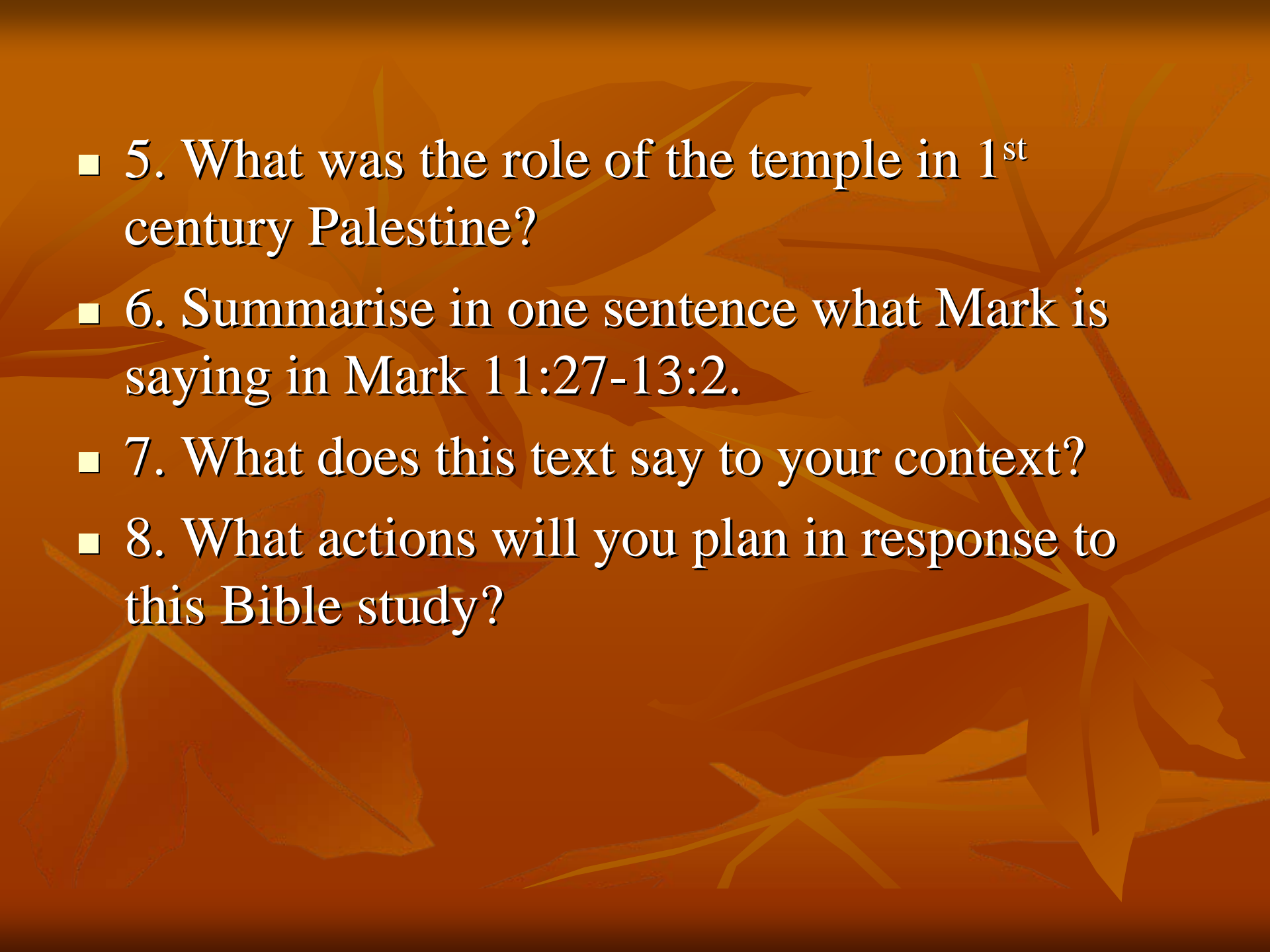


Mark 12:41-44

Contextual Bible Study
An example with analysis

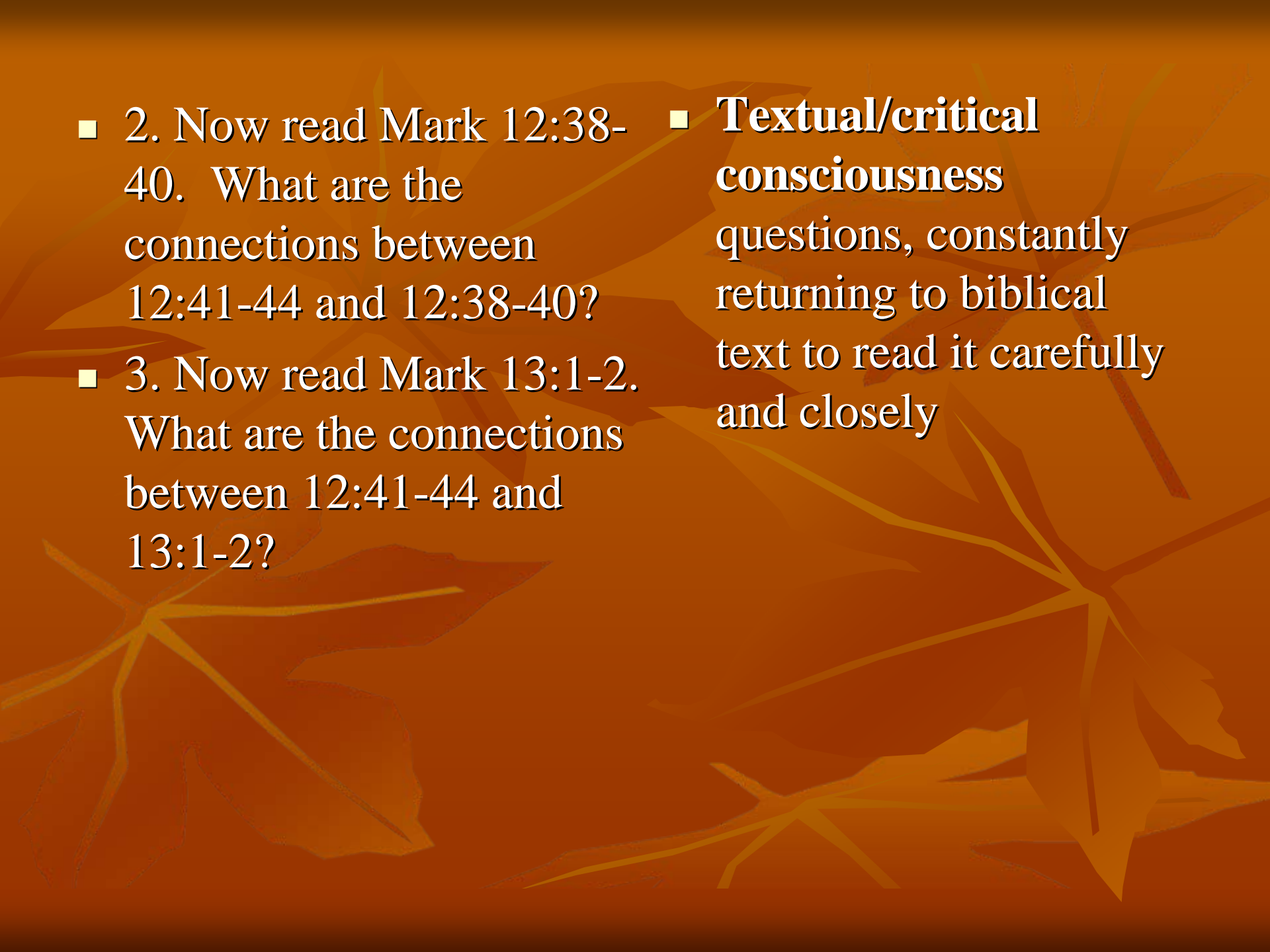
Bible study questions

- 1. Read Mark 12:41-44. What is the text about?
- 2. Now read Mark 12:38-40. What are the connections between 12:41-44 and 12:38-40?
- 3. Now read Mark 13:1-2. What are the connections between 12:38-44 and 13:1-2?
