

Name: _____

Document Title: _____

Written Assignments #1-3

Instructions: Use this guide to help you analyze the assigned primary source document. Answer as many of the questions as you can, **using evidence from the document**. Write your answers to as many questions as possible, based on **what you see** and **what you may already know**.¹

First Impressions

1. What are your first impressions? *Draw from your previous educational and personal knowledge.*

2. What kind of document is it (letter, prayer, historical account, apocalypse, testament, narrative, etc.)? How do you know? *Clues within the text will alert you to the literary type the writer used to communicate this message.*

Looking More Closely

1. Read through the document carefully. Make a list of any unusual words, phrases, or concepts. *Does a particular expression or concept strike you as strange? Does it jump out at you?*

2. Is there a date on it? If so, what is it? If not, are there any other clues within the document that might indicate when it was written? *Documents may allude to a well-known event as if it was written during that time (which may be a deliberate device to impact how the hearer-reader understands the message). 2nd Temple writers tended to look for precedents that provided analogies for the exhortations or messages they wanted their generation to know.*

¹ Adapted and expanded from "Engaging Students with Primary Sources," Smithsonian *Natural Museum of American History*. <https://historyexplorer.si.edu/sites/default/files/PrimarySources.pdf> Accessed 12/21/2021.

3. Is there a location indicated? What is it? *Explicit locations could be Babylon or Jerusalem, for example. But the location could also indicate that the author knew Greek well, which suggests the location is outside of Judea.*

4. Who wrote or created the document? How can you tell? *If the author is stated, is it the actual person identified or is it an anonymous writer using a famous name to give the message greater authority? Is the author familiar with Jewish tradition? Is he familiar with Gentile values? There is much you can learn from the document itself even if you do not know the author's exact identity.*

5. For whom was the document written or created? How do you know? *Is the document written to or for a specific group of Jews (or Gentile readers)? Do these Jews seem to live in Palestine or in other parts of the empires in control? Look for clues like the mention of Torah, Temple, or Jewish customs. Maybe Gentile customs are mentioned (which may clue you in to a group of Jews living outside Judea). Do the Gentiles live in parts of the empire—possibly a city—or does the document just have a general audience in mind?*

6. What is the purpose of the document? What made you think this? *Are the documents written to people who are oppressed, need encouragement, need to be warned, etc.? It helps to imagine what life must be like in the era we are studying for a specific lesson.*

Thinking Further

1. What do you think the writer thought was the most important information to convey? Why? *Think theologically and/or practically.*

2. Does the document convey a certain tone? *For example, is it entertaining, humorous, encouraging, warning, etc.?*

3. Can you tell the point of view of the writer? Is it objective? *No writer is purely objective, but the document may want to portray a sense of being objective (usually historical documents such as the writings of Josephus). The point of view could be something as simple as favorable to some aspects of a foreign culture or disapproving of pagan culture.*

4. What is the writer's attitude about Israel's God or the nations' gods? How can you tell?

5. What is the writer's attitude about "Jews"? *Pay particular attention to if the writer distinguishes between Jews based on obedience, faithfulness, etc.*

6. What is the writer's attitude about "non-Jews" or those ruling them? How can you tell? *The most pressing issue for Judaism during the 2nd Temple period was the relationship of Jews with Gentiles. Their experiences vary throughout the centuries and with different writers. How is this writer relating or thinking about non-Jews?*

7. What does the writer believe about Torah (the Law)? *2nd Temple Judaism was unified in their common interest in the Mosaic Law and the idea that all forms of Judaism related to it in one way or another. The law is discussed to some degree or another throughout the Jewish corpus of 2nd Temple literature. Think about such issues as whether the author thinks the Mosaic covenant is eternal. Does he see a connection between the law and wisdom or perhaps between the Mosaic Law and the unwritten law of nature? To what extent is the Law applicable to the nations?*

8. What other customs or institutions of Judaism do the writers mention? What is his attitude toward these customs or institutions? *These can include such things as dietary laws, marriage, the Temple, the priesthood, etc.*

9. What is the attitude of the writer toward morality or natural law? How can you tell? *The writer may have a general audience in mind, or he may have a specific group he is addressing. Does he expect these groups to demonstrate morality?*

10. Does the document remind you of any biblical event, character, or book of the Bible? What made you think of those events, characters, or biblical books?

Summary Statement: How does this document give insight into the beliefs and concerns of Jews for the historical period being investigated? How does it add to what the textbooks say about the period?