

BIBLICAL STUDIES

Paper 2035/12 The Portrayal of God in the Bible
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Key messages

This was the first November session for this new syllabus. Candidates generally displayed a good overall understanding of the requirements of the syllabus and **part (c)** questions in particular showed good appreciation for the structures required for success. Candidates were not always successful in pinpointing the passage being tested in **part (a)** questions.

General comments

Part (a) questions often did not show the specific understanding required of passages. **Part (b)** questions showed good understanding of how to explain – to make information the candidate's own – and showed sensible appreciation for the context of the passages. **Part (c)** questions were generally well-structured, although some candidates needed to conclude more clearly. The conclusion must be obvious to the examiner to be able to be credited.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a) (i) Candidates either successfully identified the passage being tested or they did not. As such, there were a number of candidates who scored zero marks. Some offered general knowledge responses about the story of Abraham, rather than focusing in on the set text.
- (ii) Of those candidates who had correctly identified the passage, only some accurately answered this question. Some knew that the promise to Abram's offspring was the land of Canaan but did not know Abram's response of building an altar.
- (b) While there were some candidates who did not recognise the phrase from the syllabus 'overall plan for humanity', most were able to answer this question. Some candidates made general comments about Abraham rather than focusing on the passage being tested, which limited the marks they could achieve.
- (c) There were some excellent, thorough and thoughtful responses to this question. Candidates often approached this from the perspective of science against religion but also explored the role of Genesis in the lives of Christians, where the story of Jesus might be said to be more important. Some candidates produced interesting discussions about the importance of Christians understanding the origins of original sin.

Question 2

Responses to this question often showed a real appreciation for Paul's techniques demonstrated while he was in Athens.

- (a) (i) While some candidates did not gain marks because they did not identify the part of the passage being tested, many appreciated that Paul was being accused of speaking nonsense.

- (ii) Many responses recalled the content of the speech and were able to give four points about God from the passage. Some did not focus on teachings about God. Some answers seemed to conflate the content of Paul's other speeches.
- (b) Candidates generally understood that the elements which Paul focused on in his speech in Athens were described for the Athenian audience, and so did not try to address teachings that would be inaccessible to them (such as the resurrection). Paul used the unknown God as a 'way in' and wished to address the worship of idols.
- (c) There were some very good responses to this question that considered the extent to which Christians should focus on this world rather than the next and contrasted this with the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus leading to the resurrection of all believers – a prize that is too precious for Christians not to focus on. Some candidates limited their responses by not giving enough detail in their arguments or by not having a conclusion that was easy to identify.

Section B

Question 3

- (a) This question was designed to test a specific part of Exodus 12 and candidates sometimes needed to be mindful of reading the question carefully in order to identify the section being assessed. However, knowledge of the Passover was generally very accurate.
- (b) Candidates usually were able to explore the links between the Passover and Christian understandings of God as a Saviour. Some candidates made links to the Eucharist. Some candidates did not read the question carefully enough and talked in general terms about the significance of the Passover and some made general comments about God being a God of salvation.
- (c) Most candidates were able to attempt to answer the question by exploring the similarities and differences between God as liberator and other models of God. For example, many responses identified the act of liberation as one of love; others said that God's omnipotence was more significant. It did not matter whether the comparison was done with a focus on importance to Christians, relevance in the Bible, general coherence or something else. Weaker responses did not seem to be familiar with the term 'nature of God', which is a core phrase in the syllabus. A clear approach to structuring a response to a 'compare' question can be helpful.

Question 4

- (a) While responses occasionally focused only on general promises about covenant, most recalled the promise to David to make his name great and for his house to continue for ever. Only some candidates remembered that the offspring would be punished by a rod.
- (b) Responses ranged from very short attempts to put the promises in context to excellent explorations of the Davidic covenant from either a contemporary or modern Christian perspective or both. The best responses came from the candidates who had shown the greatest knowledge of the passage.
- (c) Candidates were generally able to explore answers to this question in detail. Most talked about the fallibility of human leadership and also the relatively approachable nature of human leaders. Some candidates challenged their own thinking by reflecting on how God is probably more approachable than human kings.

Question 5

- (a) This question required precise knowledge of Jonah's prayer in chapter 2. Many responses did not meet these requirements and candidates seemed only to know the outline of the book of Jonah.
- (b) Given knowledge of the whole story of Jonah was needed for this question, many responses were more successful than in **part (a)**. Less successful responses often repeated ideas: there is more to the story of Jonah than repentance.
- (c) Candidates were generally able to explore whether or not actions are more important than words and often linked this to Jonah. However, fewer responses focused fully on the final phrase and the

question about how best society can be improved. For example, it is all very well to talk about eradicating poverty, but actions might be argued to have more of an impact. There were some good responses that identified the important role of inspirational speakers.

