

DIVINITY

<p>Paper 8041/22 The Four Gospels</p>

Key messages

This was a popular paper which allowed candidates to choose four questions out of fourteen and write essays which clearly reflected their level of understanding, their research, their level of scholarly reading and their individual access to resources within their own centre. Overall the standard of marks for this paper was good.

General comments

Overall, candidate performance was good as they displayed a clear understanding of the subject content of the syllabus. There was evidence of a wider reading of scholarly works. More contemporary scholars were referred to than in previous years. Candidates generally stayed focused and produced essays which were largely relevant.

A question will never be about merely retelling information but there will always be a need to either make an assessment, an analysis, an evaluation, a comparison, etc. Candidates need to identify this and then arrange their answer around this task, so the question is clearly addressed. Candidates need to show that they have a good grasp of any relevant scholarly trends and developments available to them and that they know how to use this information within their answers.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This question remains a popular choice amongst the candidates and those who did attempt this generally scored high marks. There were a small minority of candidates who did not follow the instructions and so did not fully answer the question and select four gobbets to write about but only two or three instead. This meant that candidates could not gain the higher levels if they did not answer the correct amount. Also a few candidates mistook **Question 1**, with its four parts, as being an alternative to answering 4 essays from the entire paper therefore, this seriously affected their final mark.

- (a) This was a very popular gobbet with most candidates clearly identifying it as from the birth narrative in Matthew and the flight to Egypt instigated by Joseph. A lot was written in answer to this gobbet about the comparison to Moses and Old Testament fulfilment of prophecy.
- (b) This gobbet was popular as it presented candidates with the opportunity to write about Peter and his importance amongst the disciples. It was correctly identified in context and answers were detailed and relevant.
- (c) There was a danger with this gobbet that candidates would see it as an opportunity to write about the call of the fishermen disciples in general, so a few answers referred to Peter's call. Some candidates did not confine their comments to James and John and so wandered off the point. For those who focused on the sons of Zebedee there were a lot of quality answers.
- (d) Some candidates used this gobbet to write solely about the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. It is necessary to comment on the content in the question, i.e. the significance of the washing of hands: cleanliness/uncleanliness.

- (e) A few candidates identified Zechariah as the person of Zacchaeus and therefore totally mistook the content and understanding of the gobbet. For those who did recognise this as part of the foretelling of the birth of John the Baptist good marks were achieved. A lot of material was included in the best answers which clearly covered the main points of the gobbet.
- (f) This gobbet is about Zacchaeus the tax collector and for the candidates who answered this question there was a lot of scope. The best answers drew out the main points of the incident rather than merely retelling the story, i.e. the tax collector's role, outcasts, Roman society, Jesus' presence demanding a response.
- (g) The Prologue from John is a distinct piece of writing and so this gobbet was largely identified correctly with a lot of relevant comment. Marks were not given for merely recounting the whole of the Prologue word for word.
- (h) Some candidates confused this gobbet with the story of Mary Magdalene anointing Jesus' feet with expensive perfume in Luke's Gospel. The context here is from John's account of Mary the brother of Lazarus therefore comment should be around this account.

Question 2

A reasonably popular question, although many responses were quite weak, being too narrative in tone or making general comments about Joseph protecting Mary. Some responses referred to the Old Testament context (Joseph's ancestry) and the focus of Matthew on the broader Jewish and historical background. A few responses demonstrated good understanding of the social and cultural context, noting the severe danger to her life that Mary would have been in, if pregnant by anyone other than Joseph, thus accurately noting the importance of his role in saving her from probable death. There were one or two very good answers where candidates looked at the wider role of Joseph as the human father of Jesus and the trauma this may have put him through, hence needing the divine intervention through the angel's appearances to him.

Question 3

A popular question often answered in conjunction with **Question 5** and **Question 11**. Many responses answered quite well, balancing positive and negative examples within Matthew's portrait of the disciples, although only a limited number made close and accurate textual references to illustrate their answers and thus raise them to a higher level. Some candidates gave a general answer to this question and used material from other gospels apart from Matthew. The question was about Matthew's portrayal of the disciples therefore any outside references needed to be clearly acknowledged as being from another source.

Question 4

This question was not often answered, but a few responses did this very well and could make extensive and accurate reference to textual examples to support their answer. Other responses tended to be too generalised, and failed to distinguish between Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians and how that related to the political context of the time. Only a very few referred to the specific Jewish ideas about purity and separation (from Gentile culture) that lay behind much of the Pharisaic criticism of Jesus. Again, answers needed to be based on Mark's text and other sources needed to be identified.

Question 5

This was a very popular question. Some responses focused solely on the Messianic Secret – providing a 'depth-not-breadth' answer, which was fine. Others argued that the Messianic Secret was a central theme, but other themes (discipleship, immediacy, persecution, suffering, etc.) were equally central. This was done well, but a number of responses failed to explain the early 20th century origin and point of the scholarly arguments for the existence of the Messianic Secret, rather just accepting it as a 'given', thus missing a crucial aspect of the question.

Question 6

This appeared a less popular question. Very few responses did this question well, most were too general in scope, when referring to the Holy Spirit in Luke, and some strayed into confessional comment about the role of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life in general. In some cases candidates saw the term 'Holy Spirit' and put down all they knew and understood by this.

Question 7

A few candidates answered this very well, taking their response right through from the birth narratives to the crucifixion, making accurate textual references to support their answer. A number of candidates did not know the meaning of the word 'humility', or confused it with 'humanity', thus producing responses that were either entirely incorrect or conflated the two terms, giving a response that focused more on Jesus' humanity.

Question 8

Several candidates produced excellent responses and clearly understood the Prologue and its relationship with the rest of John's Gospel. In some cases, however, this was a poorly executed question, lacking relevant information and clear understanding.

Question 9

This was not a popular question. Several candidates produced excellent responses which clearly understood the point of the question and could illustrate this with accurate textual reference. Others made general comments linking living water to the Holy Spirit without any textual context.

Question 10

Quite a popular question. Most candidates clearly understood what was required, but many focused much more extensively on Matthew (and answered this part of the question well), than Luke, which was overall much shorter. A few candidates were able to write extensively and accurately on both, having a clear grasp of the purposes of both Matthew and Luke.

Question 11

This was a very popular question. Some very good responses gave extensive examples of the types of miracles that Jesus performed, their context and their Christological significance, before addressing other Christological themes in the Gospels. However, some candidates only focused on all the other things that Jesus was – a preacher, teacher, leader, etc., almost completely ignoring the miracles, thus weakening their overall argument. There needed to be a clear balance in their essays.

Question 12

Some candidates answered this well, sticking to two gospel authors and examining the meaning, origins and contexts of the different titles for Christ – Messiah, Lord, Son of God and Son of Man were extensively explored. Other responses were less focused, referring to most of the titles above but without clearly linking them to a specific Gospel, thus losing the focus of the question.

Question 13

Quite a popular question, where candidates took several approaches. Some focused closely on the authors' different audiences, and many were effective responses. Quite a number broadened the question out to include an analysis of the Synoptic 'problem' or sources of the individual gospels, and where this was linked to 'audience', were executed quite well.

Question 14

There were very few good responses for this question. Some candidates were able to explain in detail the historical and political background and thus the impact of Roman rule on Palestine and link that to textual instances where it impacted on Jesus' life and ministry – most not getting beyond the birth narratives and crucifixion. In many cases Roman rule was confused or conflated with the Jewish authorities, with candidates either failing to distinguish between the two or unable to explain the relationship between Roman and Jewish authorities.