

Texts and Traditions GA 3: Written examination

GENERAL COMMENTS

A considerable number of outstanding responses demonstrated a very clear and detailed knowledge of the text. There were very few papers which indicated only a minimal understanding of the selected texts although some students attempted all three sections of the paper.

Many marks were lost in all three sections from careless reading of the questions and a lack of focus in responses – sometimes as a result of students attempting to twist pre-prepared answers into questions which were of a more complex nature or which had a focus different to that assumed by the student. Students must read questions carefully and respond only to the focus of each question, clearly define terms which are specific to the study, refer to the text as a means of justifying their response and always keep to the topic when responding, especially in the essay question. In preparing students for the examination, teachers may find the document *Approaching the Texts and Traditions examination* helpful. This can be found at www.vattt.vic.edu.au/advice.html and while this document refers specifically to the 2002 examination its advice is still relevant to the study in 2003.

In all areas of study, students must be aware of the wider context of the passages and books they are studying. Students of the Gospels should be aware of relevant references to the Hebrew Scriptures and students of Jeremiah and Ezekiel need to be familiar with the broader literary and historical context of the prophetic books.

Students should have a knowledge of the texts broader than just the selected passages – this has been clarified by the use of the terms ‘Set Texts’ and ‘Passages for Special Study’ in 2003 (refer 2003 Prescribed Texts at www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/VCE/STUDIES/BOSE/PrescText03.htm). This broader knowledge is required – and is more notably a problem for students studying the Gospels who do not have a working knowledge of the entire Gospel. In teaching the Gospels it is important that students are aware of the structure and thematic content of the entire Gospel.

Essay questions are based on the entire ‘Set Texts’ although the questions tend to be based on themes coming from the ‘Passages for Special Study’. A broader understanding of the theme in the ‘Set Text’ as a whole usually leads to a more thorough response.

Questions 4 to 7 generally cover terms from the ‘Passages for Special Study’ or socio-historical background to the texts, they may also refer to specific minor themes from the passages.

The exegetical questions are always taken from the ‘Passages for Special Study’, and ask for highlighted words and phrases to be commented on ‘in the course of your exegesis’. More successful responses are set out in such a way that relevant highlighted words and phrases are tackled as part of a well structured commentary rather than being tacked on at the end of a disjointed series of observations. Some students opted to use the bullet points as subheadings which is fine as long as the response demonstrates an overall direction of thought. Too often, subheadings tended to make responses disjointed without exact focus. Overall an exegesis is a search for meaning so the fourth bullet point ‘meaning and significance for the author’s community’ could be seen to be a guide for all other comments. It is recommended that teachers spend some time allowing students to respond to this question as a means of preparing for the examination rather than relying on the completion of Outcome 3 of Unit 3 and Outcome 1 of Unit 4 as the only preparation.

Teachers and students should read the comments from each section as advice on how to respond to particular questions and is relevant to all areas.

Section 1 – The Gospel of John

Part A – Essay

Very few scripts this year demonstrated little understanding of the subject with nearly all students demonstrating a basic understanding of Johannine theology. A pleasing aspect of many students’ responses in the essay was their ability to draw on examples from the special study chapters. Students who can **demonstrate a thorough understanding and knowledge of the text** gain high scores in their essays. The importance of students illustrating and supporting their discussion with close reference to the text cannot be emphasised enough.

Students are much better equipped in **engaging in textual analysis** and very few scripts attempted to evangelise or preach the gospel. Answers on the historical development to the Feast of the Tabernacles were outstanding and most students could analyse the significance of Jewish concepts and traditions in discussing the way John’s Gospel presents Jesus.

It is important to define terms in an essay. A number of students wrote on the developing conflict between Jesus and ‘the Jews’ without defining the use of the expression ‘the Jews’. Some students wrote responses as if the term refers to Jewish people who oppose the revelation of God in Jesus. Many answers to the questions on the meaning of discipleship failed to attempt to elaborate on what is the meaning of discipleship in John’s Gospel. This particular essay gave scope for students to demonstrate their knowledge of the text outside the special study chapters (but very few gave textual evidence and examples outside the special study chapters). Students who answer the question and display a good knowledge of the text by drawing on examples continue to score highly.

