

THREE SAMPLES OF INTRO TO BIB LIT BIBLE STUDY ASSIGNMENTS:

Note: The questions being answered will not necessarily be the ones on this semester's Bible Study Assignments for this class. These are not necessarily the "best" papers received but are papers that meet the course expectations.

SAMPLE #1

Exodus 1:1-22

1. What is the geographical, historical, cultural, and religious setting of this narrative?

The setting is Egypt, where the Israelites had gone to survive a famine. The story takes place after the death of Joseph. A new pharaoh had come into power and had begun to oppress the Israelites due to their growing numbers. The Israelites at this point were trying to maintain their identity as a people who served the one all-powerful God of their father Abraham even though they lived among polytheistic pagans.

2. Who are the key characters in this story? What is the role of each of these characters in this narrative?

The Pharaoh, midwives, and the Israelites all play key roles in this story. The Israelites are a thriving and growing people who are serving their God and multiplying without intentionally disturbing the people amongst whom they were living. The Pharaoh is a ruler who has just come into power and is afraid of this group of people who are becoming all too numerous for his liking. He decides the best way to keep this large group of people from threatening his newly obtained throne is to subject them to forced labor. When he realizes that, even though oppressed, the Israelites were continuing to prosper, he turns to genocide, ordering the Hebrew midwives to kill all male Israelite babies. When this attempt also fails, he resorts to having all of the Egyptians carry out his genocide. Then you have the Hebrew midwives who are God-fearing women that are told by Pharaoh to kill male Israelites being born in their care. The midwives, being women of faith, do not follow through with the orders of the Pharaoh, telling him that the babies are being born before they are able to get there.

3. Based on 1:1-7, what does this story say about God and the power of His blessing given to the patriarchs in Genesis?

God displays "the power of His blessing" by empowering and allowing the Israelites to grow, to prosper, and to become numerous even through a great famine and a later attempt at wiping out an entire generation.

4. What are the social and political realities described in verses 8-14?

In verses 8-14 we can see displayed just how much power the Pharaoh had over the inhabitants of Egypt as well as a kind of mob-mentality amongst the Egyptians. It sadly displays how political propaganda can turn entire a people against another through falsehoods. It also shows how the Egyptians were easily convinced that the Israelites were a people to be feared and how once they were convinced of that, their fears grew far beyond reason as the Israelite people multiplied. In a

nutshell, these verses show how a ruthless political power can use its people to carry out its dirty work in order to stay in power.

5. Based on verse 12, how did God respond to the social and political oppression by the ruling class that is threatening to weaken and marginalize Israel?

God enabled the Israelite people to prosper in the midst of their persecution. The more the Israelites were oppressed, the more blessings God poured out on them, building them up and driving fear into the hearts of their oppressors.

6. How did the midwives who feared the Lord respond to the royal decree? What hope did they display for the future of their nation?

They did not allow the Pharaoh to rule over their lives. They knew who it was that they served and they followed through on what they believed their Lord would have them do. These midwives stood up, in a sense, to the Pharaoh and followed the Lord instead. In the end they were blessed abundantly for their courage and faith. This display of courage and faith showed the Israelite people that they did not have to be oppressed by the Pharaoh forever, that the Lord would bless and protect those who follow Him, delivering them from their oppressor.

SAMPLE #2

Joshua 24:14-15

1. What is the historical, cultural, and religious setting of this passage?

In this passage the Lord had already brought the Israelites out of Egypt and then caused them to wander in the desert for forty years for turning against Him. Moses had died and left Joshua to take his place. Joshua had brought the Israelite people into the land that God promised them. We then meet up with Joshua as he is delivering his final speech before he dies. At this point the Israelite people are beginning to really get settled in their new home. They are very comfortable having Joshua as their leader and they are thriving as God promised they would, dominating the inhabitants of the land and living in a land flowing with milk and honey. God here, through Joshua's final speech gave the Israelite people a renewal of the covenant that he made with Abraham, their ancestor.

2. What is the literary setting of this passage (the text that comes before and the text that follows the passage of your study)?

