

RELIGIOUS STUDIES (BIBLE KNOWLEDGE)

Paper 2048/12
The Portrayal of the Life and Teaching
of Jesus

Key messages

A significant improvement in the quality of **(c)** questions was seen this series, with the majority of responses showing a clear conclusion or evaluation, which raised the overall profile of marks. Some candidates chose to answer these questions before **(a)** or **(b)** questions, but this did not generally benefit them because they missed the continuity that is sometimes present from **(a)** through **(b)** to **(c)** questions and repeated themselves at times, leading to lost time.

General comments

Overall, this was a successful series in many ways.

In order to gain full marks, candidates need to focus directly on the wording of the question. Some candidates, for example, might not have focused on the person of Jesus in **4(b)**, simply explaining the Transfiguration or they told the whole story of the parable in **5(a)**, rather than simply the final part.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a)** While there was some very good knowledge demonstrated in this question, a number of answers tried to discuss Jesus' fulfilment (or otherwise) of the Jewish expectations of a Messiah, which was not what the question was looking for, coming from the background section of the syllabus. Most candidates were able to talk about the expectations of the Messiah coming from the line of David and of the first century notion that the Messiah would deliver the Jewish people from the Roman occupation. Some candidates also noted the prophecies about the work of the Messiah, such as 'good news to the poor'.
- (b)** While many answers explored some good background knowledge of the impact of the Roman government on first century Judaism, some candidates did not fully engage with the question and wrote about Jesus' relationship with the Romans. The best answers examined the role of tax collectors and the impact of the Romans in Jerusalem.
- (c)** Candidates produced clear responses to this question, examining issues such as the Messianic secret and the idea that Jesus' actions spoke loudly enough. Many explored the implications of different titles of Jesus with some success. As always, the best responses gave two different viewpoints and reached a clear, informed judgement.

Question 2

- (a)** The vast majority of responses to this question were excellent and balanced the need to cover information fully with the space available for a **part (a)** question. Weaker answers tended to omit the Biblical quotations from the passage.

- (b) While most candidates were able to explain the importance of the temptations in general, some answers did not explore why the timing of the event was significant. The best answers considered ideas such as the idea of a retreat before ministry, the location of Jesus' work in an Old Testament context and the need to banish Satan's works before doing God's work.
- (c) Candidates interpreted the childhood and early life of Jesus in a range of ways and these were given appropriate credit. Many explored the idea that the prophecies were generally fulfilled in his ministry, and most mentioned the idea of the significance of the events of Jesus' birth.

Question 3

- (a) Some candidates appeared to have misidentified the passage, using other healing miracles and often John 5 as source material. Those who correctly identified the passage usually clearly described the movement from forgiveness of sins to the debate that ensued to the actual healing.
- (b) While some candidates did not focus on both the person and work of Jesus, most were able to give useful comments that drew out specifics about the nature of Jesus from this particular miracle. While generic responses about miracles gained credit, the most successful responses were those that focused on the miracle being tested.
- (c) This question was generally successfully answered with a useful consideration of both times when Jesus' miracles created opposition and times when other aspects of his ministry did so. Some answers were too descriptive and narrated different passages, rather than forming a discussion around the question.

Question 4

- (a) Many candidates were able to give excellent detail about this passage and produced successful answers. Some candidates embellished the account somewhat, rather than sticking to the words of the text. Other less successful responses ended their accounts after the appearance of Moses and Elijah. Some answers needlessly went on beyond the account of the Transfiguration.
- (b) While most candidates were able to explore the teachings about the person of Jesus gained from the passage, such as those to do with his divinity or relationship with God and with his fulfilment or surpassing of the Old Testament, some answers were limited by being about generic observations about the person of Jesus. The best answers gave good detail about Moses and Elijah and what each of the two persons reflected in Jesus.
- (c) Most candidates explored the various weaknesses of the disciples by way of responding to this statement, although some explored whether or not a lack of faith was an issue for the disciples. Both approaches were credited. Most referred to various incidents that did or did not display the characteristics they were discussing and as such some responses were too descriptive for a (c) question.

Question 5

- (a) Many candidates gave excellent responses to this question, focusing on the final part of the parable. Some spent too much time recounting the whole parable and even the conversation with the disciples before it, which was often reflected in their overall timekeeping. Some glossed over the final encounter between the first servant and the master.
- (b) Most candidates were able to discuss both the teachings about God's forgiveness, portrayed by the master, and those about the need for human forgiveness, not displayed by the servant. Weaker responses tended to examine one or the other of these details.
- (c) Some answers simply explored the importance of forgiveness, rather than whether or not it is only important to religious people. For those who focused on the question, there was a range of valid approaches seen. Most argued that forgiveness is good for the soul in some way. Many explored the idea that for religious people the link between forgiveness and judgement or the afterlife is the core difference between them and non-religious people.

Question 6

- (a) This was the least successfully answered (a) question. Candidates often conflated the accounts of the empty tomb from different gospels or told the wrong story entirely. The strongest answers were faithful to the text and remembered the detail of Matthew's account.
- (b) While some candidates simply explored the importance of the resurrection, many observed that Matthew's account was crafted for particular purposes, such as the refutation of the story put out by the authorities that Jesus' body had been stolen. Most answers gained marks by emphasising the idea that Matthew wished to demonstrate the resurrection as fact and therefore the vanquishing of death as fact.
- (c) Most candidates explored two sides of this argument with success. Some did not focus on Christians today and therefore looked too much at textual discussion. The best responses explored the relative usefulness of the resurrection accounts against the teachings of Jesus, such as the Sermon on the Mount.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES (BIBLE KNOWLEDGE)

Paper 2048/22
The Portrayal of the Birth of the Early Church

Key messages

- Candidates are advised to focus directly on the wording of the question.
- It is vital for candidates to know the whole text so that they can properly answer the different **part (a)** questions.

