalm 8:5
- John 1:18
- Exodus 33:20-23

## **Applying the Portion to Life Today**

One of the wonderful things about the Torah is that it does not portray Bible characters as perfect saints who always do perfect things. The Torah openly and honestly displays the humanity of the humans involved in the divine struggle. Thank goodness that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were real people with real problems!

Our Torah portion is named “vayishlach” which means “he sent out.” The reading begins with Jacob preparing to meet with his estranged brother Esau. He sends out his family into two camps. His fear and his favoritism are shown clearly by his actions. His wife of choice and his youngest son are separated from the others in an effort to spare their lives should the family reunion turn sour. The mere fact that the family quibble between the two brothers is mentioned in Torah again reminds us that the Torah gives directions for every day life. We can learn much from how Jacob, Esau, Isaac, and others treated their families.

Jacob later has a wrestling match and fights for a blessing. Even though Jacob was a man of faith, his blessings didn’t always just drop from the sky. He had to fight and travail for his wife, possessions, and even his life at times. Don’t be fooled – the life of faith is not easy. The patriarchs showed us this. There are times when we seem to be wrestling with the Creator Himself. Then there are times when we must be as cunning and wise as a serpent and as meek as a dove.

This Torah parasha also teaches us to be careful to guard against vengeance. We must not take revenge into our own hands like Simeon and Lewi did. Their sister Dinah was taken advantage of by a man and this band of brothers allowed their tempers to get the best of them. They deceived the relatives of Shechem into thinking they could be part of the covenant people. Well, instead of showing them favor and mercy, Simeon and Lewi murdered many and plundered the people. They were eventually punished for such vengeance.

We should also learn from Rachel who died while giving birth to Benjamin on her way into Bethlehem. She was buried in a roadside tomb. Sometimes for new life to come there must be death. Y'shua said in Luke 9:23, that while we are on our own unique journey that we too are to "die daily." It is only as we choose to offer our lives fully to YHWH that He can fully use us. Torah is accurate in its portrayal of mankind. We are imperfect people in an imperfect world, trying to serve a perfect elohim. Families fight. Struggles occur. Loved ones pass away. Life is hard sometimes. Through it all, YHWH will use what occurs for his plan and his glory.

## **Portion Points to Ponder**

1. The Hebrew name for this portion is "Vayishlach." What does this mean?
2. Read Obadiah 1:1-21. How does this relate to the story of Genesis this week?
3. Consider the words found in Hebrews 11:11-20. What did you learn from studying this passage?
4. How is Messiah Y'shua pictured in this Torah portion?
5. Jacob met a group of angels at a place called "mahanayim." What does this term mean?
6. Ya'acov was distressed about meeting up with Esau. Why?
7. How was the division of Jacob's camp similar to the division of the 12 tribes of Israel into the Northern and Southern tribes later in the Bible?
8. Ya'acov took numerous gifts to Esau. Is it a good thing to show kindness to your enemy?
9. Ya'acov heaped "burning coals" on Esav by showing kindness. How did Jacob accomplish the commands of Y'shua to "pray for those who despitefully use you" and "bless those that curse you." Who do you need to bless and show kindness to today?
10. Before Esau and Jacob meet, the Torah states that Jacob wrestled with "a man" until the breaking of the day. Who did Jacob wrestle?
11. Ya'cov would not let go of the wrestler until he received a blessing. What blessing did he accept?
12. What was Jacob's name changed to? Describe the meaning of this name.
13. Ya'acov asked for the name of the "man" that he wrestled. Do you think the man revealed his name to Jacob?
14. Ya'acov named the place where he wrestled "Peni'el." Why?
15. Where is the phrase "face to face" spoken of again in the Bible? Explain how the name "Peni'el" relates to Yom Kippur.

16. Genesis 32:33 states that since the time of Jacob's wrestling match that the "people of Israel do not eat the meat of the hip area of animals. Is this verse suggesting that believers are not to eat sirloin meat, which is normally found at this location of an animal?
17. Explain the actions that Ya'acov takes as he prepares to meet Esau. How does Esau eventually respond?
18. Genesis 33:4 says, "and Esau ran toward him and embraced him, and he fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept." What type of kiss was this?
19. Why did Esau have a change of heart?
20. Jacob settled and names a place called "Sukkot." Do the children of Israel return her on their journey out of Egypt?
21. How did Shechem defile Dinah? He loved her, wasn't love enough?
22. When Ya'acov first heard that Dinah had been defiled before marriage what did he do?
23. The father of Shechem wanted Jacob's sons and his daughters to intermarry. Was this a good idea? Why or why not?
24. The sons of Jacob answered the father of Shechem deceitfully. Where did they learn to deceive?
25. On the third day after the circumcision Simeon and Lewi enacted revenge upon the people of Shechem. Was this of YHWH?
26. What did Ya'acov say to Simeon and Lewi about their actions?
27. Where did the sons of Jacob get the idols mentioned in Genesis 35:2?
28. Up until Genesis 35 Jacob still uses the name Jacob. After this point the Torah uses the name "Isra'el" more. Why?
29. YHWH speaks the same blessing to Jacob that was given to others. He was told to "be fruitful and multiply." Who had YHWH spoken this to before?
30. Genesis 35:11 is a highly prophetic verse. Here YHWH says, "be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a multitude of nations shall come into existence from you, and kings shall come forth from your loins." Who is the singular nation that comes from Jacob/Israel? Who is the "multitude of nations" that would come from Jacob/Israel? Explain how this prophecy relates to 1 Kings 15.
31. What happened to Rachel when she gave birth to Benjamin? Was this death prophetic?
32. Where was Rachel buried? Where is this place today?
33. Read and discuss Matthew 2:17-18 and Jeremiah 31:15 and how these verses relate to Rachel's death.
34. Reuven lay with Jacob's concubine. What was the result of this sexual relationship?
35. The descendants of Esav became known as the Edomites. Who are / were these people?
36. How many children did Ya'acov have?

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