Part B – Extended responses

Students' answers in the extended responses tended not to be of the same standard as the essays. Extended response questions demand a much more specific knowledge of a particular area of the course and require a more factual and historical understanding of the course. The role of John the Baptist in John's Gospel is quite specific and more successful responses had no difficulty defining his role as well as drawing on examples from the text.

Question 4 proved the most difficult on the paper. Many students simply retold the story without answering the question. Students were required to explore the author's portrayal of and attitude towards the Jewish Law with close reference to the text. Students are expected to be able to interpret a theme from a close analysis of a set text. More successful responses in the paragraphs gave examples from the text when explaining terms such as 'hour' and 'glory'.

Part C – Exegetical responses

There was a general improvement in how students completed the exegetical responses. Students demonstrated much better skills in applying basic exegetical methods to the interpretation of texts and were able to discuss in greater detail the meaning and significance of the text to the Johannine Community.

Successful responses showed clear knowledge of where the text was placed in the gospel. Many students still have difficulty commenting on the **context of a passage**. Students simply need comment on the position of the text in the Gospel and the significance of this. This requires students to be able to state what takes place immediately before the passage and what immediately follows the text and the importance of the positioning of the texts. For example, the investigation by the Pharisees of the blind man takes place in the Feasts Section of John's Gospel and is on the last day of the Feast of the Tabernacles. Immediately preceding the text Jesus has just cured a man born blind. The text is followed by a questioning of the blind man by the Pharisees on how he received his sight and the blind man's full confession of faith in Jesus after being driven out by the Pharisees.

The message and meaning of the text to the Johannine Community was done much better this year, with more detailed synthesis on the meaning of the passage to the Johannine Community clearly demonstrated.

Section 2 – The Books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel

Question 1

Whilst the question calls for a **description** of the historical, political and religious background, students were expected to do more than simply regurgitate dates, names, and events. In order to answer the second part of the question (*how this is reflected ...*), they were required to make **links** between this description and relevant sections of the text. For example, when discussing the period of the Josianic reform, students could have linked this to Jeremiah's depiction of the period as one which was marked by Judah's superficial return to God and of her failure to learn from the fate of her Northern sister. Or when describing the period of Jehoiakim's rule students could have connected this to Jeremiah's frequent use of metaphor and images drawn from the surrounding countryside to condemn Judah's foreign policy and compromise with paganism. Or when describing Babylon's invasion of Jerusalem, students could have linked this to Jeremiah's use of graphic imagery to describe the invasion that would be wrought by the Babylonian armies.

Question 2

A number of students failed to recognise that the question called for a discussion of three distinct aspects of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry. Thus, Jeremiah's messages of **condemnation** embrace a number of themes: the people's religious sins, their insincere worship of God, their social injustices, the complicity of the leaders; and the nation's formation of foreign alliances. Students were expected not only to identify and discuss these themes in general terms but also to support their discussion with examples from the text.

In discussing Jeremiah's portrayal of the nation's impending **doom and destruction** at the hands of the 'northern foe' (Babylon), students were expected to refer to his graphic descriptions of the enemy's strength, ruthlessness and of the invasion and destruction. However, amidst Jeremiah's prophecies of condemnation and doom there are also **messages of hope and restoration**. For example, the possibility of forgiveness and hope through a process of sincere repentance, the various steps of which students were expected to discuss. In discussing the prospect of future hope and renewal offered by Jeremiah, students should also have referred to the main features of his messianic vision in Chapter 3.

Question 3

Students were expected to offer by way of explaining why the exiles saw no possibility of future hope. To begin with, a strong belief in continuing responsibility for ancestral sins fostered perhaps by the Decalogue itself. Allied to this was the belief that the weight of one's own past misdeeds condemned a person to an endless cycle of punishment. The sense of inability to escape from divine judgment might also have been fostered by a belief in collective guilt and responsibility.

Students were expected to deal with Ezekiel's messages of **both** individual and national hope and to show **how** these messages served to counter the nation's sense of fatalism. On the individual level, students needed to develop Ezekiel's idea of individual responsibility and to show how this served to counter the exiles' belief that their fate was sealed. In addition, students were expected to discuss Ezekiel's visions of national restoration, the main features of which are set out in Chapters 34–37.