- 4. Jesus comes into the temple at 11:27 and leaves at 13:2. Who are the characters and what are the relationships between them? Draw a picture of the relationships.

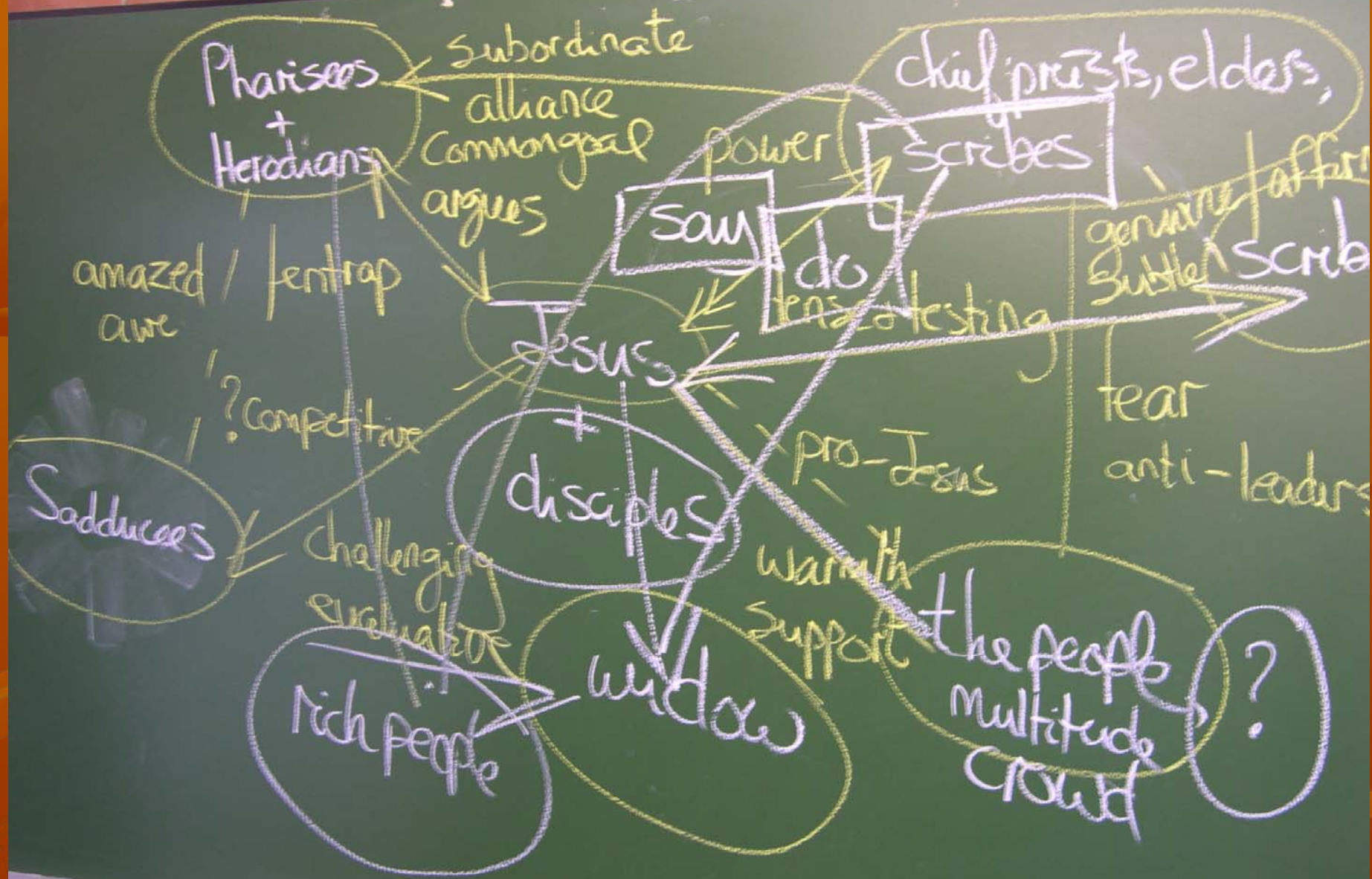
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- 5. What was the role of the temple in 1st century Palestine?
 - 6. Summarise in one sentence what Mark is saying in Mark 11:27-13:2.
 - 7. What does this text say to your context?
 - 8. What actions will you plan in response to this Bible study?

