



# Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2025

**Pearson Edexcel Level 3 GCE**  
**Religious Studies (8RS0 03)**  
Advanced Subsidiary Level

**PAPER 3: New Testament Studies**

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## **8RS0\_03 New Testament Studies 2025**

### **Introduction**

This paper provided candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate their in-depth study of the New Testament, including both textual analysis and engagement with critical scholarship. Most candidates showed a strong understanding of the historical and literary context of the Gospel texts, as well as familiarity with contemporary scholarly methods used in New Testament studies.

Candidates engaged well across all questions, with very few responses left blank. The overall standard of answers reflected thorough preparation and focused revision. Many candidates showed evidence of having studied the material at a deeper level, moving beyond surface-level knowledge to provide structured, analytical, and often insightful responses.

Notably, there was a marked reduction in responses containing unnecessary padding or repetition. This suggests that candidates were more confident in addressing the demands of the questions directly. A significant number of responses demonstrated high levels of written expression, theological awareness, and use of scholarly viewpoints.

Only a small number of candidates performed at the lower levels, and it was encouraging to see a high standard of scholarship among those achieving the top levels. Time management was generally effective, with most candidates completing all parts of the paper in sufficient detail.

### **Q1 Explore key themes in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel. (8)**

This question assessed students' knowledge and understanding of the theological content of the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel (John 1:1–18). Successful responses needed to demonstrate accurate knowledge, specialist vocabulary, and an understanding of how the Prologue establishes the theological framework for the Fourth Gospel.

Candidate performance on this question showed a broad range in understanding and focus, with responses spanning all mark levels. While some candidates engaged directly and confidently with the Prologue's theological content, others showed a tendency to generalise about Jesus or the Fourth Gospel as a whole, thereby missing the specific textual focus required.

Candidates generally attempted to engage with the Prologue, though performance varied significantly depending on how well students focused on the actual content of John 1:1–18 rather than the Gospel of John as a whole. The most successful responses skilfully referenced key themes such as the Logos, incarnation, light and darkness, grace and truth, and divine pre-existence, included textual references through quotes or paraphrase. Specialist terms were used accurately such as

Logos, incarnation, high Christology, and grace. Some candidates occasionally cited relevant scholars which enhanced AO1 depth.

The higher range of achievement was evidenced by some exemplary answers that fully engaged with the Prologue. These candidates used precise terminology such as Logos, incarnation, Christology, grace, and light supported by key verses that were linked thematically to the concept. Some responses referenced scholars (Dodd, Hooker) to show deeper engagement and overall, fully addressed the question with no inaccuracies and sustained theological focus.

The lower range of achievement responses lacked focus on the Prologue itself. Such responses were typified by deploying themes general to John's Gospel and lacked specific reference to John 1:1–18. No specialist terms or quotations were used and whilst some basic understanding of Jesus' divinity and mission was demonstrated there was significant vagueness and generalisation. Candidates must engage with the set text and use precise theological language to access higher levels of achievement.

## **Q2 Assess the priority of Mark in the writing of the synoptic Gospels. (9)**

This question required candidates to engage with the scholarly debate around Markan Priority, demonstrating both knowledge (AO1) and judgement-based skills (AO2). Successful responses were expected to show understanding of the arguments for and against Mark being the first Gospel written, and to make reasoned judgements based on relevant evidence.

Many candidates demonstrated sound awareness of the idea that Mark's Gospel may have been used as a source by Matthew and Luke, often referencing its shorter length, simpler Greek, and its shared material with the other Synoptics.

Candidates at the higher range of achievement referred to the Two-Source Hypothesis and the Four-Source Hypothesis, showing a good grasp of scholarly models. High-level answers used accurate terminology such as Markan Priority, Q source, synoptic problem, and supported arguments with textual or historical references. Some responses offered well-structured appraisals, weighed internal textual evidence against patristic testimony by noting Augustine's view that Matthew came first, and concluding with a reasoned judgement.

In the lower levels of achievement, a significant number of responses confused Gospel content, referencing miracles, parables, or theological themes not directly relevant to the issue of priority. Some answers relied too heavily on Church tradition (e.g., 'Matthew comes first in the Bible') without addressing the scholarly evidence or literary dependency. A few candidates showed a narrow range of knowledge, failing to distinguish between authorship and chronology, or simply asserting that Mark came first without support. Weak AO2 performance was common in mid-range responses whereby candidates listed information but made little or no attempt to assess the claim or construct a judgement.

