

GCE



CCEA GCE A2  
Exemplifying Examination  
Performance  
**Religious Studies**

**A2 3: Themes in the  
Old Testament**

This is an exemplification of candidates' performance in GCE A2 examinations (Summer 2018) to support the teaching and learning of the Religious Studies specification.



*Permission to reproduce all copyright material has been applied for. In some cases, efforts to contact copyright holders may have been unsuccessful and CCEA will be happy to rectify any omissions of acknowledgement in future if notified.*

# EXEMPLIFYING EXAMINATION PERFORMANCE

## GCE Religious Studies

### Introduction

These materials illustrate aspects of performance from the 2018 summer A2 examination series of CCEA's revised GCE Specification in 2016.

Students' grade A responses are reproduced verbatim and accompanied by commentaries written by senior examiners. The commentaries draw attention to the strengths of the students' responses and indicate, where appropriate, deficiencies and how improvements could be made.

It is intended that the materials should provide a benchmark of candidate performance and help teachers and students to raise standards.

For further details of our support package, please visit our website at [www.ccea.org.uk](http://www.ccea.org.uk)

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donna Finlay". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

Donna Finlay

Education Manager, Religious Studies

Email: [dfinlay@ccea.org.uk](mailto:dfinlay@ccea.org.uk)

Telephone: 028 9026 1200 ext. 2105



**GCE: A2 Religious Studies**

**ARE31: Themes in the Old Testament**

**Grade: A Exemplar**



## Section A

**Q1a** “The God of the Old Testament is a God of compassion.” Present a case for this statement. [20]

**The above question could not be exemplified as the candidate’s permission could not be obtained.**

**Q1b** “There were good reasons to explain a violent God in ancient Israel, but in the modern world such a view of God is no longer acceptable.” Critically assess this view. [30]

### Student’s response

*God often is presented as a warrior in the Old Testament alongside his compassionate nature. God often fought on Israels side as a warrior for example the drying up of the Red Sea or the destruction and invasion of Canaan. God brought a “pillar of fire, terror and dread” as he “fought for his people of Israel”. God was not only a warrior but a successful one. This is presented in the defeat of Og, Amalekites, Canaanites and many other surrounding nations that were left “utterly destroyed” with “no survivors”. Although this is an extreme and violent view of God, the modern world of God does accept this violent nature. Many in Britain, Israel and other Christian countries have proclaimed ‘with God on our side’ as they fight in war.*

*The Old Testament concept of ‘herem’ is also still acceptable in some cultures today. This means to “completely destroy”; as God often commanded Israel and others like Babylon to do. This concept is rooted in the conquest story of Central, Southern and Northern Canaan, when war, death and violence was justified by God. Although some may argue it to be immoral, this view of God is accepted by some organised terrorist groups such as ISIS who claim that their violence and total destruction and slaughter of towns and cities is justified violence by God, for the purposes of ethnic cleansing, just as God had done to the Amalekites – “I will drive them out completely”.*

*God didn’t only judge surrounding nations of Israel with his violence but also Israel itself. This is seen in the Old Testament account of when Saul was commanded by God to “utterly destroy” one city and inhabitants of the Amalekites, along with their spoil, he, however, disobeyed God by sparing their King Ag, and one best of their spoil as he seen it as an “unnecessary” waste. Samuel was then sent by God to punish Saul for his disobedience – “Saul, why did you disobey the Lord?” and Ag was put to death and Saul striped of his throne. This is accepted my many modern christians who face persecution due to personal and worldly sin.*

*However, some may agree with the statement and argue that the modern world view of this ancient violent God is no longer accepted. Historical hermeneutics would take into account the context of ancient Israel and their disobedient background and compare it to modern day Christianity which is more obedient. Pacifists would also agree with this statement that violence isn't needed for obedience because even Israel who were persecuted sometimes refused to repent and continued in their disobedience.*

### **Examiner's comments**

Based on relevant knowledge and understanding, this response clearly understood the concept of God as the Divine Warrior, tasked with the role of defending Israel. But it also comprehended that on occasion God could fight against Israel.

Referencing the concept of *herem*, connection was made to how a similar ideology is still operative in parts of the contemporary world.