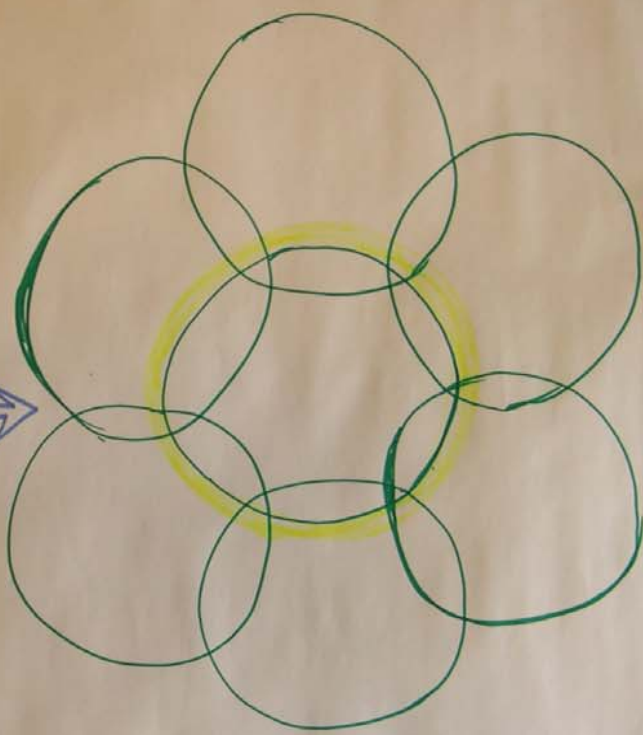
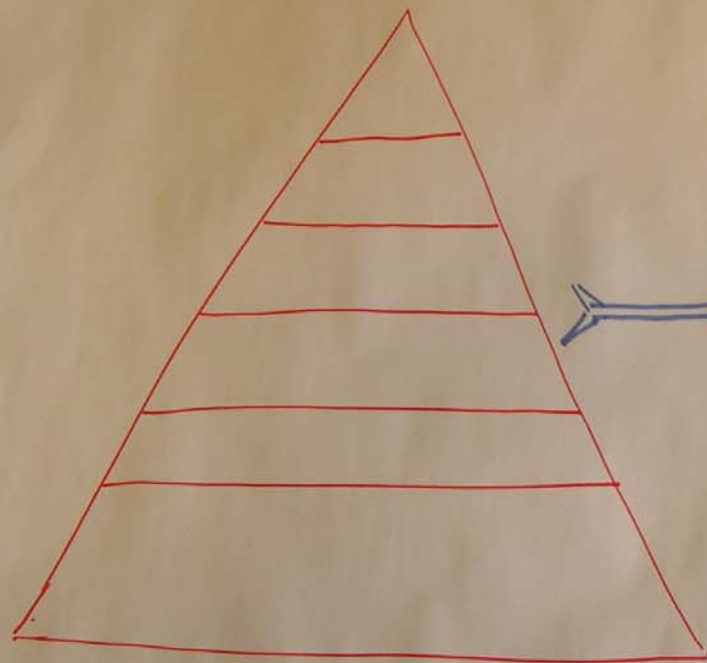
Bible study questions: analysis

- 1. Read Mark 12:41-44.
What is the text about?
- **Community consciousness** question, drawing on interpretive resources and local knowledge of participants

- 
- 2. Now read Mark 12:38-40. What are the connections between 12:41-44 and 12:38-40?
 - 3. Now read Mark 13:1-2. What are the connections between 12:41-44 and 13:1-2?
 - **Textual/critical consciousness** questions, constantly returning to biblical text to read it carefully and closely

- 4. Jesus comes into the temple at 11:27 and leaves at 13:2. Who are the characters and what are the relationships between them? Draw a picture of the relationships.
- 5. What was the role of the temple in 1st century Palestine?
- 6. Summarise in one sentence what Mark is saying in Mark 11:27-13:2.
- Sustained textual/critical interpretation
- Invites socio-historical questions from participants; move from 'internal' to 'external' information
- Uses creativity of participants; reintroduces community consciousness
- The summary helps participants to capture their own understanding of the text





Jesus }
Jesus' } TRANSFORMING.

Authority



UTTERLY AMAZED!

Where is Jesus?