Success with this question requires the ability to distinguish between factual knowledge and appraisal — AO1 should support AO2, not substitute it. Familiarity with key terms and hypotheses: Markan Priority, Q Source, Two-Source Hypothesis is as essential as the focus on textual and literary evidence (e.g., the order of material, quality of Greek, omissions in Mark) rather than just traditional views or Gospel placement. The trigger word ‘Assess’ requires judgment, not just explanation and it is good practice to always balance arguments and aim for a clear, reasoned conclusion.

This question was a good discriminator of the range of ability and to some extent attracted a polarized response that was either of very high quality or lacking knowledge of the specifics.

### **Q3 Assess the view that the Fourth Gospel was concerned with presenting Jesus as the fulfilment of scripture. (9)**

This question required candidates to assess whether the Fourth Gospel was primarily focused on presenting Jesus as the fulfilment of Old Testament scripture. To access the higher levels of attainment, candidates needed to demonstrate: accurate knowledge of the Fourth Gospel content (AO1), clear, balanced analysis and assessment of the view (AO2), and appropriate use of specialist language, such as Christology, Messiah, signs, and prophecy.

The best responses demonstrated clear understanding of John’s unique theological emphasis, especially his high Christology and portrayal of Jesus as the eternal Logos (Word). Such responses often cited Johannine content relevant to fulfilment, such as: Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem on a donkey (John 12:15, echoing Zechariah 9:9), the Crucifixion narratives that refer to fulfilment of scripture (e.g. John 19:36–37), ‘Lamb of God’ imagery (John 1:29) connecting to sacrificial expectations. Candidates engaged in sustained assessment, often contrasting the Fourth Gospel with the Synoptic Gospels (especially Matthew) to highlight how the Fourth Gospel redefines fulfilment in spiritual terms. Candidates understood and accurately addressed the expectations of a Jewish audience, while recognising that the Fourth Gospel’s purpose was not always to prove prophecy literally, but to reveal Jesus as the divine Messiah.

Moving into Mid to Lower-level responses there was evidence of factual inaccuracies in AO1, for example: Many candidates incorrectly attributed material from Matthew to John — e.g. the genealogy, the Immanuel prophecy (Isaiah 7:14), or the flight to Egypt. These were not creditable unless explicitly used to compare Gospel approaches. There was also lack of scriptural support from the Fourth Gospel, for example: some responses made general claims about Jesus fulfilling scripture without citing Johannine passages. Only a few mentioned the Prologue (John 1:1–18), which is central to understanding John’s theological purpose. This was coupled with weak AO2 analysis where assessment was often assertive but undeveloped. Some candidates repeated the question without offering clear reasoning or weighing alternative views, such as whether the Fourth Gospel’s main concern was Christological revelation rather than scriptural fulfilment. There was

some evidence of misinterpretation of the question. The word 'concerned' in the question was misinterpreted as referring to the Gospel's broader themes or general concerns, rather than being understood as 'focused on' or 'centrally interested in' presenting Jesus as the fulfilment of scripture. In some cases, it was even taken to imply that there were concerns or doubts about the Gospel itself. As a result, some candidates drifted from the specific focus of the question

Candidates should be reminded that credit is only given for content from the Fourth Gospel, unless comparison is used explicitly and effectively. The Fourth Gospel should be understood in its own theological context, rather than through Synoptic lenses. It is essential to use textual evidence accurately and there is a difference between quoting prophecy and alluding to it theologically, as the Fourth Gospel often does.

This question gave candidates ample opportunity to explore a rich area of the Fourth Gospel, but success relied heavily on being able to differentiate the Fourth Gospel's content from the Synoptics and to critically assess rather than merely describe. Stronger candidates demonstrated this distinction well and earned high marks accordingly.

