

# Don't Get Ahead

## Genesis 25:21-23; 27:35-41; 32:3-23; 33:1-11

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#### I. Promise (Genesis 25)

##### Promise is Generational and Supernatural

1. *And Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.* Genesis 25:21 [NASB1995]

##### A. Rebekah was barren (21)

- a. God supernaturally provided a son for **Isaac**. Like Sarah, **Rebekah** was **barren** (v. 21) even though God promised that nations would stem from Abraham! In contrast with Abraham (16:1–4), Isaac **prayed**, and God responded.
- b. God promised nations from Abraham

##### B. God supernatural provided twins

- a. They struggled inside her (22)
  - i. His supernatural work. God later gave Israel, His elect nation, the promise. But it would not come without Israel's struggle.
  - ii. She Inquired of the Lord (22)
  - iii. Two nations in her womb (23)
    1. One people shall be stronger
    2. Older serving younger
    3. God reversed the natural order of blessing
    4. God's fulfillment of His promise to Abraham was carried out by His election of Jacob (later, the nation Israel). At the same time, on the human side, prayer was necessary (v. 21).

##### C. Trying to Get Ahead- Genesis 27

- a. Rebekah and Jacob Deceive
- b. Esau sold birthright
- c. Jacob deceived Isaac v.35
- d. Esau bore a grudge v.41

## II. Out Strategize (Genesis 32:1–21)

*Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord, who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will make you prosper.’*  
Genesis 32:9

- e. Jacob's Fear of Esau—Refers to Him as lord (4)
  - i. Jacob’s opening words thus hint at his fearfulness and guilty conscience,
  - ii. The list of Jacob’s acquisitions resembles 12:16; 30:43. He is not boasting but seeking to impress his brother, “in order to find favor with you.”
- f. Defensive Efforts—With an Escape plan for one camp (7–8)
  - i. But fear does not paralyze Jacob; he acts decisively in an attempt at least to salvage something should Esau attack. Splitting his party into two camps may at least allow the rear one to escape. But the mention of two camps recalls the place he has just been to, “Mahanaim,” lit “two camps” (32:2–3 [1–2]).
- g. Calls to the Lord (9–12)
- h. Sends Gifts (13)
  - i. It could be that Jacob was, through this gesture, declaring himself Esau’s vassal (cf. 2 Kgs 17:3; Hos 10:6; so Jacob), or even that he was symbolically returning the blessing he had stolen from Esau (cf. 33:11; cf. Josh 15:19; Judg 1:15). But whatever the symbolism, Jacob’s motive was quite clear: “to mollify him.... Perhaps he will accept me” (v 21).
  - ii. V.20 The sacrificial overtones of “mollify” and “accept” have already been noted. Their exact meaning in sacrificial texts has been much discussed and is not of great moment here. Probably “mollify” (piel of כפר) is related to the noun “ransom” from the same root. In OT law, some capital crimes could be commuted by payment of a ransom

## III. Promise Remains (Genesis 33:1-18)

*So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”* Genesis 27:41 [NASB1995]

A. Bowed seven times

- i. What is more, “he bowed down seven times until he reached his brother.” Sevenfold bowing was the proper act of respect of a vassal to his overlord, as the Amarna letters
  - ii. In bowing down before his brother, Jacob is doing more than acknowledging Esau’s lordship; he is trying to undo the great act of deception whereby he cheated Esau of his blessing. Throughout this scene, he insists on making presents to Esau in an attempt to return to him the blessing (cf. 33:11) that should have been his.
  - iii. Esau ran, embraced, fell on his neck, kissed, and wept. (4)
  - iv. Jacob insisted on finding favor with goods (5–11)
    - a. But it may also well be that he wants to avoid any reference to that unhappy day when he cheated Esau out of his blessing. By word and gesture, prostrating himself and giving gifts, he is trying to undo his sins of many years earlier.
- B. Esau returned on the way to Seir (16)
- i. **15** Esau responds to Jacob’s gift of herds by offering him land, by inviting him to come with him to the land of Seir (v 12). But Jacob courteously, note “my lord” (vv 13–15), rejects the offer, ostensibly because his group of children and animals could not keep up with Esau’s band of warriors (v 13).
  - ii. There could be a theological reason too; Jacob is returning at the LORD’s instruction to his homeland of Canaan, which does not include Seir (cf. 31:3, 13; 32:10). These different motives are not mutually exclusive, and the uncertainty in which the narrative leaves us is no doubt deliberate. Relations between Israel and Edom were uncertain at the best of times.