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). When he arrives, he sends messengers to his brother Esav to let him know he is back. The messengers report that Esav, who had sworn to kill Jacob for taking his birthright, is coming with 400 (armed?) men. Jacob fears the worst and prepares carefully. He divides his family in case Esav attacks, prays to God for protection, and sends Esav a generous gift of hundreds of animals to try to appease him.

Jacob spends the night crossing the river, moving his family and possessions from one side to the other. Before crossing for the last time, he is confronted by an angel (or a man sent by God). They wrestle, and Jacob prevails. Jacob receives a new name, “Israel,” meaning “the one who fights someone stronger than himself and prevails.”

Jacob and Esav finally meet. Jacob bows down seven times before Esav, in submission and as if asking forgiveness, and treats him with the greatest honor and deference. The brothers reconcile and greet each other warmly. Esav invites Jacob to live with him, but Jacob very diplomatically declines.

Jacob travels to Sukkot, reaches Shechem, and buys 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 men of Shechem to be circumcised. Then, while the men are still recovering, they destroy the city and kill all its men.

Jacob leaves Shechem and goes to Bet-El. God appears 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 is buried near Bet Lechem. Jacob finally reaches Hebron and is reunited with his father Isaac (his mother had already passed away), who dies at 180. The Parasha ends by listing the wives, children and descendants of Esav, who founded the nation of Edom.