PHARISEES



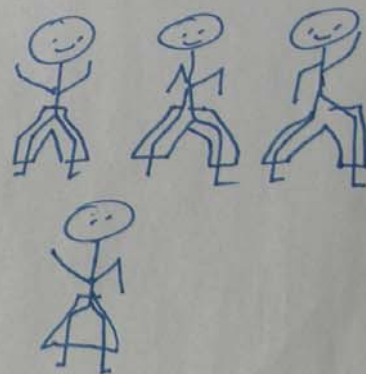
Temple authority

Scribes

Widow



Crowd



JESUS



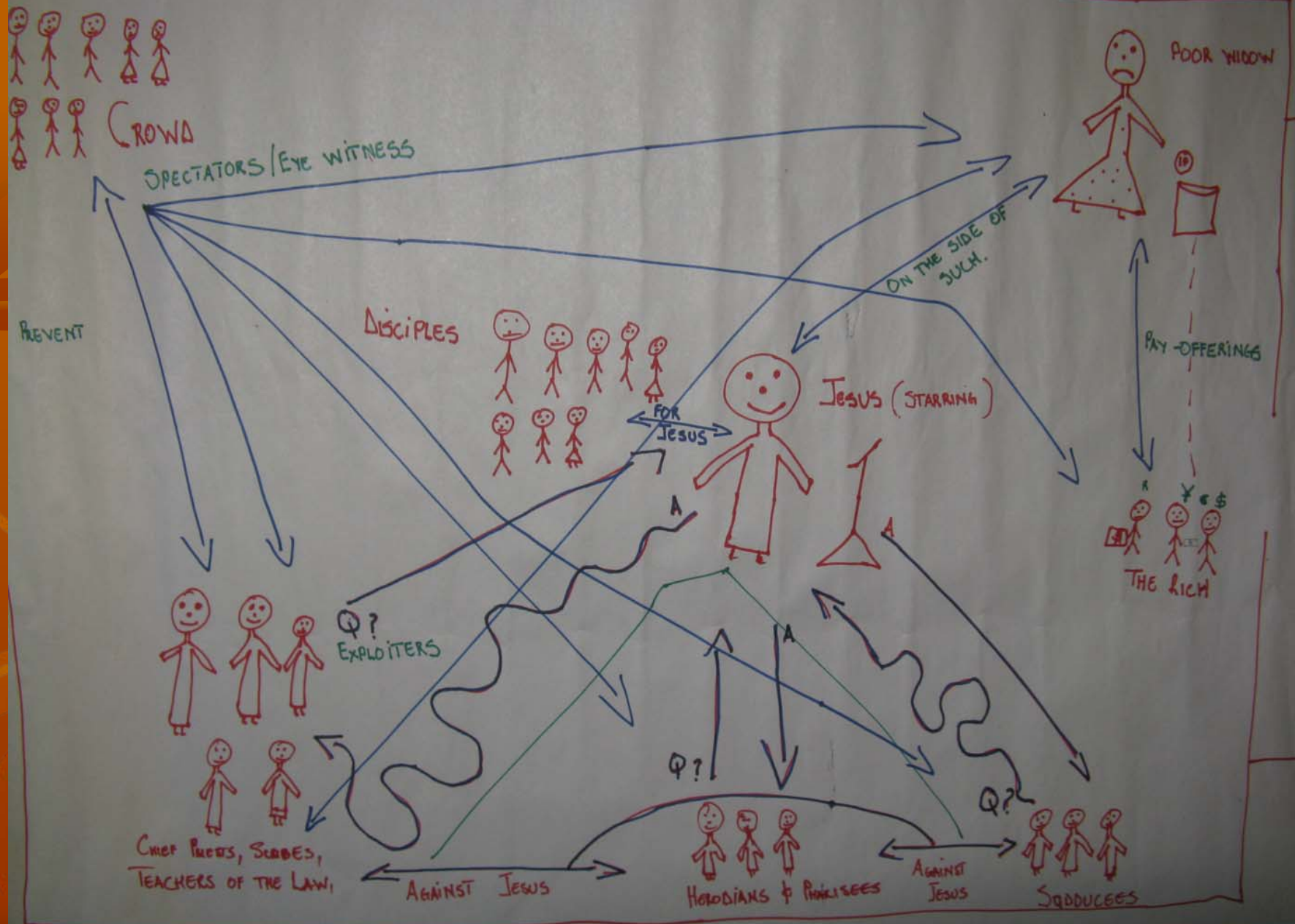
DISCIPLES

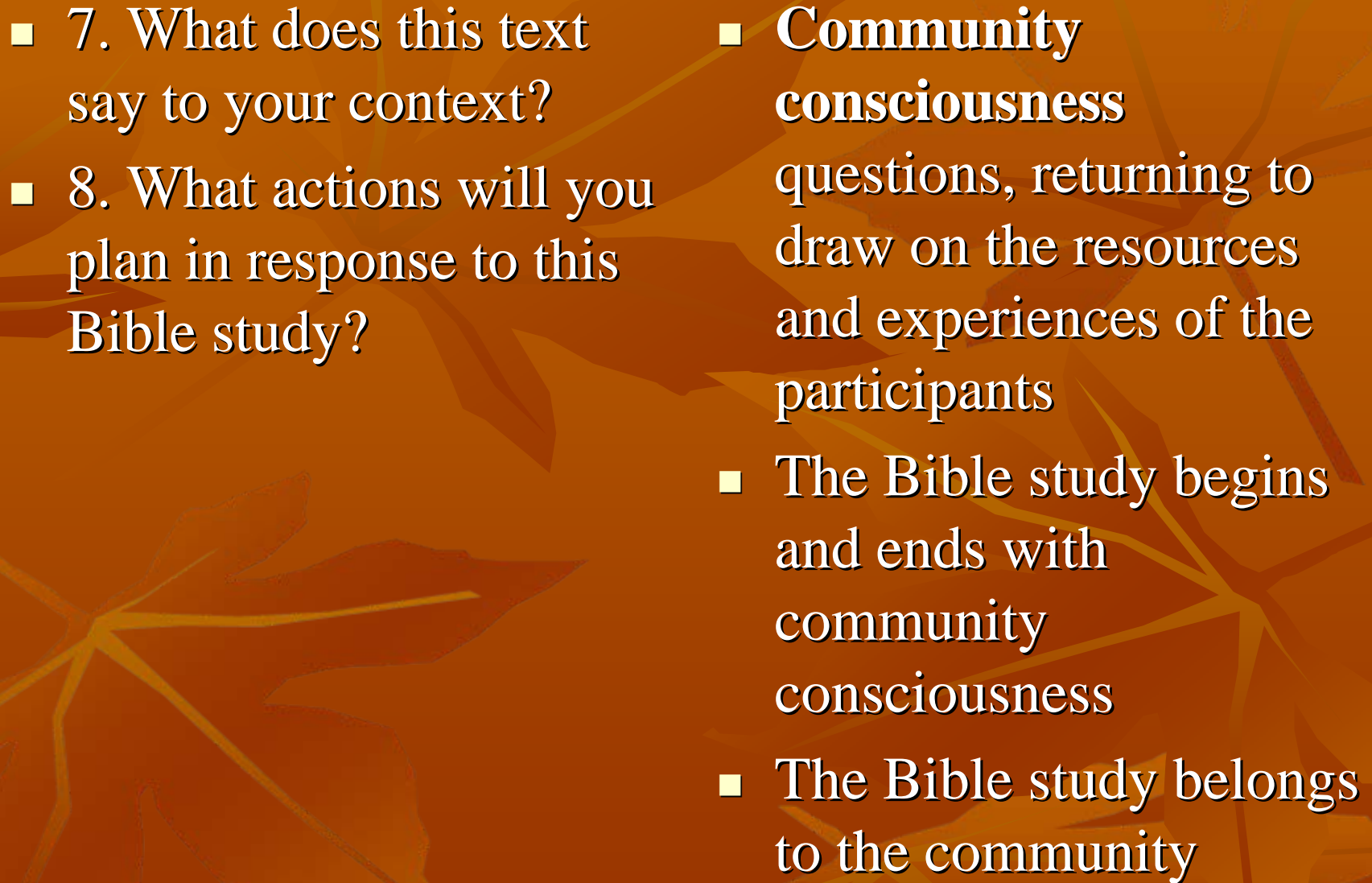


- Chief Priests

Herodians





- 
- 7. What does this text say to your context?
 - 8. What actions will you plan in response to this Bible study?
 - **Community consciousness** questions, returning to draw on the resources and experiences of the participants
 - The Bible study begins and ends with community consciousness
 - The Bible study belongs to the community

Community and critical consciousness: a summary

- 1. Read Mark 12:41-44. What is the text about?
 - 2. Now read Mark 12:38-40. What are the connections between 12:41-44 and 12:38-40?
 - 3. Now read Mark 13:1-2. What are the connections between 12:41-44 and 13:1-2?
 - 4. Jesus comes into the temple at 11:27 and leaves at 13:2. Who are the characters and what are the relationships between them? Draw a picture of the relationships.
 - 5. What was the role of the temple in 1st century Palestine?
 - 6. Summarise in one sentence what Mark is saying in Mark 11:27-13:2.
 - 7. What does this text say to your context?
 - 8. What actions will you plan in response to this Bible study?
- Community consciousness
 - Critical consciousness
 - Community consciousness

The CBS 'Sandwich'

Bread

Contextual Bible Study
begins with the
reality, experience and resources of the community ...