Some sophistication was shown in the discussion of how a violent God is no longer acceptable, including mention of historical hermeneutics and pacificism.

While the response demonstrated a very good attempt at personal insight and independent thought, critical assessment could have been stronger.

Band 4

**Q2a** Examine the importance of the call of Jeremiah as a prophet to Judah. [20]

**The above question could not be exemplified as the candidate's permission could not be obtained.**

**Q2b** Consider critically the relevance of Jeremiah's message both in his own time and today. [30]

**The above question could not be exemplified as the candidate's permission could not be obtained.**

**Q3a** Identify and consider how Ezekiel acted out his prophecy. [20]

### Student's response

*Ezekiel was one of the first deportees to be sent to Babylon and from his new home here, near the Chebar River, he was called to be a prophet of God, delivering warnings yet with a degree of future hope.*

*As Ezekiel was a rather univocal prophet, with limited confidence to publically speak the Word of God, he often used methods of sign acts, as instructed by God, to reveal the imminent destruction if the people of Israel did not change their ways. God instructed him to use a clay tablet and draw out the siege of the City, using a pan as the wall. He then was to lie on his left side, to bear the sins of Judah for 390 days then tied up he was to do the same on his right side for 40 days, for the sins of Israel. In doing so he was to ration the food he consumed and it was to be judgement cooked over human excrement as fuel. This was a physical manifestation of God's to depict the captivity of exile, into which they would be sent and the rationed food in which they would suffer.*

*Additionally, God commanded him to prophesy to the people using his hair and beard. He was to shave it all off then divide the hair into 3 groups. 1 pile he was to burn, which represented the destruction of the city by fire. Another third he was to destroy with the sword, representing how the people of Israel will die by the sword if not consumed by the fire and finally he was to scatter the final third to represent those who will be scattered in exile to the nations. However, this message of sincere destruction was intruded by a positive message of hope as God revealed that Ezekiel was to keep back just a few hairs, as a metaphor for the faithful remnant of Israel who would become the future of the city.*

*Furthermore, a key concept of Ezekiel's acted out prophecys was The valley of dry bones in which Ezekiel, through the power of God turned the bones to flesh with tendons and skin, giving them a new "flesh heart" to replace their "hardened hearts". This brought a sincere message of hope to the people of restoration after destruction.*

## Examiner's comments

This response accurately identified the importance of sign-acts to the prophetic message of Ezekiel. Examples of these were included, starting with the clay tablet as a way to signal Judah's imminent destruction if the people remained recalcitrant. This was followed by a discussion of how Ezekiel slept on his right and left side for a designated period of time to indicate the sins of Judah and Israel respectively. In connection with this, reference was made to food rations being cooked over human excrement to demonstrate the severity of impending exilic captivity.

Through examination of Ezekiel shaving his hair and the symbolism associated with the different thirds, a note of hope was introduced.

This excellent response would have been strengthened by inclusion of the obvious point that Ezekiel packed his belongings for exile in the sight of the people as an indication of the fate awaiting Judah.

Band 5

**Q3b** Critically assess the claim that the message of Ezekiel is primarily a message of judgement. [30]

### Student's response

*Ezekiel brought many messages of judgement to the exiles in Babylon. The Allegory of the foundling sums up the majority of Israel's sins as Ezekiel depicts an unfaithful wife who represents Israel's disobedience to God. Her youth demonstrates her disliked nature – "you were despised at birth" but God made a covenant with her – "you became mine". Then her sins demonstrate the multitude of disobedient actions carried out by Israel – "lay with idols and engaged in prostitution with them" – idolatry and adultery, "sought strangers instead of your husband" – idolatry and polytheism as Israel moved away from God, "you offered your lovers the food I gave to you" – false offering to altars of Baal, "sons and daughters sacrificed" – child sacrifice to the fertility cults of Baal and Canaanites. These sins of foreign alliance, idolatry and sexual immorality were then condemned by God through Ezekiel's oracle of judgement in her condemnation. God stated that he would "turn her lovers against her as she lies slain among idols and altars" and he would "judge her as a woman who has committed adultery". However, although a strong oracle of judgement, this isn't the only message Ezekiel demonstrates. Ezekiel speaks of her restoration following judgement – "I will make atonement", "you will remember and be humiliated and never open your mouth again". Although it may seem that the message of Ezekiel is primarily a message of judgement, he always brings hope at the end. Without this condemnation of iniquity, hope of restoration could not be delivered, making Ezekiel's message of hope, just as important, if not more so than his oracles of judgement.*

