

BIBLICAL STUDIES

Paper 2035/12
The Portrayal of God in the Bible

Key messages

There were some strong responses for this paper. Candidates need to give specific answers when they answer part **(a)** questions, not general.

General comments

Responses typically showed good coverage and understanding of the syllabus. In **(a)** questions, some candidates did not focus sufficiently on the question set and narrated the story in general. In **(b)** questions, candidates usually were able to explain what was being asked in their own words but sometimes struggled where there were different viewpoints to explain. In both **(b)** and **(c)** questions, some weaker responses did not focus enough on the specific words of the question.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a) (i) The vast majority of candidates achieved the mark for this question. Some gave too much detail about the passage.

(ii) Candidates who achieved both marks in this question tended to answer the question, rather than simply tell a section of the story of the fall.

(iii) Most candidates were able to identify three of the punishments given as a result of the fall. Some candidates gave most or all the punishments, which did not lead to additional credit.

(b) Candidates who achieved highly in this question focused on the wording of the question, which asked about God's relationship with humanity, not about general explanations of the fall. Some candidates based their answers around the supposition that the event shows God's closeness with humanity, where the opposite is true. Some talked in general terms about God's relationship with humanity without focusing on the question.

(c) Most answers addressed the question specifically and examined the relevance of an ancient passage for Christians today. Better answers tended to explore the idea that, to Christians, the redemption achieved by Jesus is understood most fully when the fall is understood. The understanding of the fall in the context of salvation history gave candidates a breadth of material to draw on in their responses.

Question 2

(a) (i) Candidates who achieved both marks in this question usually did so by showing an understanding that they needed to explain that God looks at the heart, not outward appearance. The command word 'Explain' was clearly understood by these candidates.

(ii) The vast majority of candidates achieved the mark for this question.

(iii) Candidates were often able to make three distinct points in answer to this question. Those that used bullet points did so with the best economy of time.

(b) Answers sometimes struggled to focus on the importance specifically for Christians. While candidates often looked at David's life as a whole, which received credit where relevant, they sometimes spent too long focusing on David's apparent humility and meekness. For Christians, of course, the appointing of David is a key moment in salvation history as it is from David's line the Messiah was to come.

(c) A full range of responses was seen in answer to this question with some good illustrations from modern life. Judgements tended to focus on the idea that Christians with some sort of vocation should behave more purely and act for justice.

Section B

Question 3

(a) Most answers showed knowledge of the passage, but some did not focus on the detail of the question. Some candidates told the story in more general terms and did not therefore show knowledge of the different moments within the story.

(b) Some answers did not show a range of views. Others tended to explain the view that God does continue to test his people in a range of ways and a second view was that God's need to test people has been displaced by Jesus. There were some answers that explored the idea that life itself is enough of a test and so God does not need to add to this.

(c) Candidates were often able to show that they had reflected on the relevance of the passage for Christians today. Some linked Abraham's test to God giving his son on the cross and these answers were successful when further linked to Christian life today. Many candidates concluded that the story's emphasis on faithfulness is a challenge to modern people.

Question 4

(a) The best answers showed clear knowledge of the story of crossing the sea, stating what happened on each of the two occasions Moses stretched his hand out over the sea, not simply telling the whole story. To reach the highest marks, candidates needed to give details about the engulfing of the Egyptian army as well as stating that the water parted and then came together again.

(b) Candidates stated that God is seen as both loving and caring to his people but is also portrayed as a God of vengeance. Some explored the idea that God might be said to be cruel. Some showed an awareness of the potential to understand the God of the Old Testament differently from that of the New Testament when they focused on what it might specifically teach Christians.

(c) Candidates generally drew on a range of material to answer this question. Some limited their answers by focusing too much on miracles in the Bible, where the wording of the question indicates that miracles today needed to be examined.

Question 5

(a) Answers tended to show good knowledge of the effects of the Holy Spirit but fewer responses talked about the moment of the Holy Spirit's coming. For example, the detail about what seemed like wind and tongues of fire was often missing. Some candidates wasted time by summarising Peter's speech or talking about the conversion of believers at the end of the chapter.

(b) Candidates sometimes struggled with the focus on Christian practice in this question. Those that answered strongly talked about prayer, speaking in tongues and occasionally confirmation and evangelisation. Candidates sometimes showed knowledge of the power of the Holy Spirit in the development of the church but did not always link this to today's church.

(c) There were some fascinating responses to this question with candidates exploring different aspects of God's plan for humanity. The majority of successful responses contrasted the Holy Spirit with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and achieved well, showing measured judgements that considered the arguments they had put forward.

