

Vayishlach

וישלח

“He sent”

Genesis 32:4 – 36:43

Torah Together



In this pivotal *Torah* portion, Jacob has an encounter with the angel of God who gives him a new name, Israel. Also, Jacob meets his brother, who he has not seen for over twenty years and who threatened to kill him when they last were together. We get some valuable insight into Jacob's character from these stories, learning what good God sees in Jacob and for that matter, what good God sees in us.

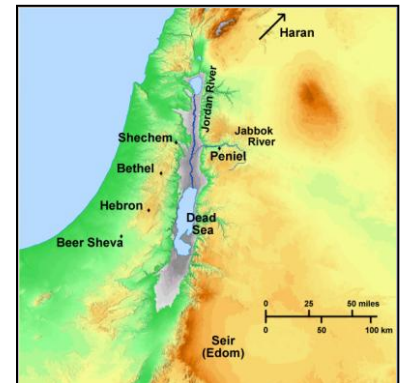
1. Jacob prepares to meet Esau - 32:4-33

a) What did Jacob learn from the messengers he sent to his brother Esau? How did he react? What did he do? Does Jacob's prayer give you any more insight into his character?

He learned that his brother, Esau, was coming to meet him with 400 of his men. Jacob was “greatly afraid and distressed.” First, he divided his family into two groups so that if Esau got one group, the other one might escape. Then he prayed. Jacob was fearful, which seems to be a very common response of his. (He was dreading the confrontation with Esau just as he had dreaded the confrontation with Laban.) In his prayer, he reminded God of His promise to him and that He had told him to return to his country. He then acknowledged that he was unworthy of all the blessings that God has bestowed on him. He finally honestly acknowledged his fear and pleaded for His protection. See 2 Kings 6:16-17 for a similar story.

b) Jacob prepared a gift for Esau. Describe the gift and the way it was to be presented. Do you think this was a wise move?

Jacob sent separate herds and flocks of livestock on ahead of him, each with a servant whose instructions were to present them to Esau as a gift from Jacob, who was following. The idea was to soften Esau up before he actually met Jacob. This is an example of “doing everything you can and leaving the outcome to God.”



Jacob's Prayer and Gift

When Jacob heard that Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men, he was filled with fear. (The last time Jacob had seen Esau, Esau had threatened to kill him. See **Genesis 27:41**) In his prayer, Jacob frankly admits his fear and asks for God's deliverance. His gift to Esau was very generous and presented in a way that would hopefully soften Esau's heart. Notice that Jacob prayed for God's protection but also put forth his best effort to save himself. Do you think this is a good practice for us as well?

Jacob's Name Change

After wrestling with the angel and refusing to let him go, Jacob's name was changed to Israel, which means "he who struggles with God."

From what we have seen of Jacob's life so far, can you see how he has struggled with God, refusing to let go? Do you think this is a picture of our relationship with God as well? Do we live our lives struggling to be obedient to God's word and to consistently choose His will for our lives rather than our own?

Unspoken Words

The conversation between Jacob and Esau at their reunion has many subtle undercurrents. On the surface, it appears that Esau has forgiven Jacob for his deception and wanted to let bygones be bygones. But a more thoughtful reading might lead one to believe that Esau wanted to "escort" Jacob and his entourage, something Jacob wished to avoid. After some discussion, Esau agreed to go back to his home alone and await Jacob's arrival. Jacob, however, did not travel south toward Seir (present day Petra), where Esau lived, but west to Shechem where he had first met God about 20 years earlier. (See **Genesis 28:10-22**)

c) Jacob sent his two family groups across the Jabok river and he spent the night alone on the north side. How do we know that Jacob wrestled with an angel? What is the symbolism of "wrestling"? When the angel demanded to be let go, how did Jacob respond? What is the significance of the name "Israel"? What insight does this give you into Jacob's character?

It's apparent that the "man" was an angel (or pre-incarnate Yeshua) as the story progresses. The wrestling is symbolic of Jacob wrestling with God. Jacob was not a particularly good man and did not deserve to be blessed, but he "held on" refusing to let go until God did bless him. Thus Jacob "wrestled with God and prevailed." This is consistent with Jacob's character in desiring God's blessing more than anything else. (See Hosea's view of this incident in Hosea 12:3-4.)

"Your name will no longer be Jacob, but **Israel**, because you have struggled with God and prevailed."

Genesis 32:28

d) What does "Peniel" mean?
Peniel means the "face of God." Clearly Jacob believed his experience had been a face-to-face encounter with God.

