Tips for Writing Successful Papers

The paper assignments for this class require you to formulate a response to a particular question and to persuade your reader that your response is valid. There is no one right answer; the success of your paper will depend, rather, on how well you articulate your claim (i.e., thesis) and argue your case.

A successful paper will:

• Have an introductory paragraph. Please keep this paragraph short, however. These papers are very short and thus do not need “padding.” Get to the point quickly.

• State your claim clearly in the introductory paragraph. The claim, or thesis statement, will likely be your answer to the question posed on the assignment, but it should do more than simply reformulate the initial question. A strong claim will be arguable, i.e., another person will be able to argue the opposing view. Topics, facts, and opinions are not arguable and, therefore, not proper claims. If nobody would or could disagree with your claim, then the paper is not worth writing.

• Develop an argument in support of your claim. You must support your argument through allusion to and citation of the biblical text; a strong paper will show that you have read and synthesized the assigned readings.

• NOT include long quotations (longer than one typed line in your paper) from the Hebrew Bible or other sources. Use the space instead to analyze the text.

• Draw a conclusion. A conclusion should do more than simply restate your claim using different words. A strong conclusion may consider the implications of your argument, synthesize the points you have made in the paper, or answer the question “So what?”

• Stick to the required length, be double spaced, have 1.25 inch margins, and be printed in a legible font of normal proportions (such as 12 point).

• Look “clean”: Please carefully proofread and check your spelling.

• Be on time. Papers are due at the beginning of your section meeting.

Further Notes on Style:

1. When you quote a secondary source, you must provide footnotes.¹ (Please read footnote 1 below as an example of a proper citation.)

2. All citations from the Bible should be embedded in the text (in parentheses), like this:

Abraham sends his servant on a mission (Genesis 24:4).

or

Abraham sends “his servant on a mission” (Genesis 24:4).

Please note that the period goes AFTER the citation.

3. Biblical quotations that occupy two lines or less of your paper may be quoted in the body of your paper, like this:

Rebekah shows her eagerness to welcome the stranger when “... she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels” (Genesis 24:20).

Again, please note that the period goes AFTER the citation.

4. Biblical quotations that are longer than two lines (and this should be rare in your short reflection papers) should be offset, indented, and single-spaced, like this:

Abraham’s servant lavishes Rebekah’s family with gifts:

And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. (Genesis 24:53)

The gifts are evidence of Abraham’s wealth and are meant to ...