

DIVINITY

Paper 8041/21
The Four Gospels

There were too few candidates for a meaningful report to be produced.

DIVINITY

Paper 8041/22
The Four Gospels

Key messages

To do well when answering these questions candidates must stick closely to the content of the question and identify what the main focus of it is.

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. It is important to give a balanced response which shows the candidate has covered more than one approach to the question.

It is necessary to show that candidates 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. Marks are awarded for what the candidate produces in their answer and the quality of their response.

General comments

Candidates are asked to choose four questions out of fourteen and write essays which clearly reflect their level of understanding, their research, and their level of scholarly reading. Overall, the standard of marks for this paper was good with many candidates scoring the higher end of the marks. The standard of vocabulary and written work was very good. No scripts were illegible.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

The Gobbets

75 percent of candidates opted for this question. It remains a popular choice. Almost all answered the correct number of parts. A few attempted more than 4. Most were reasonably well done, although some lacked contextual detail – i.e., the gobbet's chronology and context in a particular gospel, and other features of the text, such as place detail or its relation to other significant events. Quite a few responses confused and/or mixed up **(b)** with the Calming of the Storm miracle. A few responses completely mistook **(e)** for the birth of Jesus, instead of John the Baptist.

- (a)** This was correctly identified as coming from the Sermon on the Mount and there was good comment around the person of Jesus being compared to Moses and parallels being made with the ten commandments. Candidates wrote at length about Jesus' role as one of defining the law in a new way. The fulfilment of the Law was part of the Jewish Messianic expectation, and some answers reflected their awareness of this.
- (b)** There were some candidates who confused this gobbet and incorrectly identified this as the storm on the lake miracle where Jesus was asleep in the boat when the storm hit. Many however got it right and wrote about Jesus coming to the disciples whilst they were in the boat and Peter's attempt to walk toward Jesus on the water.

- (c) A well answered question giving a lot of relevant detail about the healing of the man with the withered hand. A Sabbath healing which gave rise to the religious authorities challenging Jesus about his actions.
- (d) This was correctly identified as following the Transfiguration story. All candidates commented on the three disciples who accompanied Jesus at this time and spoke about the 'inner circle' of Peter, James, and John. Stronger responses included very relevant comment reflecting the significance of this event in Jesus' ministry.
- (e) Several candidates confused the annunciation of Jesus' birth with this account of the birth of John the Baptist which meant they received no marks. For those who got it right, they wrote lengthy answers with detail about the role of Zachariah and his wife Elizabeth.
- (f) Correctly identified by most candidates as the story of the Roman centurion whose slave/servant was ill. Most responses grasped the significance of 'authority' and 'faith' in this gobbet.
- (g) This was a popular choice as it allowed candidates to write at length about the role of women in Luke's Gospel and the relationship between Jews and Samaritans. This was answered well by candidates who chose it.
- (h) This was not popular. Those who answered this did identify it correctly as part of the final discourses at the last supper event and it was evident that they had studied the relevance of this in some detail, so answers were very well written and informed.

Question 2

Few candidates chose this one. Some did this well, making good textual references to illustrate this, such as Pharisaic hostility to Jesus (the Conflict stories), and exploring the broader historical, political, and social context that may have influenced Matthew's portrayal. Weaker responses merely cited examples which supported the premise of the question with little analysis. There was a lot of material to utilise, and it was evident those candidates who had prepared for an essay on Jesus' opponents clearly had the opportunity to write at length.

Question 3

Candidates wrote a lot about the Sermon on the Mount and its significance for Jesus' ministry. This formed the bulk of many essays. Few responses identified the development of the teaching throughout Jesus' ministry and the Gospel of Matthew. Many responses wrote about how Jesus developed the law further i.e. Spoke about adultery and extended it to looking at a woman with lust etc. but failed to show how the ideas, Jesus put forward in his sermon, reoccurred within Matthew's Gospel. This was the type of question which insisted on knowing how the teaching from the sermon was reiterated within the gospel.

Question 4

A very popular question and mostly well-answered, with appropriate textual references. Responses took a variety of approaches to this, with many using numerous references to support the view that Mark was focused on Jesus' humanity. Stronger responses were able to compare and contrast this with Mark's portrayal of Jesus' divinity and link this to an overview of Mark's Christology, exploring the Messianic Secret and Jesus' suffering and the historical context of Mark's Christian community at the time of writing.