2. Jacob meets Esau - 33:1-20

a) Notice the order in which Jacob positions his family. What does this reveal about Jacob's priorities?

Jacob put the slave girls and their children first, Leah and her children next, followed by Rachel and Joseph, exactly in the order that he valued them. Jacob clearly showed his favoritism yet again.

b) How did Jacob approach and address Esau? What was Esau's response?

Jacob "bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached" Esau. He was clearly trying to be as subservient as possible. But Esau ran to Jacob and embraced him, apparently pleased to see him.

c) Analyze the conversation between Jacob & Esau. Do you think Jacob believed that Esau had forgiven him? Why or why not?

First, Esau tried to turn down Jacob's gifts, but Jacob insisted. Then Esau suggested that they go on together. Jacob said that since he must travel slowly with the women, children, and flocks, Esau should go on without him. It would appear that Jacob was uncomfortable with Esau, maybe suspicious.

d) Jacob traveled on to Shechem. Was this on the way to Seir? What did Jacob do when he got to Shechem?

Esau went back to Seir, which was south. Jacob went to Shechem which was west. He was not headed toward Seir. He bought a plot of ground for 100 pieces of silver and set up camp and an altar, calling the place El Elohe Israel which means "God, the God of Israel." Jacob was very thankful.

3. Dinah & the Shechemites - 34:1-31

a) Who raped Dinah? When he wanted to marry her, why did he go to his father? What was the proposal that was made to Jacob? How do you think he felt about it?

Shechem, the son of Hamor (the ruler of the town), raped Dinah. He also fell in love with her and asked his father to "arrange" to get her for his wife. Hamor offered that Jacob and his sons intermarry with the Shechemites and settle in the land.

b) What was the "bride price" required by Jacob and his sons? Who suggested it? Do you think they were being deceitful from the beginning?

Jacob's sons said they would agree only if all the males in Shechem were circumcised. Verse 13 suggests they were deceitful from the beginning.

c) How did Hamor and Shechem sell the proposal to the men of their city? What happened after the Shechemites fulfilled their end of the bargain? Specifically who did the killing and who did the looting?

Shechem & Hamor told the town's people that if Jacob's family settled with them then all their livestock would become theirs. Simeon and Levi led the raid on Shechem, but all the sons took part in the looting.

d) What was Jacob's response when he found out what his sons had done? Was his reaction justified? Were his sons sorry for what they had done?

Jacob was very upset, afraid that when others in the land heard of the raid they would rise up against Jacob. While this was a distinct possibility, it showed the natural fearfulness of Jacob. His son's were not at all repentant.

4. Jacob returns to Beth-el - 35:1-29

a) God tells Jacob to go to Beth-el. What reasons do you think Jacob might have had to want to do this anyway?

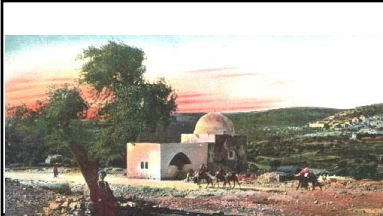
Jacob probably wanted to leave the area of Shechem because of the actions of his sons. Bethel was also the site where Abram built an altar and worshiped God when he first arrived in Israel (Genesis 12:8, 13:3) as well as where Jacob made his vow to God after leaving his home (Genesis 28:19). Bethel was about 20 - 30 miles south of Shechem (Nablus).

Joseph's Tomb

Jacob's purchase of this plot of land near Shechem is recorded here for posterity. According to **Joshua 24:32**, when the Israelites came to this site after the Exodus, they constructed a tomb to hold the bones of Joseph, which they brought with them from Egypt. This land and Joseph's tomb can be visited today near the city of Nablus, the modern name for Shechem.

Jacob's Dysfunctional Family

Notice the role that Jacob's sons played in the discussions with Shechem and Hamor concerning their sister, Dinah. It seems clear that Simeon and Levi had a more sinister motive than did Jacob. After they had led their murderous raid on the Shechemites, Jacob seemed justifiably upset and angry with Simeon and Levi. What was Jacob's concern? Does this seem consistent with what we know of Jacob's character up to this point?



Rachel's Tomb

A small building over Rachel's tomb is still standing on the road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, a distance of some 10 miles. The picture above showed how the tomb looked in about 1910.

b) In preparation for the return to Beth-el, Jacob cleanses his camp of all foreign idols. Where do you think these foreign idols may have come from?

Many of the idols may have come from the Shechemites. (Rachel may have still had her father's household idols as well.)

c) Jacob completes his 20+ year journey by returning to Beth-el. What things does God say to Jacob?

God renamed Jacob "Israel" and reconfirmed His promises to Abraham.

d) Where does Rachel give birth to Benjamin? What is the significance of his name?

Rachel gave birth to Benjamin on the road from Beth-el to Ephrath (Bethlehem). Rachel named her son Ben-Oni (son of my trouble) but Jacob renamed him Benjamin (son of my right hand).

e) What sin did Reuben commit?

Reuben slept with Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant and Jacob's concubine.

f) Jacob returns "home" to Hebron. Can you estimate how long he was there before Isaac died? Do you know where Isaac was buried?

Isaac died at 180 and was 60 when the twins were born. Esau had married his two Hittite wives when he was 40, before Jacob left for Padan-Aram. Jacob lived with Laban for over 20 years. Thus Isaac must have been over 120 when Jacob returned, meaning Jacob could have been in Hebron for as long as 60 years. Isaac was buried in the same cave at Machpelah where Abraham & Sarah were buried near Hebron. (Rebecca was also buried there.)

5. Descendants of Esau & History of Edom - 36:1-43

a) Verses 1-5 list the descendants born to Esau in Canaan, whereas verses 9-14 lists those born to him after he moved to Seir. Why did Esau move to Seir?

Verse 7 says that "their possessions were too great for them to remain together," so Esau moved to Seir. This is today's Petra in southern Jordan.

b) Verses 15-19 list the "chiefs of Edom" and verses 20-30 list the descendants of Seir the Horite. What does this suggest about the relationship between these two groups? Are any of the names familiar to you?

It would appear that the Horites were already living in the land when Esau arrived. Since the land was renamed Edom, it appears that Esau conquered the Horites.

c) Verses 31-43 list the "kings of Edom before any king had reigned over Israel." In what time period does this place these kings?

All of these "kings" reigned before Israel was united under King Saul. Thus this occurred between 1850 and 1030 bc.

Digging deeper

1. Analyze Jacob's character, detailing his positive character traits as well as his negative ones. Which ones do you think God valued? Does this give you any insight into the character of God? Does it help you understand how God works with us, His people?

Jacob was obviously not above deception. He paid dearly for his deception with Isaac. (His father-in-law deceived him even more.) It also seems that Jacob lived in constant fear (of his father-in-law, Laban; of his brother, Esau; of the Canaanites, and others.) But in his favor, he wanted God's blessings more than anything. He was committed to God, even though he didn't necessarily understand or obey Him. His name Israel (he struggled with God) reveals a lot about Jacob's nature and God's view of Jacob.

2. Do some personal research into the history of Edom. What interesting facts do you discover? How prominent is Edom in the history of Israel? In biblical prophecy?

One famous Edomite was Herod the Great. There are many prophecies about Edom, some already fulfilled, some yet to be fulfilled.

For further study, see

Haftarah : Hosea 11:7-12:12; Obadiah 1-21

Brit Hadashah : 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Revelation 7:1-12

A Brief History of Edom

Event	Date
Esau moves to Mount Seir Mount Seir is SE of the Dead Sea near Petra in modern Jordan (Gen 36:8-9)	~1800 BC
Moses and the Israelites travel around Edom Num 20:14-21	~1400 BC
Period of the Judges	~1400 - ~1000 BC
United Monarchy David conquers Edom (2 Sam 8:11-14)	1000 - 930 BC 990 BC
Edom rebels under Solomon (1 Kings 11:14-22)	940 BC
Divided Kingdom Jehoshaphat reconquers Edom (2 Kings 3:1-27)	930 - 587 BC 870 BC
Edom rebels after Jehoshaphat's death (2 Kings 8:16-24)	848 BC
Edom reconquered under Amaziah, named Sela (2 Kings 14:1-7)	780 BC
Edom rebels under Pekah (2 Kings 16:5-6)	735 BC
Fall of Northern Kingdom	~720 BC
Fall of Jerusalem Edomites rejoice over fall of Jerusalem, take over the Negev (Ps 137:7)	587 BC
Invasion by Nabateans of Arabia	~400 BC
Idumaea conquered by John Hyrcanus Forced conversion to Judaism, i.e., circumcision	125 BC
Antipater, Herod, etc. - famous Idumaeans	~ 100 BC

The History of Edom

The nation of Edom figures prominently in the history of Israel. The two nations were often at war, and seldom did peaceful relations exist between them. The Prophets also had much to say about Edom. They spoke not only of the historical aspects but also the symbolic aspects. God always recognized that the Edomites and the Israelites were brothers because Esau and Jacob were brothers. Today, some people believe that the Palestinian people are the descendants of the Edomites.