BIBLICAL STUDIES

Paper 2035/22 The Portrayal of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels
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Key messages

This was the first November session for this new syllabus. Candidates need to be aware of the requirements of the syllabus so that they can identify specific passages by name as well as being clear about which Gospel's version is required knowledge. In **Section A**, some candidates gave unnecessary information for the point marked questions. Selecting information to answer the question would be a better approach than telling the whole story.

General comments

Part (b) and **(c)** responses were sometimes not specific enough in the level of detail being given, so the response read more like a list of points. The best responses to **part (c)** questions gave two clear points of view and/or a judgement. Those without this approach significantly limited the number of marks available to them, however well-written what was in their answer might have been.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a) (i) Most candidates knew that this event took place after Passover.
- (ii) This is a good example of a question where answers could have been very brief and targeted to the question, but some responses included a significant section of the passage from Luke.
- (iii) Most candidates were able to make four distinct points in answer to the question. Some responses were quite general.
- (b) Some responses confused the function of the Temple in first century Judaism with that of a synagogue, and others talked about the Temple as a Christian building. Others showed good knowledge about the Temple but did not focus enough on the importance of it.
- (c) There were many good responses exploring the extent to which this passage alone shows Jesus to be the Son of God or whether the miracles or indeed the resurrection provide the evidence required for Christians. Where responses were less effective, there was too much focus on whether or not Jesus was the Son of God rather than the passage itself.

Question 2

- (a) (i) Candidates generally answered this question accurately.
- (ii) Most candidates knew that the seed represents God's word, although some described it as representing the people.
- (iii) This was less successfully answered. Candidates often made general comments about what a parable was or made points that did not come from the text itself. The key here is that Jesus was saying that the parables hide the message from those who are not open to understanding it (or believing).

- (b) Candidates usually took the explanation of Jesus and recounted this. The best responses made that explanation their own. Some tried to give their own interpretation of the parable, often successfully but less so if they departed from the parable itself in their answers.
- (c) Responses were weaker when they did not focus on the parable of the sower but instead explored parables in general. Other responses successfully compared other parables to that of the sower, making the point that Jesus did not generally give explanations (or that they were not recorded by the evangelists). There were some interesting responses that explored the possibility that Jesus' explanation was added by the writer.

Section B

Question 3

- (a) There were some excellent answers to this question. However some candidates conflated different Gospel accounts, or described the whole passage of the crucifixion, which either affected their time management or led to them passing over the detail required in this particular question. Some did not focus in on the events that occurred at three in the afternoon.
- (b) Candidates often were able to go through the events that took place as Jesus died and suggest the significance of them. Candidates were able to access this question well even if they had not named some of these events in **part (a)**.
- (c) There were generally good responses to this question, with a range of interesting conclusions. Some candidates felt that Jesus' death and its fulfilment of the prophecies was the most significant aspect of this part of Christian belief; others believed that the possibility of heaven opened by Jesus' death is more significant.

Question 4

- (a) While candidates who knew the story answered very well, a noticeable number of responses seemed to combine Jesus' miracle stories to fit the question. Some talked in general terms about the controversy rather than describing the content of the passage required for study.
- (b) Candidates generally knew enough about Jesus' ongoing battle with the Jewish religious leaders about Sabbath laws to answer this question well. Most responses focused rightly on the key sticking point being the literal interpretation of the laws when balanced with the need to put people first.
- (c) Most candidates were able to provide a range of points of view both for and against and reach a conclusion. For many candidates, life requires a Sabbath, and many responses pointed to the need to follow the Ten Commandments literally. There was some good awareness that not all Christians mark the Sabbath in the same way.

Question 5

- (a) In order to be able to answer this question, candidates needed to be able to identify the passage from the title given to it in the syllabus. Some chose the wrong passage and achieved no marks. Candidates who did write about the friend at midnight did not always then go on to Jesus' teaching, which is part of the passage.
- (b) Candidates were able to talk generally about the power of prayer after perseverance whichever passage they had recounted in **part (a)**. There were some very good responses that explored the importance of praying without ceasing. Candidates were able to relate this to the nature of God.
- (c) There were many well-considered responses which ended up with interesting conclusions. Some candidates agreed with the suggestion in the title of the essay and pointed to the potential hypocrisy of praying for show. Others, however, pointed towards the ability for the community to pray with or over those in need of prayer.