**Q4 (a) Explore key ideas about the signs in the Fourth Gospel. (8)**  
**(b) Analyse the claim that the signs give the clearest understanding of Jesus' identity and ministry. (20)**

Most candidates demonstrated familiarity with the concept of signs in the Fourth Gospel, recognising them as miracles that reveal Jesus' divine identity and purpose. Better responses explored theological themes such as faith, divine authority, and Christological significance, referring to specific signs (e.g. Water into Wine, Healing the Blind Man, Raising of Lazarus). Many candidates correctly identified that the signs are selective and are included to inspire belief (John 20:30–31).

At the higher range of achievement there was clear identification of the purpose of signs to reveal Jesus as Messiah and Son of God. There was evidence of reference to the symbolic nature of signs ('semeia') rather than just miraculous ('dunamis') acts. Some responses recognised the importance of accompanying discourses such as the 'I am' sayings.

Candidates who performed in the lower levels were overly descriptive, focusing on retelling the signs rather than exploring their meaning or theological function. Some candidates confused Johannine signs with synoptic miracles or failed to link the signs to the Fourth Gospel's overarching themes. These responses evidenced limited use of terminology such as Logos, Messiah, Son of God, or faith/belief and this affected the depth of explanation. In a question like this, candidates can access higher levels of attainment if they aim to explore the meaning and implications of the signs, not just describe them. The use of specialist terms and Gospel context helps achieve higher marks in AO1 and referring to the seven signs and their symbolic significance will also enhance clarity and depth.

Moving on to part b) the responses to this question varied in quality. Many candidates engaged well with the claim, offering analysis of whether the signs are sufficient on their own to fully convey Jesus' identity and ministry. High-scoring responses considered both sides of the argument and evaluated the role of signs alongside other Fourth Gospel elements such as the 'I am' sayings. Better responses used examples like the Raising of Lazarus or the Feeding of the 5000 and discussed their symbolic and theological implications.

Overall, the best responses evidenced balanced evaluation as to whether signs alone offer a 'clear' understanding of Jesus' identity and ministry and could analyse whether this is the clearest way to understand Jesus' identity and mission. There was reference to the Fourth Gospel's theological agenda, especially in the light of John 20:30–31. Good responses showed critical engagement with the idea that signs required interpretation to be fully understood and made useful reference to the 'I am' sayings in the discussion. There was consideration of opposing views in that signs caused division or misunderstanding among the people at times.

At the lower end of achievement some responses lacked analytic depth, simply agreeing with the claim without challenge or nuance. A few candidates made general statements about signs without anchoring them in the Fourth Gospel context. These responses had limited or no use of textual evidence which weakened arguments, and several responses failed to distinguish between AO1 (knowledge) and AO2 (analysis/evaluation), resulting in unbalanced essays. There needs to be clear and sustained focus on analysis of the claim, rather than just recounting signs to earn higher marks. Textual examples used to support arguments raises the level of attainment as does any engagement with the complexity of the Gospel message e.g., the idea that signs were sometimes misunderstood or rejected.

It is worth remembering that Q4(a) required concise but meaningful exploration of key theological ideas and stronger responses moved beyond description. Q4(b) required a sustained, analytical approach and only those who critically analysed the claim using detailed knowledge and logical reasoning accessed the top band. Overall, there was a clear understanding of content, but AO2 (evaluation) skills need to be developed further by some candidates.

## **Paper Summary**

A very strong year's work is evident across many centres, with most candidates well prepared for the demands of this paper. Responses suggest that candidates are engaging with the material enthusiastically and with genuine interest. Many demonstrated both depth of knowledge and increasing confidence in applying it to exam questions.

Based on performance in this paper, the following points of advice are offered:

- Tailor responses to the specific demands of each question.
- Continue developing a broad and well-informed range of scholarship,
- Practice timed responses
- Use the answer booklet correctly and avoid unnecessary extra sheets or attachments unless clearly required.
- Support all points with specific examples and relevant textual references.
- Where AO2 is assessed, ensure the response includes analysis rather than description or opinion.
- Remember that Q1 and Q4(a) assess AO1 only: opinion or argument is not required in these questions.
- Pay close attention to subject-specific terminology and accurate spelling, especially names of scholars and theological terms.
- Centres are encouraged to reinforce the distinction between AO1 (knowledge and understanding) and AO2 (analysis and evaluation), and to continue developing students' skills in analytical writing, reasoned judgement, and structured argument.