The literary setting for this passage is a time after God has delivered the Israelites out of Egypt, had them to wander in the desert for forty years for their disobedience, while still providing for them by giving them manna daily. Moses has been shown the promise land, but dies before setting foot in it and Joshua has taken charge. Joshua has sent two spies to survey the land they are to enter and this is where we have the story of Rahab giving the spies safe shelter and protecting them and in return gaining protection when the Israelites overtake Jericho. Before entering the Promised Land, Joshua circumcises the Israelite people a second time, for those born

in the time of wandering were not yet circumcised. Joshua then destroys Jericho by marching around it and making a loud noise which causes the walls to crumble. Then, in the text under consideration, Joshua is far along in years and is delivering his final speech to the Israelite people in which God is renewing his covenant of Abraham with the Israelite people. In the passages that follow this text, the Israelite people turn away from God after the death of Joshua and do what is evil in God's eyes. For their trespasses, God gives them into the hands of the Midianites for seven years. Then after these seven years have passed we find God commissioning Gideon, Joshua's son, to deliver Israel from the hands of the Midianite people. Gideon is successful in his deliverance and he honors God and the Israelite people once again are fruitful and thrive in the land given to them by God. After the death of Gideon the people of Israel once again relapse into sinful ways. This pattern continues for some time, with the people repenting and following and then relapsing, after the death of a leader, and turning away from.

3. Identify the key action words in this passage and describe how they relate to Joshua's challenge to Israel?

I believe that by identifying the action words in this passage we are ultimately identifying the challenge that Joshua is making. He is urging the Israelite people to *revere* God and *serve* him only by *putting away* the gods of others, but if they will not, then they must *choose* what god they will serve. Joshua though, makes it clear that he and his house will be *servicing* the God of Abraham, the one true God. Joshua challenges the Israelites to serve God whole-heartedly and without wavering, or to turn away from God and not make hypocrites of the Israelite people.

4. What is the significance of the word *serve* in this text? How should one serve the Lord? What is the historical and theological basis for this call to "serve"? (see vv. 2-13)

Serve is exactly what Joshua is calling to Israelite people to do, he is calling them to serve the God of Abraham. One should serve the Lord with fear and trembling. One should serve God consistently and whole-heartedly through actions and deeds and well as with ones thoughts and attitudes. Historically God took Abraham and taught him to cast away other gods. The Lord blessed Abraham abundantly and set him and his descendants aside as a special people who were to serve God alone. This calling to serve is reiterated throughout the Bible, most obviously through Christ's Great Commission. Our calling to be servants of the Lord and of Him alone is of great importance. We are to serve God continuously through everything we do, think and say. We are to worship or serve God unceasingly to give him all of the honor and glory.

5. What are the choices that Joshua has placed before Israel? What are the implications of these choices?

Joshua gives two very distinct choices to the Israelites, either turn away from idol worship and serve the true God of Abraham, or choose to serve the gods of the pagans. That is it, one or the other, you must choose, for the God of Abraham is a jealous God. Therefore you cannot be lukewarm. You must completely serve the Lord God, or you must not attach yourselves to Him for He is jealous and will hold that against you.

6. Why did Joshua set an example for the Israelites? What did it mean for Joshua's descendants?

The Israelites were an inconsistent people who turned to idol worship at the slightest inclination that something might not be as they would hope for it to be. Therefore, Joshua needed to set an example for them so that they could know what it was to truly serve God. The challenge he set before them was to turn away from their tendencies to disobey God and remain steadfast in serving Him with all of themselves.

7. What is the theological challenge of this text to modern readers?

This text challenges us as Christians today to not be lukewarm, to not be hypocritical and end up defaming the title of Christian. We must either be working towards being more and more Christ-like everyday through faith as well as works, or we must be away from God and not try to cover ourselves with the title of Christian.

8. Discuss practical ways to fulfill the call to serve God in our day. What are the hindrances to serving God today? How do we respond to Joshua's challenge today?

We are called to live out our Christianity in this world in which we live. We can do so in many ways, including donating and going out and delivering food to those who are in need. We can write encouraging letters to those who are on death row; we can tutor kids who impoverished and uneducated; we can reach out and touch someone who is hurting or in need. We can pray for others with an earnest heart and we can love on everyone around us, because God is love and that is what He calls us to do, love one another. We often excuse the fulfillment of our call due, giving selfish excuses that rarely amount to much. We get distracted in our daily lives and forget or are too lazy to reach out. We say we are too busy or don't have the resources to contribute. We claim many different reasons for not fully serving God, and then we turn around and convince ourselves that they are legitimate reasons and we go about our lives never truly serving God and never being able to enjoy the blessings and happiness that come with serving and glorifying our creator.

SAMPLE # 3

Isaiah 40:1-11

1. Discuss the scholarly perspective on the historical, political, religious, and cultural setting of this passage.

As we enter into this passage we have the divided kingdoms of Judah and Israel who are both being threatened by the expanding Assyrian power. Isaiah was the councilor to both King Ahaz (735-717 B.C) and King Hezekiah (715-690 B.C.). Isaiah was also a great prophet during the reign of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Israel at this time has disobeyed God and rebelled against him and the Lord is using Isaiah to warn his people and tell them that he is still willing to forgive them if only they would repent of their sins and return to his right and just ways.

