

Examiners' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

January 2013

Edexcel GCE – Religious Studies
Unit 2: Investigations – The Study of
the Old Testament/Jewish Bible

6RS02/1E

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Unit 2: Religious Studies - The Study of the Old Testament/Jewish Bible

Introduction

GENERAL COMMENTS

The Investigations Paper of January 2013 demonstrated a very high level of independent student enquiry. The engagement that candidates had with their area of investigation was evidenced in the way they independently used and evaluated a wide range of source material. The enthusiasm for and knowledge of the chosen topic was clearly conveyed in many answers that were truly academic in their approach. Some Centres chose to focus on the same or similar topics for all their candidates, whereas other Centres permitted considerable choice for individual candidates. 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 students 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 area 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. In some of these cases the candidate was using material suitable for Question 1 to answer Question 3 and not really grappling fully with the demands of the question. 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. Importantly, in the exam itself there must be explicit attention to these objectives in the examination answer. 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 but the answer itself is not necessarily generic as candidates are expected to use their material to answer the question. The purpose of the

question is to challenge candidates to adapt their material so that at the highest levels they may demonstrate a coherent understanding of the task, based on the selection of their material. Widely deployed evidence/arguments/sources were evident in well-structured responses to the task whereby a clearly expressed viewpoint was supported by well-deployed evidence and reasoned argument. There was skilful deployment of religious language in many answers and the fluency of the essay showed command over the material.

Candidates at the lower end of achievement struggled with the demands of the question. In preparation for this examination some 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-learned 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.

Specific Comments – Paper 1E – The Study of the Old Testament/ Jewish Bible

It would be good to see more entries for this paper as the Old Testament had the fewest candidates of all the options. The level of knowledge and scholarship shown in this area is very impressive. The best candidates were able to offer balanced answers, with knowledge of and evaluation in proportion. Many answers 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, in line with what they had been taught in the A2 options. Quite a number missed the real meaning of the questions and concentrated on tangential issues.

6RS02_1E_Q01 – Religion and Science

Apart from the excellent answers at the higher end responses to the religion and science question where candidates handled their response to the question with great skill, it was evident that weaker candidates generally struggled to relate issues within the religion and science debate to a study of the Old Testament. Some candidates 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; good candidates had no difficulty handling their material with this point in mind.

6RS02_1E_Q02 – The Nature of God

Candidates offered a range of convincing views coupled with competent 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 God being beyond our understanding was tackled very well through the use of scholarly opinion backed up by the Prophets and the Psalms. Some candidates were very knowledgeable on the powerful way God revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush and although God identifies Himself as the God of the patriarchal covenant God still does not reveal God's name to Moses when asked. The question was successfully addressed through comment on this material as also through the illustrative use of Job, for whom God was beyond understanding.

In the mid-range, 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 candidates concentrated on re-telling Bible stories with little scholarly analysis. The January 2010 report quotes a whole essay which shows how scholarly commentary can be combined with a sound knowledge of scripture to address the demands of the question.

6RS02_1E_Q03 – Job and the Problem of Evil and Suffering

By far, this question was the most popular, with most candidates handling it really well. Candidates were able to skilfully examine the problem of suffering in Job and compare it with textual narratives elsewhere, most notably the Genesis myths. 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 most answers were full of scholarship, good learning and interesting evaluation.

However, some weaker candidates 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) – this results in some uneven answers. There were a few candidates who could not recall the story of Job with accuracy.

Advice for Candidates

- Please directly address the question being asked.
- A generic question is not best answered with a generic answer. The question is made up of two parts. The question itself and the generic phrase 'Examine and comment with reference to the topic you have investigated.' Answer the question.
- Use appropriate sources and, if possible, include recent scholarship.
- Well deployed material will show how well you understand your topic and how you are using your material to answer the question.
- Do not forget to comment on your material in relation to the question.
- Use your evidence to substantiate your argument.
- Comment on alternative views if you know them.
- Express your viewpoint clearly.
- Practice writing under timed conditions as part of your preparation.
- Do not spend too much time on your essay plan to the detriment of the essay itself.
- Write legibly.

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