General comments

Overall, there were many good responses this series. The best answers described the passages in **(a)** questions using the right amount of detail, explained for **(b)** questions in their own words and gave balanced arguments with a reasoned conclusion for **(c)** questions. Weaker responses for **(a)** questions did not identify the passage being tested correctly. It is important that candidates journey through the whole of Acts, rather than focusing on the big stories alone.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a)** The best answers to this question focused on the actual idea of leadership rather than simply looking at passages from chapter one. Some candidates explored the extent to which the leadership was focused around Peter, some looked at the leadership of the group of apostles as a whole and some mentioned the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Weaker answers tended to not focus on the wording of the question, and some simply looked at the Jewish leaders rather than the leadership of the early church. A number of answers tried to examine the leadership of the church after Pentecost, not before.
- (b)** Most candidates were able to give a successful explanation of the importance of the seven deacons, for example exploring their role in the distribution of food and the need for the apostles to be relieved of day-to-day tasks. Better answers went on to explore the importance of the Seven beyond their introduction in Acts and discussed the role of the Seven as a whole or individuals from the seven in the spread of the gospel.
- (c)** There were some very good answers to this question that explored the pitfalls of having too many leaders in a church community or in a church as an institution. The counter arguments given often examined the idea that breadth of approach is good for Christianity or the need for the wide range of leadership tasks to be distributed. Weaker answers tended only to offer one point of view.

Question 2

- (a)** A number of candidates discussed the wrong passage in this question and gave accounts, for example, of the conversion of Saul. Those candidates who correctly identified the passage being tested were able to give clear accounts of Saul's time in Jerusalem and to discuss the intervention of Barnabas to gain the trust of the Twelve.

- (b) Some candidates looked at why Paul's work was challenging for Jews who might convert to Christianity, others looked at why his work was challenging for Jewish Christians, and some looked at how his work might be challenging for Jewish opponents. All three approaches were credited as valid responses to the question. The best answers moved away from describing other passages in Acts and sought to explain responses to the question in their own words.
- (c) Most candidates gave good balanced answers to this question, exploring the idea of Paul the missionary, Paul the miracle worker, Paul the preacher and so on. There were some answers that tried to compare the story of Paul with the story of others and to discuss which had more to teach Christians today, but this was not seen to be a valid interpretation of the question.

Question 3

- (a) Those candidates that correctly identified the passage being tested were able to give clear and accurate accounts of the healing of Tabitha/Dorcas. Weaker responses attempted to explore Peter's vision or other passages from Acts.
- (b) Candidates who had been successful in **part (a)** were able to give clear links between the passage and its importance to the early church. Weaker answers tended simply to talk about why the passage was remarkable in some way. Successful candidates focused on the wording of the question accurately.
- (c) There were some very interesting answers to this question. Some candidates agreed with the statements because they thought that the influence Peter could have exerted in Jerusalem would have been significant. Other candidates disagreed with the statement, often saying that Peter had many gifts that needed to be seen beyond Jerusalem. Most candidates in concluding stated that Peter was a great leader wherever he was based, and the best responses, as always, examined two different views before reaching a conclusion.

Question 4

- (a) Candidates often seemed to struggle to identify the correct part of the text to describe in this question. However, successful answers described the impressive impact that Paul and Barnabas had and the divisions that they caused in the city, which led to them having to flee.
- (b) There were some excellent answers to this question that showed a wide knowledge of the impact of the first missionary journey on the story of Acts. Some candidates focused on describing passages from the first missionary journey and therefore did not fully answer the question which was looking for an explanation in the candidate's own words.
- (c) There were some very insightful answers to this question. In agreeing with the statement, candidates often drew on the example of Paul but also on theoretical ideas such as the impact of his personal encounter with God. In disagreeing with the statement, candidates argued that being a Christian for life can put somebody in a good position to explain the word to others.

Question 5

- (a) Most candidates successfully identified the portion of the text being tested, though many did not go into sufficient detail in exploring what Paul said specifically about God when he was in Athens. In his speech, Paul was very clear about the actions of God as well as the nature of God, and the best answers drew both of these aspects out.
- (b) Many candidates were able to explain how and why Paul changed his message for different audiences, using the Athens visit as a stimulus. Others were usually able to make the point that Paul gave different speeches in different places and that the content was different, receiving credit as appropriate.
- (c) While there were many excellent answers to this question, some only focused on the extent to which the resurrection is important in general terms. The best answers focused clearly and throughout their responses on the Acts of the Apostles, contrasting this teaching with others such as the nature of God or how to live a community life, reaching a judgement about the relative importance of these teachings.

Question 6

- (a) Some candidates identified the wrong sorcery passage, but most were able to draw out the passage about the Sons of Sceva and gave good and clear detail in response to the question.
- (b) Some responses to this question were quite generalised, but others looked at the impact of encounters with evil spirits on the journey of the reader through the Acts of the Apostles. As always with **part (b)** questions, the best answers framed their responses in their own words rather than trying to describe passages.
- (c) There were many comprehensive answers to this question. Candidates often argued that evil spirits are relevant for Christians today and gave examples either from their own experience or in general terms about how the devil continues to be at work in society. Some candidates argued that there is little empirical evidence for the existence of evil spirits today. Weaker answers tended not to focus on Christianity today, which showed that they did not fully consider on the wording of the question.