SEE

Meat/jam

In-between
we re-read the Bible,
slowly, carefully and closely
using the resources of biblical scholarship

JUDGE

Bread

... and ends with the
reality, experience and resources of the community.

ACT

Contextual Bible study: a collaboration of academy and community

- See – Judge/Reflect – Act
- See: social analysis generates a theme
- Judge: contextual Bible study
- Act: constructing an action plan
- Or ...
- The 4 Cs: Context, Community, Criticality, Change

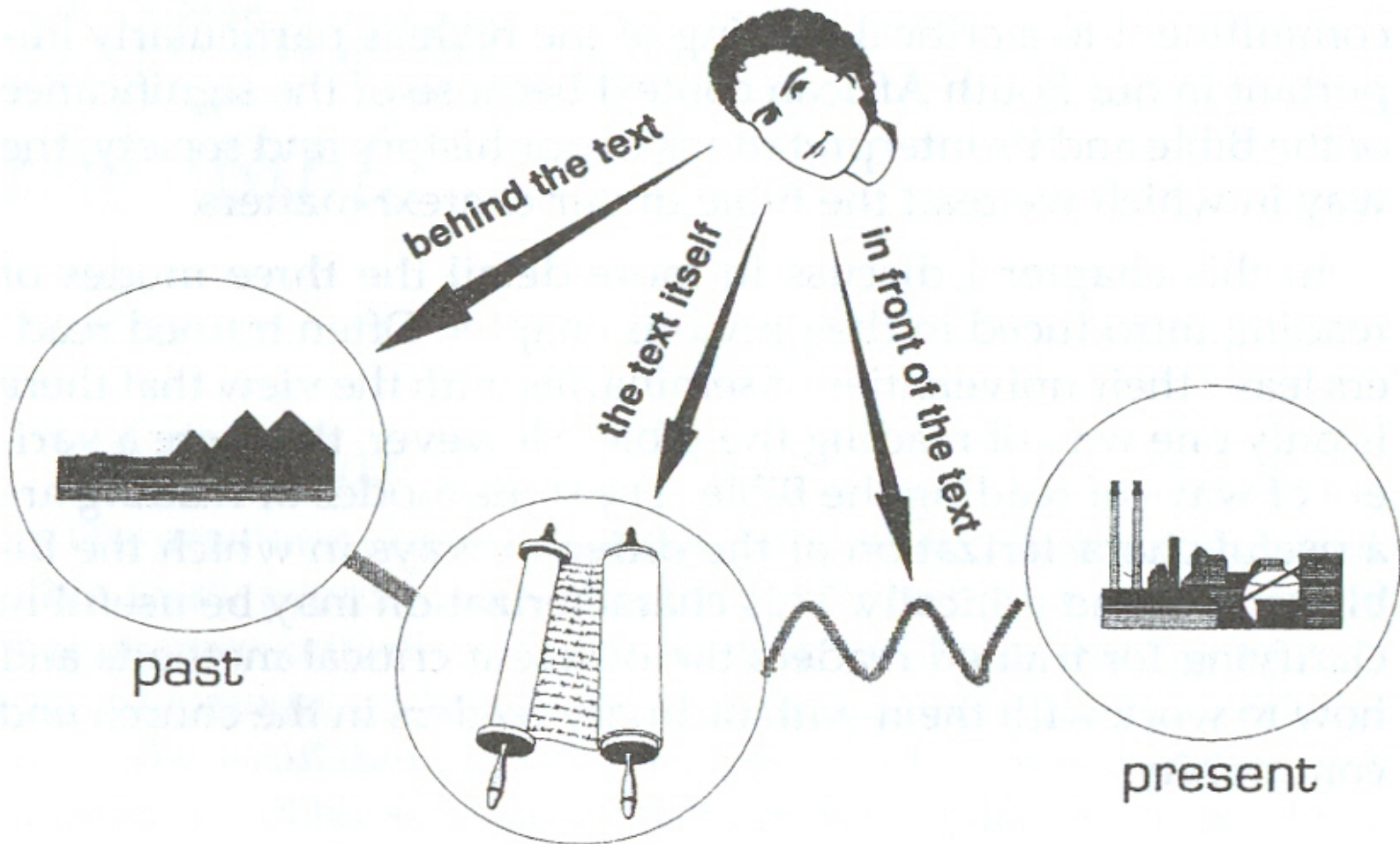
Contextual Bible study process

- Begins with reality 'from below'
- Facilitation/animation type leadership
- Affirms dignity and agency of participants
- Equalizes power relationships
- Collaborates in 'reading' resources
- Allows for articulation and owning of local embodied theologies
- Local control of action plan

Reading 'with': biblical studies resources

- Begin in front of the text
- Move to close and careful (literary) reading
- Offer socio-historical resources to go behind the text
- Conclude in front of the text

Modes of reading



Historical and hermeneutical emphasis in biblical scholarship

Sender ----- Message ----- Receiver
Text

Focus on sender: behind the text

- Interest in author, origins, historical and sociological reconstruction
- Historically, the beginning of biblical scholarship
- These interests are a product of the Enlightenment world-view
- Uses archaeological tools to reconstruct specific historical sites

- Uses historical-critical tools
 - Textual criticism, attempts to reconstruct the original and most reliable text
 - Form criticism, attempts to reconstruct the oral type and context of different literary forms
 - Source criticism, attempts to reconstruct the various sources used by an author
 - Redaction criticism, attempts to reconstruct how the sources are used by an author

- Uses sociological tools
 - Having located the text historically, sociological tools are used to reconstruct a 'thick' description of the society which produced the text
 - Sociological analysis focuses on social structures and processes, including the cultural, economic, political and religious dimensions of life
 - Comparative analysis and various sociological models are used to reconstruct ancient societies

Focus on the message: on the text

- Interest in the text itself as a literary product
- Recognises that the Bible is literature
- This is a development in biblical scholarship within the past forty years
- Uses literary tools
 - Analysis of genre and internal structure
 - Analysis of plot, character, narrative setting and time, narrative point of view, narrator, implied reader, etc.