2. What is the literary and theological relationship of this text to chapter 39 and 40:12-31?

In chapter 39 and prior we have the story of God's people rebelling and disobeying the Lord and then from 40 and on we are given the story of God's continuous love for his people and his forgiving them for their rebellious ways. This is an obvious display of the salvation story, one of rebellion and forgiveness. In chapters 1-39 Isaiah writes about the rebellion and judgment of God's people, he is fiery and aggressive in his writing. In chapters 40 and onward the writing tone is changed to a more subtle, gentle, and mellow tone as Isaiah is now getting on in age and is writing about the redemption of God's people and their deliverance out of the hands of the Babylonians.

3. Outline the text based on the sub themes of this text.

In versus 1-5 Isaiah is speaking about God comforting his people. He announces the end to the suffering of Jerusalem, he conveys a message of God's covenant being renewed and fulfilled, and he calls the people to repent and set right their rebellious ways. In Isaiah 6-8 Isaiah writes about how the word of the Lord stands forever. It speaks of how we are a broken people who are worthless in this life without God and how we are a wavering and inconstant people, but the Lord is a consistently loving and forgiving God whose ways are perfect. Isaiah 9-11 speaks of the greatness of God, of how he is all-powerful and he will guide and direct us. It calls God's people to lift up their praise to God without fear, for he is delivering his people of Judah. It also tells of how God is above all and is the ruler over all the earth.

4. Study the meaning of key words and phrases.

Penalty is paid- you have served your sentence for your sins and you are now forgiven.

Prepare the way of the Lord- Israel repent and make right your ways.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever- our lives are small and meaningless without God, but he is true and will consistently love and forgive us if we repent. God's way and his plans are perfect.

See, the Lord comes with might...his reward is with him...he will tend his flock- God is powerful and above all of the earth, he is willing to forgive those who repent and he will renew his covenant blessing upon his people.

5. What is God's opening message to His people? How does comfort come to God's people?

His message is one of forgiveness and a called to repent. God will renew his covenant blessing upon his people who repent and change their ways. God will comfort them and deliver them out of the hands of the Babylonians and restore them to the promise land and renew his blessing upon them.

6. What is the message conveyed by the imagery of a "highway" in the wilderness?

It is an image of God's people taking their life of rebellion, chaos, and exile and repenting, putting away their old sinful ways and asking God back into their lives. It is an image of God's people clearing a path to God by straightening out their own lives so that God may enter in and bless their lives.

7. How does the prophet contrast humanity with God's word in verse 6-8? What is the goal of this contrast?

The people are wavering and inconsistent, they praise the Lord and follow his ways one minute and the next they turn and rebel against him. In contrast the word of the Lord is ever constant and ever true. It is solid, strong, and unwavering. The message that Isaiah is trying to send is one of the stability of God and the frailty of man. That God is right, just, true, and unchanging even as man is inconsistent and rebellious.

8. How does the prophet describe God and His salvation in verse 9-11? What imagery is used here to describe God's relationship with His people?

Isaiah describes him as a powerful, firm and just God, but also uses imagery in displaying him as a shepherd guiding, nourishing, protecting, and nurturing his people. God is described as a perfect balance of might and nurture, just as his salvation is a firm one calling for repentance, but he is gentle and comforting in that as well.

9. How did the New Testament writers interpret verses 3-4? What particular theological perspective did they introduce into this text?

The New Testament writers interpreted this text as an allusion to John the Baptist who would be the one to prepare the way for the coming messiah, our Lord, Jesus Christ. The theological perspective they introduce here is one of baptismal repentance and making right what you have done wrong through this.

10. Summarize the key theological lessons of this text?

The theological lessons are those of humility before God, repentance of our sins, the forgiving power of the Lord and the salvation that he offers to his people who are willing to repent and set right their ways.

11. How do you relate the theological lessons of this text to contemporary situations?

This is an everlasting story of how man is constantly rebelling against God and his perfect plans for our lives. The people of today are no different from the people of Judah at this time. We are sinners just the same who are disobedient and constantly turning away from God, but just as the text states, God is ever constant in his willingness to forgive his people and live in relationship with them.

Outline of Isaiah 40

Comfort of God's people

- The ultimate end to Jerusalem's suffering is announced.
- God's covenant is being fulfilled.
- The people are being called to repentance and correction of their ways.

The word of God stands forever

- We are a broken people who are worthless in this life without God.

- This life we have is wavering and inconstant, but the Lord is a consistently loving and forgiving God who's ways are perfect.

The Greatness of God

- The Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is all-powerful and he will guide and direct us.
- Lift up your praise to God without fear, for he is delivering you people of Judah.
- God is above all and is ruler over all the earth.
- God is ever constant and ever true.
- God empowers the weak and gives strength to the weary, blessing and enriching the lives of his followers.