

Catholic Bible Institute
GUIDELINES for MONTHLY PAPERS:
One-Page Reflection Papers for Year 1 (Old Testament)

Levels of Interpretation:	Questions to Consider:
LITERAL	What is the biblical text <i>literally</i> about? What is the content and style of the ancient book(s)?
INTENDED	What did the ancient author(s) <i>intend</i> to say? What message did they want to give the original readers?
PERSONAL	What does the text mean to me here and now? How does it apply to <i>my own life individually</i> ?
COMMUNAL	What can we as a community do about it today? How can modern <i>Christians together</i> apply these lessons?

Note: The first two levels focus on the *ancient* world (the original author and original audience), while the last two levels focus on our *modern* world (today’s readers, individually and together).

- LITERAL:** What is the actual **content** of the text, as recorded by the biblical author? (*what historical events, people, stories are recounted; e.g., The books of Kings narrate the history of the Monarchy and the Temple.*)
 What literary style is used by the ancient author? (*narrative, poetry, letter, oracle, symbolism, etc.*)
 What important “facts” are conveyed by the notes in your Study Bible and/or our textbook?
 (e.g., *David’s son Solomon built the first temple, which was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.*)
- INTENDED:** What was the original **message** or purpose of the biblical book(s)? (*God creates, forgives, saves, etc.*)
 What lesson did the ancient writer want the original readers to learn? (*God is faithful to the chosen people, despite their human sinfulness; God cannot be contained in a building; etc.*)
 Which stories, parables, or examples in the text illustrate this message? (*Creation story, Noah’s Ark, etc.*)
- PERSONAL:** What does the biblical text say to **me personally**? How can I apply this message in my own life? (*I need to trust God’s faithfulness, acknowledge my own sins, failures or shortcomings. I need to experience God’s love, so that I can love and care for others; etc.*)
- COMMUNAL:** What does the biblical book say to **us collectively**, in the church, society, or world? (*In spite of the shortcomings of our church or nation, God loves and cares for us. Our society must care for the poor.*)
 What can we together, as a community, do about it? (*We must be good stewards of creation, using our nation’s resources for the common good. The Church needs to expand its outreach to the poor; etc.*)

Practical Tips and Instructions:

- After doing the assigned readings each month, **write a short essay (one full page)** on the assigned biblical book, covering all four levels of interpretation (the four sets of questions), as explained above.
- Each section should be clearly *labeled* (Literal, Intended, Personal, Communal), and approximately the same length (one-quarter page, or one long paragraph for each level of interpretation).
- Include a *compact header* on the top right-hand side of the page (your Name and the Date – single-spaced, so you leave plenty of room for the body of your paper), and a *brief title* for your paper.
- All papers are to be *typed*, double-spaced, on a standard page (8-1/2” by 11”), using 10 to 12 point type-size, and with one-inch margins all around (top, bottom, left, right). *See the reverse side for a sample paper.*
- Papers are due at the *beginning* of each monthly session. They will be read, commented on, and returned the following month. Papers not meeting these standards may be returned for re-writing. No certification/credit will be given for failure to do the assignments.
- For **April 16, 2011**, *instead of* writing the usual one-page reflection, you will be asked to write a slightly longer *research paper* (a separate handout will be given later, with detailed instructions on that paper).

Jane Doe
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THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

LITERAL: As part of the so-called Deuteronomistic History, the book of Joshua tells a part of the “sacred history” of the people of Israel. It covers the period from the death of Moses to the death of his successor Joshua (about 1200 BC). After the Exodus and the wandering of the Israelites in the desert for 40 years, Joshua finally leads the people into the land of Canaan, or the Promised Land. Joshua 1–12 deals with the conquest of the hill country and its native inhabitants, while chapters 12–24 describe the division of the land among the twelve tribes of Israel, ending with a covenantal renewal at Shechem (Josh 24).

INTENDED: God’s words to Abraham, promising that his descendents would inherit the Promised Land (Gen 12–25), are finally fulfilled in the book of Joshua. God wants the people to be patient and to trust in Him, rather than in their own strength. They should not fear their enemies, even when these are stronger or more numerous than they are, since God is on their side. They should also obey the law (the “Torah”) and the leaders God has chosen for the people.

PERSONAL: Reading through this book helps me to realize that God will fulfill his promises, even if it sometimes takes longer than I want or expect. Sometimes I wish I didn’t have to travel through the “desert” for so long, or that entering into the “promised land” wouldn’t be so difficult in my life. But the story of Joshua challenges me to trust that God’s strength is enough for me, and that God will help me overcome any adversity, as long as I trust in him, obey his laws, and be faithful to his covenants.

COMMUNAL: These writings are as meaningful for our Church today, as a community of faith, as they were to the people in the biblical world. We must hear them again in the midst of our own social, political, religious, and multi-cultural contexts. What constitutes covenant fidelity for our church and our nation? Do we rely too much on our own strengths, on our ways of doing things? Or can we trust in God to fulfill his promises? Our religious and civic leaders need to trust in God, as Joshua did, rather than following their own plans and ideas. We need to work to make our own country a sign of God’s goodness to us and to all people.