

## **Knowing scripture and the power of God**

### **Mark 12:18-27 (and Mark 12:28-34)**

#### **An Ujamaa Centre**

#### **Contextual Bible Study**

1. Listen to a reading of Mark 12:18-27.
2. Who are the key characters in this text and what does the text tell us about them. What is the relationship between the characters?
3. Jesus says, twice (verses 24 and 27), that the Sadducees are 'wrong'. What reasons does he give to explain to them why they are wrong?
4. While we know little about the Sadducees, scholars and Jewish religious leaders are in agreement that they represented the scripturally 'literalist' or theologically 'conservative' religious group within Judaism in the time of Jesus. They accepted only the written law, the Torah. They rejected the oral law which developed as a form of contextual interpretation of the Torah (the Talmud and Midrashim). As we see in this text, they did not believe in the resurrection, because it is not mentioned in the Torah. The main focus of their religious life were the rituals associated with the Jerusalem temple, which is why they confront and contend with Jesus. They understood that his presence was a threat both to their theology and their temple. And, in fact, the Sadducees disappeared from history after CE 70, after the destruction of the Second Temple (Herod's Temple).

What do you understand by a 'literalist' approach to scripture? What did a literalist approach to scripture prevent the Sadducees from 'seeing' and understanding?

5. What are some of the problems with a literalist approach to scripture?
6. Who are those in our contexts that use scripture to protect the traditional ways of their church and their own positions in the church?
7. Read the next section of Mark's narrative, Mark 12:28-34. How is the engagement between this scribe and Jesus different from the engagement between the Sadducees and Jesus?
8. What is the understanding of scripture that Jesus and the scribe share?
9. How should we approach scripture as we engage with the issue of sexuality?