Hi,

Not much in the way of updates today:

* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

How does Joseph of the “Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat” end up in Egypt? Secrets and lies. What ruins so much of our world? Secrets and lies.

***Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 (NRSV)***

**Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived as an alien, the land of Canaan. This is the story of the family of Jacob.**

**Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father’s wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.**

**Now his brothers went to pasture their father’s flock near Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.” He answered, “Here I am.” So he said to him, “Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock; and bring word back to me.” So he sent him from the valley of Hebron.**

**He came to Shechem, and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, “What are you seeking?” “I am seeking my brothers,” he said; “tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.” The man said, “They have gone away, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’ ” So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them at Dothan. They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams.” But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore; and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.**

**Then they sat down to eat; and looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, balm, and resin, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers agreed. When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.**

How could things have gotten so bad between Joseph and his brothers? Is it really all about a dream and a father’s favoritism? The story of Abraham’s family helps us understand that there is much more to this. So, let’s try to imagine some of the family dynamics among the twelve brothers, as we look back over the stories of the last few days.

The brothers’ grandmother, Rebekah, conspired with their father, Jacob, to steal the birthright and blessing that their grandfather, Isaac, intended for Jacob’s older twin brother, Esau. When Esau threatened to kill his brother for the theft, Jacob fled to Haran, the family’s ancestral home.

When Jacob got to Haran and met his uncle, Laban, the tables were turned. This time, Jacob was the deceived rather than the deceiver. Though Jacob loved Laban’s daughter, Rachel, he was tricked into first marrying her older sister, Leah, whom he did not love and never would. Jacob pressed on in his quest to marry Rachel and ended up marrying *both* sisters, sacrificing fourteen years of his life to gain the beautiful Rachel as his bride. Not surprisingly, the two sisters soon found themselves enmeshed in a bitter rivalry over who would give Jacob sons, for there must yet be a family built on God’s promises to Abraham.

Because Leah was unloved, God blessed her with a child and then another . . . and another . . . and another. Four sons in all -- while Rachel remained childless. Envious of her sister, Rachel sent in her maid to get pregnant by Jacob. Bilhah had two sons which Rachel could legally claim as her own. Leah, fearing that she would fall behind in the baby race, sent in her own maid, Zilpah, who had two more sons. Leah herself then gave birth to two more sons and a daughter named Dinah. After all this, God finally blessed Rachel with a child of her own, whom she named Joseph.

Remembering Jacob’s sacrifice of fourteen years to be married to Rachel, it isn’t hard to imagine how he must have felt when Rachel was finally able to give birth herself. It is as if Joseph was the fruit of their long and troubled love. And when Rachel later dies during the birth of her second son, Benjamin . . . well, who can really blame Joseph for picking favorites.

But what stories were told about all this. Told to and among the brothers. What were things really like between Isaac and Rebekah after her betrayal, or between Rebekah and her son, Esau? What were the grandchildren told about their mothers’ rivalries and their father’s love for only one? Who told them the stories?

It is pretty easy to imagine the family dynamics that swirled around those children as they grew up. The accusations that were made. The resentments that were harbored. None of the boys was Joseph’s full brother. Only he was the product of Jacob and Rachel’s love. Surely, Leah’s sons knew that their father didn’t love their mother. The cycle of deceit and envy that began with Esau and Jacob now reaches full flower.

*Deception piled on deception*

The stories of Jacob and his family are of one deception piled on another. The brothers conspire to kill Joseph and toss him into a dry cistern. They will simply lie and say that animals got him. One of them, Reuben, talks them all into not killing Joseph but simply leaving him in the hole . . . as if that is much better!

Then Judah has either a pang of conscience or sniffs the scent of opportunity. Some Ishmaelite traders have wandered by and Judah urges the brothers to spare Joseph and sell him into slavery. See, Joseph can live *and* the brothers can reap a windfall. A clever head and a cold heart.

Of course, the brothers must come up with a cover story. So Jacob the deceiver is deceived yet again. The brothers tell their father that Joseph has been killed and they even produce the boy’s beautiful coat, now covered in goat’s blood. Jacob would never be the same and would cling even more tightly to young Benjamin, the last remaining child of his beloved Rachel. Meanwhile, Joseph makes his way to slavery in Egypt.

Randy Pautsch, of “The Last Lecture” fame, died some years ago after a hard battle with pancreatic cancer. He said that if he could give his kids only three words of advice they would be, “tell the truth” and if he got three more, it would be “all the time.” So much pain and heartache are born out of the deceptions in these stories. And yet, God’s purposes move forward. Abraham will have his large family, descendants that outnumber the stars. Despite our secrets and lies, God works through us all. We worship an amazing God who loves us more and puts up with more from us than we really know.

*A bit more: twelve brothers and twelves tribes*

In all, Jacob had twelve sons:

*Leah* – Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun

*Rachel* – Joseph aand Benjamin

*Zilpah* (Leah’s maid) – Gad and Asher

*Bilhah* (Rachel’s maid) – Dan and Naphtali

When the Israelites’ settle in Canaan, the land is divided among the tribes. However, following the Law of Moses, the tribe of Levi (one of Leah’s sons) was to be the priestly tribe and was to get no land.

Thus, you’d think that there would then be eleven tribes with land. However, perhaps to maintain the “twelve,” the land that would go to Joseph’s tribe actually went to his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, the children of Joseph’s Egyptian wife. This is how the lists of tribes in the book of Numbers are built.

In the end, two tribes settle in the south of Canaan (Judah and Benjamin) and the other ten settle in the north. After the death of King Solomon, the ten northern tribes separate from the southern tribes and form the Kingdom of Israel. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin then become the Kingdom of Judah. And in 722BC, the ten northern tribes are overrun by the Assyrians and disappear from the pages of history. The ideal of twelve would stay with the Israelites even into the New Testament, for Jesus gathered around himself an inner circle of twelve disciples.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott