

Update for the 3/7/19 (third and final) session of CSAIR course on Homer's *Odyssey*

Richard Sacks, Columbia University

My current plan for our third and final session – that of Thursday March 7 – is to split our time between getting a handle on the end of the *Odyssey* and thinking about ways in which the *Odyssey* resonates with issues *Genesis* is tackling. With that plan in mind, here is a list of passages-based questions for the *Odyssey* which might prove useful and provocative. And as with the second session, I have also posted a handout with excerpts from some of the *Odyssey* passages (I'm assuming you all have a text of *Genesis* at your disposal). Looking forward to seeing you all again on March 7!

Odyssey passage-based questions:

- 1) What do you make of **the two extended scenes with Odysseus and Penelope in book 19** (19.102-360 and 19.508-599)? More specifically:
 - 1A) What do you make of the two lies Odysseus tells Penelope (at 19.165-203 and 19.261-307) during the first of their extended scenes together in book 19?
 - 1B) What do you make of Penelope's long speech to Odysseus (19.509-553) at the beginning of their second extended scene together in book 19? In particular, what do you make of the simile Penelope uses at 19.518-529 and of the dream she tells Odysseus at 19.535-553?
- 2) What do you make of **the various scenes between Penelope and Odysseus in book 23**, with the suitors now dead? More specifically:
 - 2A) What do you make of Penelope's trick-of-the-bed and her ensuing speech at 23.209-230?
 - 2B) What do you make of the simile of 23.233-240?
 - 2C) What do you make of the final speech of book 23 (spoken by Odysseus at 23.350ff.)?
- 3) What do you make of **Odysseus in the poem's final book** (book 24)? More specifically:
 - 3A) What do you make of the scene narrating the reunion of Odysseus with his father (24.205ff.)?
 - 3B) What do you make of the poem's final scene and lines (24.472ff.)?

In terms of moving on to **comparisons with issues with which *Genesis* is wrestling**, I am anxious to avoid limiting the focus of our comparisons. So let's agree that anything in *Genesis* will be fair game. That said, I will at least note the following:.

- A) The Abraham sequence begins in earnest with God's command to Abram to hit the road (*lekh lekha* at 12.1ff), which is then followed in the second half of chapter 12 by the first of the two journeys in which he tells Sarai/h to say she's his sister (the second is the Abimelech scene at 20.1ff.). Any thoughts on the evolutions of God and/or Abraham in that sequence from God's first speech to Abraham at 12.1ff. up through that second say-you're-my-sister scene, which is of course followed by the pivotal events of chapters 21 and 22: the expulsion of Ishmael (21.9ff.) and the near-sacrifice of Isaac (22.1ff.)?
- B) Jacob's first encounter with God occurs during his "stairway-of-angels" dream at Bethel (28.10ff.) after he has to leave home because of Rebekah's fear of Esau's anger toward Jacob. Note that Jacob returns to Bethel on God's orders in chapter 35 (immediately following the Dinah disaster of chapter 34), and when he gets to Bethel this time, God tells him (35.10): "You whose name is Jacob, / You shall be called Jacob no more, / But Israel shall be your name." But of course his name had already been changed from Jacob to Israel at 32.25ff. during his "wrestling-till-dawn" scene the night before his encounter with Esau (the first since they both left home). Any thoughts on Jacob's evolution in the sequence from when he first leaves home in chapter 28 through the first articulation of the name change in 32, the scene with Esau in 33, the Dinah scene in 34, and finally the second stop – and re-changing of his name – at Bethel in 35?