SUMMARY OF PARASHAT VAYISHLACH

Jacob returns to the land of Israel after spending 20 years in the house of his uncle Laban, in the city of Haran (in southern Turkey). Arriving in Israel, Jacob sends emissaries to Esav, his brother, to notify him of his return. The messengers inform Jacob that Esav, who had sworn to kill Jacob for taking his birthright, is arriving with 400 (armed?) men. Jacob suspects the worst and strategically prepares. He divides his family in case Esav attacks him; he prays to God for his protection and sends Esav a generous gift, hundreds of animals, to try to appease him.

Jacob spends the night crossing the river and moving his family and property from one side to the other. Before crossing for the last time, he is confronted by an angel (or a man sent by God), who fights with him, and defeats him. Jacob acquires his new name, “Israel,” which means “the one who fights against who is stronger than him and prevails”.

Jacob and Esav finally meet. Jacob kneels 7 times before Esav, in the act of submission and as if asking for forgiveness, and treats him with the greatest possible honor and deference. The brothers eventually reconcile and greet each other warmly. Eisav invites Jacob to live with him, but Jacob very diplomatically declines the invitation.

Jacob travels to Sukkot, reaches Shechem, and purchases land near the city. His daughter Dina is kidnapped and raped by the crown prince of Shechem. Two of Jacob’s sons, Shimon and Levi, convince the inhabitants of Shechem to be circumcised. And then, taking advantage of his convalescence, they destroy the city and all the men in it.

Jacob leaves Shechem and goes to Bet-El. God reveals himself

to Jacob and promises that he will inherit the land of his fathers. Jacob builds an altar. Rachel, his beloved wife, dies giving birth to her second son, Binyamin, and she is buried in a tomb near Bet Lechem. Jacob finally arrives in Hebron and meets his father, Isaac (his mother had already passed away), who dies at 180. The Parasha ends by mentioning the wives, children, and descendants of Esav, who founded the nation of Edom.