

The Book of Genesis

Jacob

Interpreting the Text:

1. Is Jacob ultimately a sympathetic character? What about Esau? What verses indicate how the author feels about these two, or wants us to feel about them?
2. In Scripture, the people of Israel are never related to Canaanites or Egyptians. Recent scholarship shows that Israelites were a specific group of Canaanites. Why was it so important that their stories differentiate them from these particular neighbors?
3. Dr. Baden talks about 'fictive kinship' or the stories we tell to explain some shared ancestry. How does this practice function in the story of the descendants of Abraham (or Isaac, or Jacob)? How does a family story become a national narrative?

Applying the Text:

1. What does it mean for the hero of the story, and the namesake of Israel, to be a trickster? What does it mean for God to have chosen the cheater to be the successful son?
2. Jacob ultimately wrestles with God – literally. It can sometimes feel like we are wrestling with our faith. How can Jacob's chosenness, cheating, and eventual wrestling help us think about how we relate to God?
3. Jacob provides a rich character that changes and evolves over the course of his life. What can these imperfect figures tell us about the people of God? How might our ability to relate to Jacob impact our relationship with God?

Yale Divinity School, 409 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06511
www.yalebiblestudy.org