



Parsha Snapshot

VAYISHLACH

After escaping from the treacherous Laban, Jacob turns to face the next peril: his imminent return to Canaan, home of his brother Esau, whose murderous wrath he fled more than thirty years ago. Jacob sends envoys of peace – who return with the news that Esau is coming with four hundred armed men. Greatly alarmed, Jacob prepares for the confrontation: he sends a lavish tribute to appease Esau; he divides his household into two camps in case of battle; and he prays to God, expressing gratitude, humility, and a plea for salvation.

In the middle of the night, Jacob is attacked by a mysterious stranger, who wrestles with him until dawn. Jacob is unharmed except for a limp; the stranger –in reality an angel representing Esau – is forced to acknowledge Jacob’s legitimacy as heir to the Patriarchal blessing. The angel informs Jacob that God will soon change his name to Israel, indicating leadership and victory.

Jacob finally meets Esau, who, quite out of character, hugs and kisses him. Jacob insists that Esau keep the gifts he had sent ahead, and politely but emphatically refuses Esau’s offer to travel together.

Rachel dies delivering her second child – Benjamin, Jacob’s twelfth and final son – and is buried by the side of the road. Rachel’s tomb remains one of Israel’s most beloved sites of prayer.

Jacob camps near the city of Shechem. Dinah, his daughter, is abducted and violated by the local prince, also named Shechem. Jacob’s second and third sons, Simon and Levi, attack Shechem in return. Jacob agrees in principle but criticizes his sons for endangering the family; God, though, protects them from retaliation, and they complete their journey unmolested.

Now Esau leaves his parent’s home, moving away to escape the destiny of bondage that is a prerequisite to inheriting the Holy Land. The Parsha ends by listing the members of Esau’s family, who are enumerated briefly, representing no moral accomplishment; the coming chapters will discuss in careful detail the meaningful lives of Jacob and his family.



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