Focus on the receiver: in front of the text

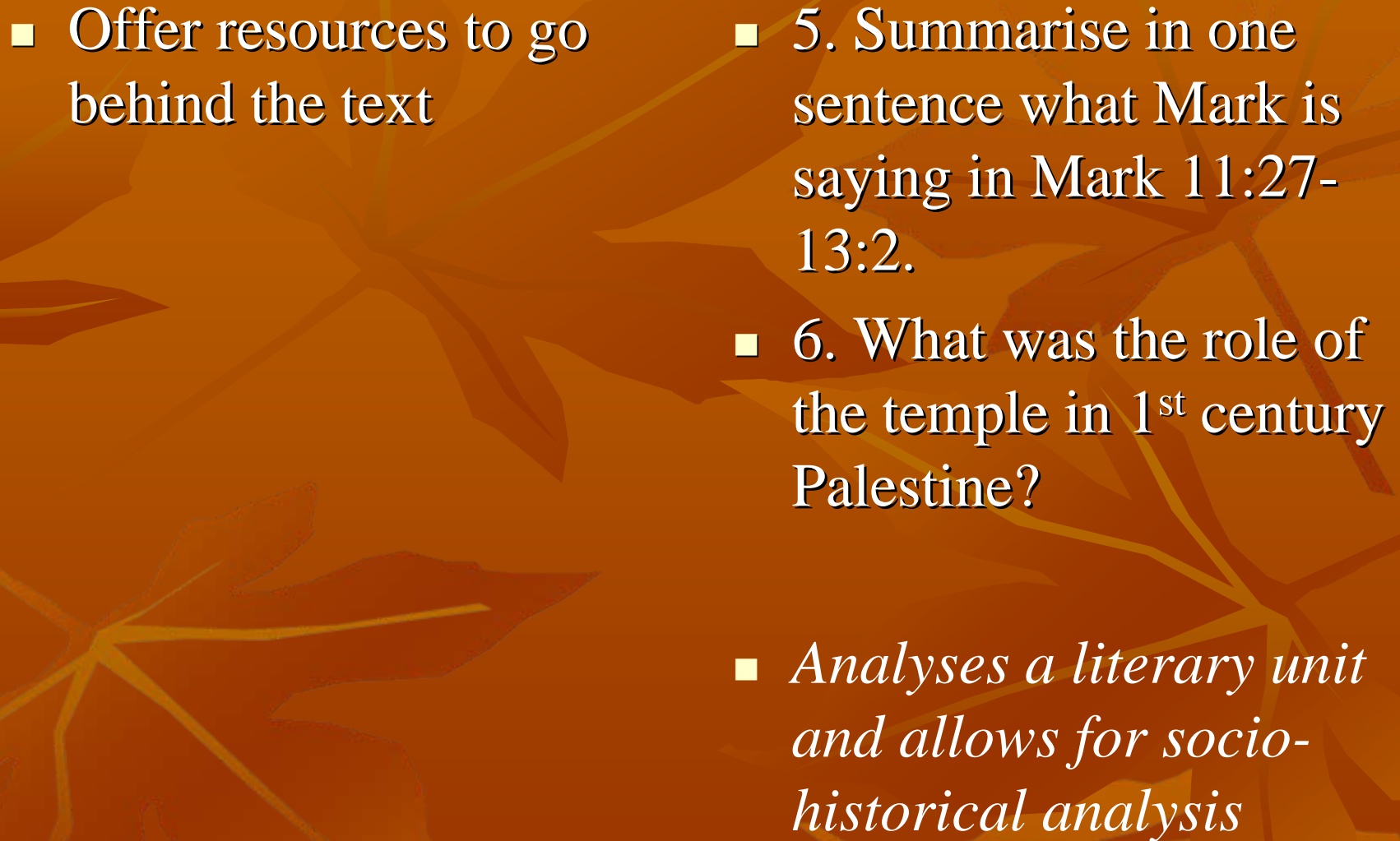
- Interest in the contribution of ‘the reader’
- Recognises that interpretation is a dynamic process – the reader is active, not passive
- Historically, this is a relatively recent development in biblical scholarship

- Uses reader-response criticism as its analytical tool
 - Analyses social location of reader (and in so doing introduces sociological analysis of both reader and author)
 - Locates the act of interpretation in the ‘fusion of horizons’ between text and reader, hence interpretation is ‘in front of the text’
 - The text has a range of potential interpretations, some of which are ‘activated’ by the life interests of the reader

Eg. Mark Bible study

- Begin in front of the text
- 1. Read Mark 12:41-44.
What is the text about?
- *Allows life interests of participants to engage with aspects of the text*
- *Write up all responses, affirming agency and documenting reception history of text*

- Move to close and careful reading – on the text
- 2. Now read Mark 12:38-40. What are the connections between 12:41-44 and 12:38-40?
- 3. Now read Mark 13:1-2. What are the connections between 12:41-44 and 13:1-2?
- 4. Jesus comes into the temple at 11:27 and leaves at 13:2. Who are the characters and what are the relationships between them? Draw a picture of the relationships.
- *Analyses internal structure of text*

- 
- Offer resources to go behind the text
 - 5. Summarise in one sentence what Mark is saying in Mark 11:27-13:2.
 - 6. What was the role of the temple in 1st century Palestine?
 - *Analyses a literary unit and allows for socio-historical analysis*

- Conclude in front of the text

- 7. What does this text say about structural injustice in your context?
- 8. What actions will you plan in response to this Bible study?

- *Fusion of horizons between text and context*
- *Re-reading, having given text a voice*
- *Engage with theme of Bible study*

Interpretive and life interests

- It is analytically useful to distinguish between two dimensions of the act of interpretation

- ‘Interpretive interests’

Dimensions of ‘text’ we focus on when we come to the Bible

- ‘Life interests’

Dimensions of ‘life’ we focus on when we come to the Bible

Interpretive interests: dimensions of text

- There are three main categories of interpretive interest within biblical scholarship
 - Behind the text – socio-historical interest
 - On the text – literary interest
 - In front of the text – thematic interest
- These are dimensions or aspects of ‘the text’ that interest us as interpreters

Life interests:

Reader dimensions

- Every reader is socially located, and brings his/her social location to the reading process, whether consciously or not
 - Eg. White, male, South African, etc.
- In addition, readers come to the Bible with particular questions, needs, concerns etc.
 - Eg. Healing, discipleship, HIV/AIDS, etc.