Questions 4 to 7

Given the more 'factual' nature of these questions, they were generally handled better by most students. However, a number of the questions bear further comment.

- Many students who attempted Question 4 simply presented a mere paraphrase of the passage instead of writing a **commentary** on the passage involving an **explanation** of a number of key words and phrases that underpin Jeremiah's future vision.
- In Question 6 students were, on the whole, able to give a description of the commissioning of both prophets, though in many cases these descriptions were very short on detail. Very few, if any students were able to comment well on points of similarity and difference between the two prophets. For example, in both cases the prophets were forewarned about the difficulties they would encounter in their mission, but were also assured by God not to be afraid of their task. Although described differently, in both cases God touched the prophets' mouths and it was this that made them ready to commence their communication. Whereas Jeremiah was instructed to preach to the nations, Ezekiel was instructed to speak to the nation of Israel. Whereas Jeremiah raised objections about his suitability for the role, God forestalled such a possibility for Ezekiel when he instructed him *be not rebellious*.
- A number of students presented a very general account of Jeremiah's description of the people's behaviour but failed to show how Jeremiah did so through the use of metaphorical language. More successful students were able to support their discussion of the people's various sins with actual examples of metaphorical language from the text.

Questions 8 to 10

Problems in students' handling of these questions were:

- rather than comment on the **meaning and significance** of these phrases, many students simply restated them in their own words
- where students did say something about the meaning and significance of a particular phrase, they did not always do so **in the context of the passage**. In other words, it is not enough simply to explain the meaning of a phrase in its own right, but account must also be taken of its relevance or connection to the passage of which it is a part. For example, in Question 8 it is not enough to say that 'a decree of divorce' refers to the exile of the Northern Kingdom. Students must also explain, with reference to the passage, why Jeremiah refers to this event – to emphasise the depth of Judah's sins given the benefit she had of historical hindsight
- whilst students were on the whole able to locate the passages in their historical setting, they were not always able to show **how** this would have influenced the way in which the author's community (the original audience) might have understood the meaning and significance of the passage under discussion
- not commenting on the (literary) context of the passage, and not showing an understanding of how the passage fits into the framework of the text as a whole. For example, does the passage form part of a wider literary or thematic unit within the text? Is it significant that this particular passage comes before or after a particular chapter or set of verses?
- most students ignored the instruction to comment on literary form or technique, and yet there were a number of things that could have been said about each passage.

Question 8

Verses 6–11 are an example of prophetic oracle, often introduced by the set phrases such as 'the word of the Lord came to me.' The communication of God's words in the first person serves to emphasise that the message is not the prophet's own but God's. Students should have noted Jeremiah's use of historical precedent to reinforce his message. The latter part of the passage exemplifies the language of exhortation or sanction, the purpose of which is to induce the people towards faithfulness and repentance.

Question 9

The book of Jeremiah contains both poetry and prose. This is one of various prose passages, of which there are two types – biography and prose sermon. This passage belongs to the former category which consists of narrative that speak about Jeremiah in the third person, reporting things that he did and said, and placing these within an identifiable social and historical context.

Question 10

Another example of the prophetic oracle, often introduced by set phrases such as 'Thus says the Lord.' or 'the word of the Lord came to me.' The communication of God's words in the first person serves to emphasise that the message is not the prophet's own but God's. Included in this passage is an example of a 'proof-saying' marked by the use of the formula 'and X will know that I am the Lord', which is attached to God's first person account of a divine action (verse 23).

Section 3 – The Gospel of Luke

Part A – Essay questions

Question 1

Very few students attempted this question but those who did tended to do well. Nearly all examples were taken from the set chapters and were used thoughtfully to describe the impact of the Hebrew Scriptures on the ministry of Jesus in Luke's Gospel. No student noted that there is a difference between the Jesus of the Gospel and the way Luke has used the Hebrew Scriptures to paint that Jesus in a particular light and the 'historical' Jesus and the reality of Judaism's impact on him. While the question could be interpreted to delve into such matters it was not the intention or focus of the question. All students who wrote on this essay topic used three examples as required.

