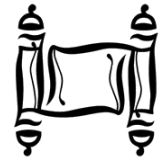




# Shabbat Table Talk Page



## General Questions:

- What's the *name* of this week's Torah reading? (Vayishlach / וַיִּשְׁלַח)
- What does the Hebrew name *mean*? (“and he sent,” from שְׁלַח, “to send”)
- Which chapters of the Torah are included in the reading? (Gen. 32:3-36:43)
- What are some of the main events? (Jacob sends messengers to Esau; Esau mobilizes an army to meet Jacob; Jacob wrestles with the Angel and is renamed Israel; Jacob meets Esau; Dinah is defiled; Jacob returns to Bethel; Rachel dies giving birth; Jacob returns home; Isaac dies)

## Specific Questions:

- Why was Jacob afraid of Esau? (Because Jacob stole the birthright and blessing)
- To whom did Jacob send messengers to make peace? (Esau)
- What did the messengers come back and tell Jacob? (That Esau was coming to fight with 400 men)
- What three things did Jacob do to prepare for this? (He prepared gifts for Esau; he prayed for salvation, and he split up his camp into groups so that one could escape)
- Who did Jacob fight when he went back across the Jabbok river, and who won? (He wrestled with the Angel of the LORD; Jacob won the match but was injured in his hip)
- What are we not allowed to eat in memory of this event? (*Gid hanasheh*: the vein of the thigh)
- What new name did the Angel give Jacob? (Israel, meaning “one who contends with God”)
- Why didn't the Angel tell Jacob his name? (Because he was *Hameforash*- YHVH)
- What did Esau do when he finally met Jacob? (He kissed him, though in the Torah scroll the word for “and he kissed him” (i.e., *vayisha-kehu*: וַיִּשָּׂקְחוּ) is marked with a dot over each letter).
- What did Simeon and Levi do to the city of Shechem, and why? (They killed the inhabitants of the city because the prince of the city (Hamor) abducted Dinah)
- What did Jacob say in response to their actions? (“You made me ugly in the eyes of the land”)
- To whom did Rachel give birth in this Torah portion? (Benjamin)
- What did Rachel call her second son? (Ben-Oni, “son of my sorrow,” though Jacob renamed him as *Ben-Yamin*, “son of my right hand”)
- Who was buried on the road to Bethlehem and why? (Rachel, so that when the Jews were sent into exile they would pass by her grave and she would cry out for their return)
- Why did Rachel die so young? (Because Jacob cursed the one who stole Laban's idols)
- What did Reuben do after Rachel died? (He “moved Jacob's bed” from the tent of Bilhah to the tent of Leah; Reuben supposedly did so to honor his mother)
- How old was Isaac when he died? (180 years old) *Bonus*: When did Rebekah die?



### Some Discussion Ideas:

- Why was Jacob terrified of his brother Esau when he had earlier been promised by God to watch over him? (Gen. 28:12-19).
- Did Jacob's vow ("IF God will help me... THEN the Lord will be my God") suggest that he had *reservations* about God's ability to fulfill His word? (Gen. 28:20-22)
- Jacob prepared "and sent" (*vayishlach*) gifts to Esau in the hope that this might "appease" his anger. Note that the word translated "appease" comes from the verb *kafar* (כָּפַר), from which the word "atonement" is derived (i.e., *kippur*: כִּפּוּר). Does this imply that Jacob needed to *atone* for his sins against his brother? (Gen. 32:13-20)
- After Jacob met with Esau and the two were apparently reconciled, why did Jacob tell his brother that he would later join him in Seir, when he actually went and settled near Shechem (Gen. 33:1-17)? Was Jacob being dishonest? If so, were the brothers *truly* reconciled?
- On his deathbed, Jacob expressed horror over the violence of Simeon and Levi regarding their killing of the inhabitants of Shechem, and he prophesied that they would be "scattered throughout Israel" (Gen. 49:5-7). However Moses and Aaron later descended from Levi, and the Levites became the honored Torah teachers of Israel. What happened to Jacob's prophecy: "Let not my soul come into their assembly?"
- After the ordeal of the abduction of Dinah, God commanded Jacob to leave Shechem and return to Bethel to fulfill the vow he had made earlier. Before leaving, however, Jacob commanded the members of his clan to bury all their idols (i.e., "foreign gods"). Why would Jacob's camp include the presence of these idols? Moreover, why didn't he destroy these idols but instead only buried them under a tree? (Gen. 35:1-5)
- After Jacob built an altar at Bethel, Rebekah's nurse Deborah died and was buried beside an oak tree there. Why was Deborah accompanying Jacob when he returned to Bethel? (Gen. 35:6-8)
- At Bethel, God extended the oath of Abraham to Jacob a second time and renamed him "Israel" (Gen. 35:9-15). What connection is there between this event and the Angel of the LORD's renaming of Jacob found earlier (Gen. 32:27-28)?
- After they left Bethel, Rachel died during childbirth on the way to Bethlehem. Why did Jacob decide to bury her there instead of taking her to be buried with the other matriarchs at the Cave of Machpelah? (Gen. 35:16-21)
- Immediately following Rachel's death, Reuben went and "laid with Bilhah his father's concubine" (Gen. 35:22). The midrash says that this means that after Rachel's death, Jacob "moved his bed" from Rachel's tent to that of Bilhah's, and this so upset Reuben that he took his father's bed and moved it into the tent of Leah. What is the motive behind the midrash?
- The portion ends with the genealogy of Esau, otherwise known as Edom, whose descendants became an ongoing enemy of the Jewish people (Gen. 36). Jewish tradition sometimes links Edom with the Roman Empire and therefore regards Hitler as a "child of Rome." Indeed, post-Holocaust theology has been often expressed as a "theology of protest." Why was Hitler given the power to murder so many Jewish lives, including the lives of over a million Jewish children? Why does God allow the wicked to have power in this world, especially when we are taught to pray, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven?"