BIBLICAL STUDIES

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

Key messages

In this paper, judgements given by candidates needed to be clear and stand out from the rest of the part **(c)** response. Sometimes a judgement was simply given as a statement of a viewpoint, rather than being reasoned.

General comments

Candidates often spent too long narrating irrelevant parts of the passages. It is also important that candidates study the version of each story stated on the syllabus so that they have the specific knowledge required in the examination. In **Section A**, candidates must ensure that they make enough distinct points to gain the marks in the part **(a)** questions.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a) (i) Candidates tended to understand the transformation that had happened to Jesus just before the verse given in the stimulus.

(ii) Generally, answers focused in on the question. Sometimes, candidates simply narrated the transfiguration and did not give the detail required to gain the marks.

(b) Answers needed to go beyond simply recounting the words of the text to go beyond Level 2 because this was an explain question. Candidates who were successful in this made helpful links to John the Baptist and sometimes the belief that Elijah would come before the Messiah.

(c) While some answers focused on the question and explored whether or not the transfiguration and the conversation while coming down the mountain are sufficient to show that Jesus was the Messiah, others spoke in more general terms about Jesus' identity. Successful responses debated the extent to which an understanding of all of Jesus' life is necessary to understand his true identity.

Question 2

(a) (i) Candidates needed to know Mark's version of the feeding of the five thousand. Candidates who used other versions were not able to achieve the marks for this question.

(ii) Some candidates gave descriptive and general responses to this question, telling the general story and not necessarily making four distinct points. The very best answers used bullet points to state four things that happened when Jesus was given the loaves and fish, understanding the nature of this point marked question.

(b) Good responses to this question clearly wrote about the person of Jesus and then the work of Jesus. Other responses tended to be general explanations about the miracle without really

focusing on Jesus. Some weaker responses simply said that Jesus was generous or loving to his people and gave too much detail about this.

(c) Candidates generally contrasted Jesus' miracles with his teaching ministry and explored the different benefits of each to those that witnessed them. Some candidates explored the death of Jesus as contrast to equally useful effect.

Section B

Question 3

(a) Some candidates wasted time by narrating the whole passage. Others gave versions of Jesus' triumphal entry that are not the passages set for study – in Luke's version, there are neither palm branches nor shouts of Hosanna. These answers tended therefore to be less focused. Some candidates did not give enough detail for part (i).

(b) This question was often quite poorly answered. Candidates either did not know sufficient detail about the Pharisees as distinct from other Jewish groups or thought of the Pharisees as a Christian group. Some focused too much on their relationship with Jesus and very weak answers simply tried to narrate passages that mentioned the Pharisees.

(c) Good answers to this question showed clear consideration of whether the triumphal entry was some sort of tipping point in terms of Jesus being arrested. Most candidates talked about controversies caused by Jesus and the enmity of Jewish leaders towards him. Some, in judgement, felt that the role of Judas would have been the deciding-point, whatever had gone before.

Question 4

(a) Some candidates simply told the whole of the parable. Focused responses picked up the story at the appropriate point and were able to give attention to the detail that was required for Level 3. For example, weaker answers often skirted over the moment of the son's repentance or how lavishly the father greeted his son (a robe, a ring and a party).

(b) Weaker responses gave a vague narration of the end of the parable. Stronger responses explored possible representations of the elder son – the Pharisees, Christians who have not abandoned the faith and so on. As for all (b) questions, the best answers were clearly explanations, using the candidate's own words.

(c) Strong responses to this question focused on the parable of the prodigal and his brother and usually contrasted the human need to turn to God with the forgiveness offered by God. However, many answers did not focus on the parable and so talked in general terms about what parables do, sometimes narrating different parables and often not achieving high marks.

Question 5

(a) This was not a popular question and some candidates seemed to select it for the part (c) question, showing little knowledge of the passage. The wrong passage was often narrated and when the correct passage was chosen, Jesus' explanation of the Scriptures was often not included.

(b) Some candidates simply told the end part of the story – or even all of the story again. Others attempted to explain aspects of the passage. Very few candidates explored the significance of the risen Jesus being able to be known through the Scriptures and through the Eucharist.

(c) Candidates were able to engage with this question however successful previous responses had been. There was a full range of comparisons with the argument that the resurrection was a literal, historical event, from explorations of a symbolic resurrection to rejections of the resurrection outright. Where judgements were present and considered, they explored the evidence presented and reached a clear conclusion.