The intersection between life interests and interpretive interests

Life interest:
women

```
graph TD; A[Life interest: women] --> B[Interpretive interest 1: Socio-historical Reconstruction Of women In Ancient Israel Or First century Palestine]; A --> C[Interpretive interest 2: Role of women In the narrative structure Of Luke's gospel]; A --> D[Interpretive interest 3: Theme of discipleship In Pastoral Epistles And how it speaks To women];
```

Interpretive interest 1:
Socio-historical
Reconstruction
Of women
In Ancient Israel
Or
First century Palestine

Interpretive interest 2:
Role of women
In the
narrative structure
Of Luke's gospel

Interpretive interest 3:
Theme of discipleship
In Pastoral Epistles
And how it speaks
To women

**Life interest:
HIV and AIDS**

```
graph TD; A[Life interest: HIV and AIDS] --- B[Interpretive interest 1: Socio-historical Reconstruction of Healing and disability In Ancient Near East]; A --- C[Interpretive interest 2: Narrative role Of healing In Mark's gospel]; A --- D[Interpretive interest 3: Healing as A major theme In the New Testament];
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**Interpretive interest 1:
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In Ancient Near East**

**Interpretive interest 2:
Narrative role
Of healing
In Mark's gospel**

**Interpretive interest 3:
Healing as
A major theme
In the New Testament**

Kinds of interpretive disagreement

- We may disagree on which dimension of the text should be the most important, eg. Mosala and Boesak
- We may disagree on what life interests should be brought to the text, eg. Apartheid/liberation
- We may even disagree if we share the same interpretive and the same life interests, in that we may interpret the available data differently, eg. Mosala and Wittenberg

Working with the church and community

- Life interests are what unite us with our churches and communities; hence ‘socially engaged biblical scholars’
- What we bring to biblical interpretation, however, is different
- Our training equips us with a range of *structured and systematic* resources
- Ordinary ‘readers’ bring their own resources
- Contextual Bible study is a process which enables a sharing of these different resources

Contributions of biblical scholarship

- Enables the reading of unfamiliar texts, egs. 2 Samuel 13:1-22 and Job 3
- Enables the reading of larger literary units, eg. Job, the Joseph Story (Genesis 37-50)
- Enables familiar texts to be read in unfamiliar ways, egs. Mark 12:41-44 and Matthew 6:9-13
- Biblical scholarship provides a structured and systematic (ie. Critical) reading of specific biblical texts and, indeed, the whole Bible

Contributions of local communities

- Experience of context, 'from below'
- Analysis of context, 'from below'
- Engagement with the Bible
- Range of 'reading' resources

Egs. Cyclical interpretive rhythms, eg. Revival service

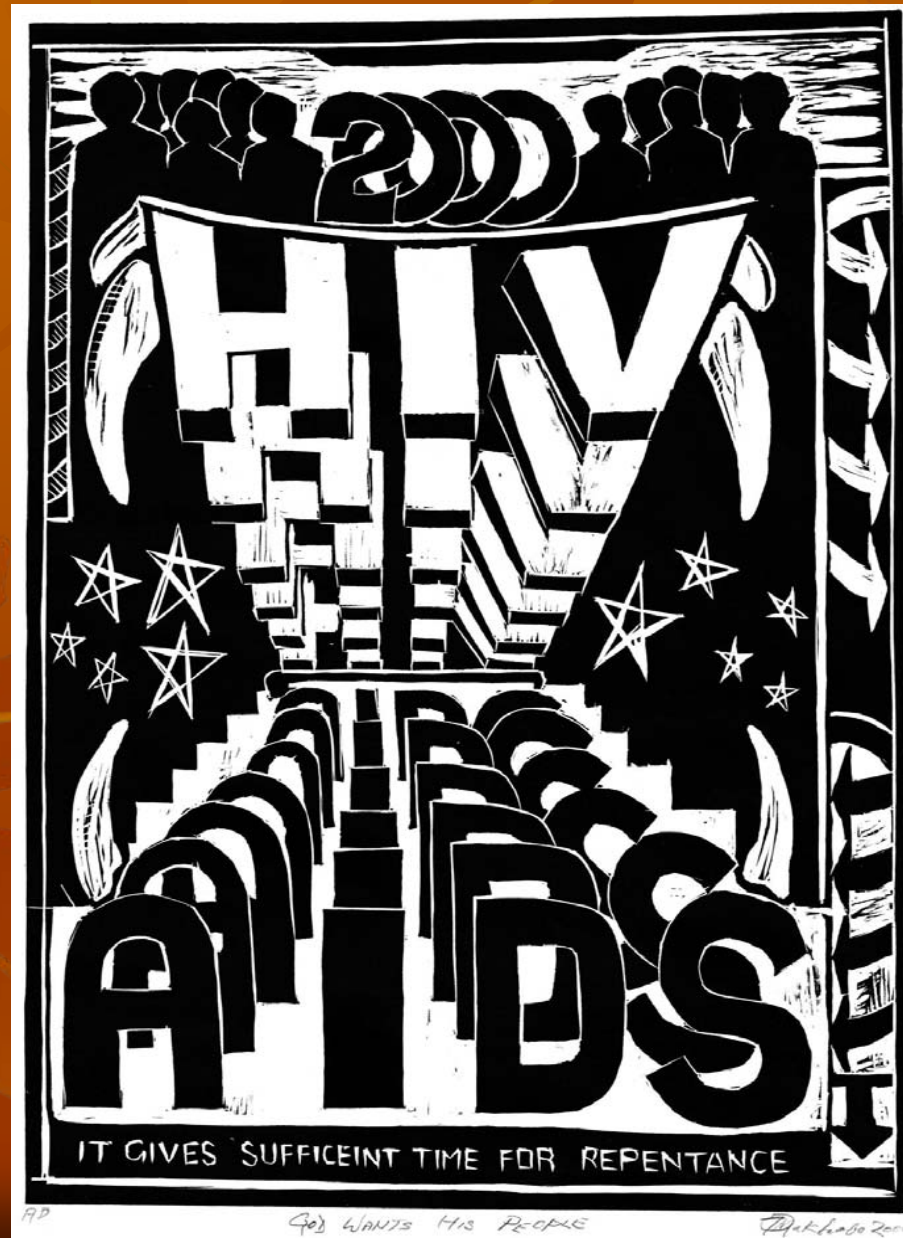
Symbolic, thematic, typological interpretation

Interpretation in art

Interpretation in music

Interpretation in popular culture

Biblical interpretation in art



An example: HIV and AIDS

- This Bible study has no biblical text. In fact, it is a Bible study that is in search of a biblical text! Using the art of the late local KwaZulu-Natal artist Trevor Makhoba (with the permission of his wife, Mrs G. Makhoba), this Bible study attempts to probe what biblical texts we use when we speak theologically about HIV and AIDS.
- 1. In small groups, try to interpret Trevor Makhoba's linocut. What does the linocut say to you?
- 2. Which biblical texts do you think Makhoba is drawing on in this linocut? Read Job 3:1-10, 40:15-24, and 41:1-34.
- 3. What is Makhoba's theology of HIV and AIDS?
- 4. What is your theology of HIV and AIDS?
- 5. What biblical texts do you draw on to speak theologically about HIV and AIDS?
- 6. How can we make an impact on the church's theology about HIV and AIDS?



An example: Land and leadership

- 1. Use Azariah Mbatha's woodcut to remind yourself of the Joseph story.
- Input: The Joseph story does not end with the reuniting of Joseph's family. As Prime Minister of Egypt, Joseph implements plans to deal with the years of plenty and the years of famine.
