

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2011

GCE Religious Studies
6RS02_1E
The Study of Old Testament/Jewish Bible

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AREA 1E - Old Testament

Introduction

General Comments

The Investigations Paper of June 2011 demonstrated a high level of scholarship evident across all areas of study and many responses demonstrated the engagement that candidates had with their area of investigation. The enthusiasm for and knowledge of the chosen topic was clearly conveyed in many responses that were truly academic in their approach. Candidates were very well prepared for the examination and it was evident that Centres used their specialist resources and interests to encourage candidates to research in depth a particular area of study. It is important to stress again that the 'Investigations' unit has a definite academic purpose. The aim is to involve candidates as active participants pursuing open-ended enquiries with an emphasis on independent learning. Questions were designed to be inclusive of all possible approaches to various topics and all valid answers were considered.

Whilst most centres had entered their candidates for the correct option there were still a few entries for particular areas of study where consideration regarding entry for a different area of study may have been beneficial to the candidate. It is important to ensure candidates know which areas of their investigation is the best fit for the question they answer on the paper. There was evidence of candidates choosing a different question on the paper to the question they had clearly prepared for before the examination.

Candidates were not penalised if correct entries were not made or a cross was put in a box that did not match the answer. Examiners were encouraged to mark positively. Centres should ensure that candidates are entered for the option that matches their area of study and that candidates are clear about which question they have been prepared for on the paper.

Variation in achievement was related to the two assessment objectives. These objectives should receive prominent attention in the process of the investigation. Each question consistently referred to the assessment objectives with the trigger word 'Examine' for AO1 and 'Comment on' for AO2. These dictated the structure of the question and helped candidates to plan their answers. It would be advisable for candidates to pay regular attention to the level descriptors for these assessment objectives as a way of monitoring their development and progress during their investigations. The phrase 'with reference to the topic you have investigated' will always appear in the question to ensure that the generic question can be answered with material from any appropriate investigation. The mark scheme itself is generic to all questions. In preparation for this examination candidates may find it useful to write up their investigation under exam timed conditions to a variety of different possible questions. They might build up a number of different essay plans to different possible questions. The important point in these activities is to enable candidates to develop their management of material such as how to best structure their content to answer the specific question. However, success can be undermined by writing up a rote-

learnt answer which was not adapted to the question set or by answering a question that has been written for a topic they have not studied.

6RS02 reports features work produced by the candidates in the actual examination for candidates in Area 1A, 1B and 1C where possible. Areas 1D, 1E, 1F and 1G have smaller entries and the style of report is briefer for these areas of study.

Area 1E The Study of the Old Testament/Jewish Bible

Many candidates were able to offer balanced responses, with knowledge and evaluation in proportion. Some responses were excellent and several achieved high levels in both assessment objectives. There was a clear and detailed understanding of the issues and of the religious and theological meanings behind them. Candidates referred to a range of scholars, both ancient and modern, as well as engaging in detailed theological debate and argument. There was proficient use and understanding of complex theological ideas such as atonement and sin. The use of Old Testament symbolism was impressive. Candidates know their scholars and quote extensively from primary sources.

In the middle range, candidates were less comfortable with the textual narrative and tended to concentrate on re-writing the textual narrative and then developing ideas from it. Quite a number concentrated on tangential issues.

Question 1 Religion and Science

It was evident that some responses struggled to relate issues within the religion and science debate to a study of the Old Testament. Some responses were rather one-sided in their approach to the religion and science debate and opportunities to refer to the Old Testament narratives were generally missed. In the better essays there was evidence of studies on creation narratives that were handled very well and the issues were firmly located within a discussion of contemporary scholarship from within the religion and science debate. Scholarship in the Old Testament is extensive and is best deployed with the relevant textual extract from which the theological issues emerge.

Question 2 The Nature of God

Candidates offered a range of convincing views coupled with good exegesis of the biblical text and useful scholarship. Candidates answered this question with a high level of insight and were well equipped to examine the notion of God as personal whilst backing up their views with a wide range of very useful and contrasting biblical quotations, both from the Law and the Prophets. The notion of 'the holy' was tackled very well through the use of scholarly opinion backed up by the Prophets and the Psalms. Evaluation was interesting and varied in approach, from the evangelistic notions of God's embracing agape love, through pre-destination, heaven and hell to philosophical notions of free will and epistemic distance.

In the mid-range responses, there was much evidence of Dawkins' analysis of the psychotic nature of God at the expense of reference to classical Old

Testament scholarship. Issues were discussed in a polarised fashion and a little more scholarly analysis would have added a qualitatively academic edge to the discussion. At the lower end of achievement responses concentrated on re-telling Bible stories with little scholarly analysis.

Question 3 Job and The Problem Of Evil And Suffering

Candidates were able to examine skilfully the problem of suffering in Job and compare it with textual narratives elsewhere, most notably Genesis. Many then went on to look at philosophical notions, particularly the Augustinian Theodicy and natural and moral evil. Scholarship was clearly evident and impressive references were made to the redeeming and atoning love of Christ. Candidates really did explore issues deeply within this question, and many answers were full of scholarship, good learning and interesting evaluation.

Some weaker responses re-told the Job narratives and then wrote about philosophical notions, but were unable to relate the two in a very meaningful way. Some candidates tended to concentrate on the philosophical arguments concerning suffering and tended to use Job as an example (or an after-thought).

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