Question 5

Peter is always a popular character to write about and many study him as a key person, so this question was attempted by many candidates. Better responses looked at his potential links with Mark/the author of the Gospel and historical references to this, thus taking a broader overview of his influence on the composition of the Gospel as a whole. Some responses were able to analyse Peter's role as both an example of faith and weakness, citing his denial of Jesus and subsequent post-resurrection forgiveness by Jesus. Weaker responses listed many of the instances of Peter's words and actions in the Gospels without really analysing his importance.

Question 6

A popular question and mostly well-answered; however, some responses were weaker on the question of date and context, or attempted some cursory comments, whilst mostly exploring the purposes of Luke. Stronger responses dealt in detail with each part of the question, giving a comprehensive answer, the best being able to link their conclusions about date and context to Luke's overarching purpose or purposes in writing the Gospel. Any question around authorship is always popular as candidates do appear to prepare well for these ones and can draw on several different sources and scholarly views.

Question 7

This question on the topic of Luke's theme of material possessions demands candidates are able to handle their material in a way which will answer the question. Most were able to explore this theme with appropriate textual evidence. Many referred to other Lukan themes, such as the preference for the poor, outcasts, women, thus attempting to address the question of whether rejection of material possessions was really central, or merely one among a number of central themes.

Question 8

This was not a popular question. Few chose this and fewer still were able to answer this question in a relevant balanced way. Weaker responses made brief reference to the trial of Jesus, but without being able to develop the broader references to the importance of truth, such as the 'I am' sayings or the Holy Spirit as truth, etc., within the Gospel. There were many ways of approaching this essay – looking at 'truth' as something 'being true' or as 'universal truth', 'truth on a higher plain', but these were not explored.

Question 9

A slightly more popular question than **Question 8**, however, not generally done very well. Most responses which attempted this were able to list and describe the signs, but few were able to discuss the broader purpose and context of these in John's Gospel. A few stronger responses referred to the wider aim of the signs to deepen believers' faith and addressed the question of what the signs showed about Jesus' divine power. There was a lot of scope for good, relevant answers to be developed with links made to the 'I am' sayings and the whole idea of John's Christology but this opportunity was not taken.

Question 10

A very popular choice of question with many good responses. Some analysed the social and historical context, i.e., the status and role of women in Jewish culture and wider society in the Roman period, and thus were able to point to the significance and influence of some of the women portrayed in the Gospels. Weaker responses were mostly confined to a descriptive list of the deeds of women in the Gospels, going back the birth stories, with little attempt at examination. A lot of material was covered by candidates, and they chose their examples wisely. Good and interesting answers were given by most candidates.

Question 11

A few answered this one. The responses were reasonably good and could give examples of how the events that preceded it were reflected in the words and actions of the Last Supper, such as the predictions of Jesus' suffering and betrayal, and the importance of service to each other (e.g., Jesus washing the disciples' feet in John's Gospel). Good responses also focused on the Last Supper as the Passover meal (in the Synoptics) and the significance for the later Church of the Institution of the Eucharist.

Question 12

A popular question. Most responses dealt with this thoroughly and systematically, considering different combinations of the Synoptic Problem and source theories. Most concluded for the modern widely held view of Markan priority. Some referenced the traditional, earlier view that Matthew was written before Mark, reflecting the ordering of the Gospels. Very few considered views about the date, and by extension, authorship, of John. Most who attempted this appeared as those who had prepared an essay on the Synoptic problem and their skill lay in presenting it in a way which answered the question as it was written.

Question 13

Quite a number answered this one. Straightforward responses compared and contrasted the key features of each of the birth narratives. Better responses linked these to the background, aims and intended readership of the authors. For example, many contrasted the Jewish cultural background references of Matthew, linking Jesus to Jewish history, with Luke's broader universal outlook, for example the focus on Mary's role and the presence of the poor and humble (the shepherds), and were thus able to explain quite effectively how these narratives were devised to support the authors' purposes. Some very good essays on this question.

Question 14

Not that many attempted this question. Those who did were generally able to handle it well, arguing that the events and responses to Jesus, e.g., Messianic expectations, Jewish customs and festivals, the political context of Roman occupation, were all required for a proper understanding of the Gospels. A few very strong responses considered whether the message of Jesus could be understood independently of context. One or two referred to the author of Luke's stated purpose and intended readership, arguing that this took his Gospel beyond its purely Jewish context.

DIVINITY

Paper 8041/23
The Four Gospels

There were too few candidates for a meaningful report to be produced.