



Pearson

Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Religious Studies (6RS02)
Paper 1E Investigations – The Study of the Old
Testament/Jewish Bible

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AREA 1E Old Testament

Introduction

GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2017 examination season heralded the end of an era and the final entry stands as a testimony to the historic high level of engagement with selected studies drawn from a very wide range of academic fields. Over the life of this specification there has been consistent evidence of superb research on topics that are clearly of great interest to candidates. This legacy of academic achievement has been inspirational for examiners whose privilege it is to see what can be achieved by our candidates. The new specification will obviously provide a different assessment experience and centres will find that their excellent resources can be integrated into future schemes of work.

The high standard of work evidenced in June 2017 was no exception to historical high standards as candidates demonstrated a very high level of independent enquiry which clearly demonstrated what their chosen area of investigation had meant to them as a learning experience. Candidates showcased their knowledge of a particular academic field in the way they identified a line of enquiry, clearly expressed their view, analysed key concepts and deployed evidence with coherent understanding of their task whilst fluently evaluating a wide range of source material that they had at their disposal. The enthusiasm for and knowledge of the chosen topic was clearly conveyed in many answers that were truly academic in their approach. Candidates were mostly 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. At this stage in the life of the specification it is difficult to find new things to report because, in the main, centres possess a very high degree of expertise and this is clearly evidenced in the work that is produced on the day of the examination.

Examiners were encouraged to mark positively and to credit all valid material according to the mark scheme and question paper. Variation in achievement was related to the two assessment objectives. 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 good essays showed command over the material; such command makes for high outcomes and rewards the amount of hard work done by the candidate. Many candidates had clearly learned much in the process and their overall grasp of the issues involved and command over their material was highly commendable.

Candidates at the lower end of achievement struggled with the demands of the question. These candidates were insecure with their management of material and did not know how to best structure their content to answer the specific question. 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. This approach is contrasted with excellent praxis whereby candidates were trained to answer the question; arguably, this is evidence of good practice but at the lower end some candidates thought it was sufficient to simply use the question stimulus at the end of each paragraph. The best answers were those which were guided by the statement as opposed to simply '*tagging it on*' to anticipated content. A balanced approach to the question that meets the highest levels of achievement according to both assessment objectives is obviously desirable and the generic question accommodates many possible routes to success whereby any valid approach to the question was credited.

The excellent work of centres and candidates in 6RS02 bears testimony to the academic potential of candidates that is a joy to behold when it is fully realised.

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

It would be good to see more entries for this paper as the Old Testament continues to have the fewest candidates of all the 6RS02 options. It is evident that candidates engage enthusiastically with this unit as there were some very insightful and detailed studies.

Question 1 - Religion and Science

The Old Testament provides rich material for the application of natural science, for example, in the creation narratives, miracles or prophecy. Very few candidates addressed, for example, how the Christian doctrine of creation could be explored by examining scientific explanations for the origins of the universe. The best candidates were able to discuss the creation and evolution debate in detail; other candidates extrapolated a relationship between the design argument and the Old Testament. Origins of the universe in the Old Testament were contrasted by some candidates against scientific discovery. Candidates appear to fear discussing with confidence how the study of the interface between religion and science might have real relevance for the study of the Old Testament. There is scope for examining the historical interaction between religion and science by focussing on the dialogue between Christianity and the natural sciences

The take up for this question remains rather low and this seems a shame because the potential of this topic is not really explored by many candidates.

Question 2 - The Nature of God

Some excellent responses navigated a wide range of different Old Testament literature and explored in detail the significance of these for understanding our relationship with God. This question was very well done. This question provides scope for examining the Old Testament in order to understand the nature of God. Candidates offered a range of convincing views about the nature of God that were coupled with solid exegesis of the biblical text and appropriate scholarship. Candidates answered this question with a high level of insight and were well equipped to examine the many valid interpretations of God whilst backing up their views with a wide range of contrasting biblical quotations, both from the Law and the Prophets. The various attributes of God were understood in detail and discussed 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.

Question 3 - Job and The Problem Of Evil And Suffering

The best candidates had secure knowledge of the Book of Job and scholarship specific to the Book of Job such as C.S.Rodd and biblical commentary. They were also familiar with a range of other well-known Old Testament scholars. Candidates really did explore issues deeply within this question, and most answers were full of scholarship, good learning and interesting evaluation. By far, this question was the most popular with most candidates handling it really well and 2015 was no exception. Candidates were able to examine the Book of Job skilfully, with clarity and coherence; candidates discussed its relationship to the problem of evil and suffering by comparative analysis of textual narratives in the Book of Job and from elsewhere in the Old Testament, most notably the Genesis myths.

Paper Summary

Key Points to Remember

- Do not ignore the question.
- 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.