Question 2

This was a popular question which was answered fairly poorly. Few students defined what they understood 'outcasts' to be and even fewer explained why they were outcasts. Many assumed all outcasts were Gentiles and therefore referred to some Jewish outcasts as Gentiles. This question had two parts and some students did not respond to the second part of the question which asked for the significance such a portrayal would have on Luke's audience. This is where an outcast/Gentile parallel would be useful. A definition or description of Luke's audience would have assisted with their analysis. Some students wrote an essay on women as outcasts in a very general manner with only vague examples similar to 'This can be seen in the story of the woman with the haemorrhage.' It is seemed that such students were prepared to write an essay on women and twisted the topic to fit their plans.

Question 3

The two parts to this question were not picked up by all students. Some wrote about meals in Luke's Gospel without relating those events to the universality theme – others wrote an essay on universality without direct reference to meal stories. Many students tended to take the theme of universality to mean that 'all people are accepted into God's kingdom' which is not the way the commentators or the Gospel tackle the theme. It is very important that students understand the notion of Salvation History and the idea which was held by some Jewish authorities that only Jewish people who followed the Law would be welcomed into the kingdom. Universality in Luke's Gospel tends to open the doors of God's kingdom to those who are not Jewish (Gentiles) but does not assume automatic inclusion simply because of one's status as Gentile. The complexity of this idea was not tackled by most students. The use of the word Gentile was also confused in some responses to this topic – a few commentaries refer to Gentiles almost synonymously with 'god-fearers' and therefore assumes automatic entry into the Kingdom, other commentaries take Gentile to mean non-Jewish and therefore see that, although all are welcome, only some will enter. Students need to define technical terms and recognise the implications of such definitions.

Part B – Short-answer questions

Question 4

Many students attempted this question and quite a few did so very well but many others did not read the question carefully and erred in one of two ways. Some students wrote a mini-essay on women and made none, or only a vague, reference to the text, ignoring the instruction 'With close reference to the text below.' Others retold the story of the text and never explored 'Luke's portrayal of, and attitude towards, women as disciples of Jesus.' Finally some responses discussed the text in the light of Luke's attitude toward and portrayal of women but ignored the 'as disciples of Jesus' part of the question. This question, more than any other, pointed to the fact that students had not read questions carefully enough.

Question 5

This question was completed well by most students who attempted it. The centurion at Capernaum was the most favoured choice by students and this sometimes led to the problem of students just retelling the story in the Gospel. Those who chose more 'historical' characters were able to give some background information and then discuss the role that character played in the Jesus story – it is important that students recognise that an instruction such as 'discuss the significance of' means more than 'say what they did.' This instruction usually asks for a greater depth of analysis.

Question 6

Students who attempted this question tended to do very well – some used a comparative chart and others used subheadings of 'Temple' and 'synagogues' to structure their response. Others chose a more unified manner of responding – all these methods were effective. A few students seemed to know very little about the Temple or synagogues (this should be tackled in Unit 1, Outcome 1 as well as during exegetical work during the year).

Question 7

This question was generally well done. Some students did not read the question carefully and just gave a general description of parables without any reference to a specific example. Others jumped from one parable to another to make points about the structure and use. Some students only commented on structure and made no reference to the use of parables in the Gospel of Luke. Students must read questions carefully and learn how to break the questions down to their component parts to make sure that the whole question is answered.

Part C – Exegetical responses

Generally the exegetical questions were answered more competently in 2002 than in 2001. Students were able to use the bullet points to structure their response and most commented competently on the highlighted words and phrases.

Responses could be improved by incorporating the comments on the highlighted words and phrases into the exegesis as a whole – the instructions ask for this. Those who left their commentary on the word and phrases until after they had covered the bullet points did not seem to understand what an exegesis is. Ultimately an exegesis should enlighten the reader regarding the overall meaning of a passage – this would include bullet points 1, 2, 3 and 5, which should incorporate mention of specific words and phrases – the purpose for commenting on bullet points 1, 2, 3 and 5 and specific words and phrases is to fulfil bullet point 4 – the meaning and significance for the author's community. A student who responds competently would be always aiming to use their comments to bring about bullet point 4.

The highlighted words and phrases must be commented on 'in the context of the passage'. This means that definitions alone are not enough. If a student is to comment, for example, on the word 'Messiah' or 'Christ' they need to do more than just define the word or discuss the history of the concept, they must also discuss the use of the word in the particular passage.