*Towards the end of his prophecy, Ezekiel focuses primarily on the New Covenant that Israel would experience. He brought visions of a new heart – "message no longer written on tablets of stone but unlike Torah written on the hearts of Israel". He delivered visions of the Temple restoration – "water flowed out from under the Temple and all it touched, lived", "I saw that the Temple was filled with the glory of the Lord". This brought hope of God's presence moving beyond the temple, to dwell among his people. The valley of dry bones alludes to resurrection as God would "breathe his spirit" into the bones which represented Israel's absence of God. Then they stood as "a vast army" as God was with them again in their renewed covenant relationship.*

## Examiner's comments

This response addressed the task by arguing that the text depicting Israel as a foundling contained all of Israel's primary sins and the judgment commensurate with them. Idolatry and unfaithfulness in all their dimensions were identified as the core reasons for Israel's alienation from God.

After indicating the strength of the condemnation and judgment, the response enumerated and explored later aspects of hope, including the New Covenant as central to this. In addition, the new heart, restored temple, and vision of dry bones being returned to life were also incorporated.

Overall, the response demonstrated a very good attempt at critical analysis but could have been strengthened by the discussion of a wider range of judgment oracles, related to more specific sins.

Band 4

## Section B

### Synoptic Assessment

#### Theme: Leadership, Text and Alienation

**Q4a** “Sin will always involve alienation from God and others.” Present a case for this statement. You must support your answer with reference to at least one other unit of study. [20]

#### Student's response

*Sin is a contentious topic in today's society as it's importance is considered significantly different to the time of the Bible in which it was first written about. There is no denying that throughout the Bible sin as disobedience of God's commands more often than not resulted in alienation through exile or exclusion. Throughout the Old Testament this alienation is encountered on numerous occasions whereby Israel have gone against the decalogue and God has then punished this sin by hiding from his people, leaving them to suffer alone or by excluding them from their cities and communities.*

*The most obvious example of such exclusion is the exile to Babylon in 586 bc which saw over half the Israelites being deported however they were not entirely with God as he continued to prophesy to them through Ezekiel. Likewise the people who remained were not without God as Jeremiah, another of God's prophets remained with them. The statement therefore that sin always involves alienation from God and others is not entirely true as from a point of view more often than not it did involve alienation from others but in many cases alienation from God was only ever a temporary situation as he could not subject himself to human ways for long enough before his sovereign nature caused him to forgive.*

*In today's society, we are more convinced that sin will not cause alienation from God. As part of the unit 7 Ethics course which we study, we encounter many scenarios by which God is a threatened case as preventative measures of socially unacceptable scenarios such as abortion and euthanasia. As is well known, neither of these concepts are favoured in the eyes of the church, therefore in the eyes of God as they go against the sixth commandment of the decalogue "do not murder". In doing either of these, you are committing a sin and therefore will experience alienation from God and the others in society. However, it is also noted that God is a person of forgiveness, should you repent therefore the alienation in which you experience will not be permanent.*

## Examiner's comments

This response initially addressed the task by accurately explaining a biblical view of sin, including as disobedience of the divine commands encoded in the decalogue and how this ultimately resulted in the alienation of the exile. Dimensions of alienation were indicated by reference to the concept of the God who hides (*deus absconditis*), people being left to suffer alone, and being uprooted from their communities.

The other unit of study referred to was Ethics and consisted of a discussion of how different ethical approaches can stand in tension with accepted church teaching, particularly in relation to issues such as abortion and euthanasia.

This response would have been strengthened by reference to different theological theories of sin and alienation.

Band 4

**Q4b** “In a world that has outgrown religion, the concept of sin is irrelevant.” Critically evaluate this view. You must refer to other aspects of human experience in your answer. [30]

**The above question could not be exemplified as the candidate's permission could not be obtained.**