- 2. Read Genesis 41:46-57. How did Joseph get the grain which he stored? During the famine, what did Joseph do with the stored grain?
- 3. Read 47:13-26. What must the people do in order to get grain from Joseph?
- 4. Do you think Joseph was a good leader?
- 5. What alternative forms of redistribution could Joseph have used?
- 6. What should be the role of government in land allocation/reallocation?
- 7. How will you lobby and advocate for this?

Biblical interpretation in music

- Mzwakhe Mbuli, Song of the Spirit, *KwaZulu-Natal*
- Friday Mavuso, special tribute to the late President of the DPSA – the Disabled People of South Africa – died June 1995, car accident.
- When he died I wished I could stage a sit-in in heaven./ Magundulela ngubani oyohaya inkondlo ngawe?/ Yini eyakungenza ngikuhloniphe ukufa na?/ Lord my God I do not understand./ Pardon me, I am ignorant./ Here I stand in search of thy wisdom./ Is death an idiom, or is death an idiot?/ Lord my God, I do not understand.
- When are you on duty, and when are you on leave?/ Is there a holiday in heaven or not?/ Few years ago tragedy deprived us of two great talents./ In one week you took away Arthur – ‘Fighting Prince’ – Mayisela and Paul Ndlovu the singer./ Again, death deprived us of two great talents, legends, Friday Mavuso and Harry Gwala, both paralysed.
- Lord my God, I do not understand./ Punish me not, for I am ignorant./ Is there a new commandment?/ “Thou shall suffer perpetually”/ “Thou shall die more than other races”?/ Now I understand why other nations weep when the child is born.
- Lord my God, do you care about the poor?/ Why then remove the shepherd from the sheep?/ Is there a hidden prophecy about the plight of the black people?/ Is there a curse bestowed upon us?/ Senzeni thina sizwe esimnyama?/ Was the bullet that riddled Friday’s spinal cord not enough?/ Why did you remove Friday Mavuso and leave Barend Strydom alone?/ I repeat, why did you remove Friday Mavuso and leave Barend Strydom alone?
- Lord my God, I cannot fax nor telephone you, but to continue with my provocative poetry .../ Why are there so many more funerals than weddings?/ Do you know that our graves are overcrowded./ Is death an idiom, or death an idiot?
- Lord my God, why allow people with unfinished projects to enter your kingdom?/ When Friday Mavuso finally enters thy kingdom, honour him with a noble crown./ When he enters thy kingdom, ask him who should look after his sheep./ When he enters thy kingdom, ask him what should we do with his wheelchair./ When he enters thy kingdom, tell him I say his departure was too early and too soon for heaven, too soon for burial.

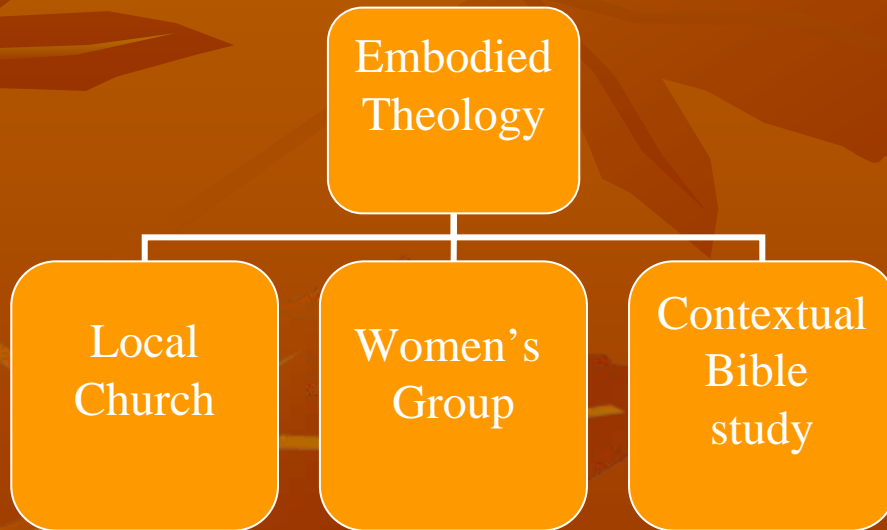
Constructing a CBS

- 1. Listen to Mzwakhe Mbuli's song, "Song of the spirit".
- 2. Listen again, this time following the words of the song
- 3. What do you think this song is about?
- 4. What kind/form of theological discourse is Mbuli using in this song? Are you familiar with this form/kind of theological discourse?
- 5. Where can you find similar forms/kinds of discourse in the Bible? Are you familiar with any of these? Share your experiences with these texts with the group.
- 6. Each small group will be allocated one of the following texts: Job 3, Psalm 22, Psalm 31, Psalm 55, Psalm 13, Psalm 44, Psalm 88.54 Read your text together and then identify the ways in which it speaks (a) about individual physical and social distress, (b) about relationships, and (c) about and to God.
- 7. Do you identify with your text? In what ways do you and in what ways do you not?
- 8. Write your own song of lament.
- 9. How can we encourage the church to recognise lament as an important theological discourse in our time?

The art of collaboration

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of each mode of reading/textual dimension?
 - See *Contextual Bible Study* chapter 2.
- Which textual dimension do we start with and why?
- What are the power dynamics of collaboration and what is our role as intellectuals?

Effects of collaboration



- To what extent is embodied theology:
 - Articulated?
 - Affirmed?
 - Incorporated?
 - Enacted?
- Contextual Bible study provides an additional site with additional resources to articulate and own embodied theologies

Contextual Bible study: a safe and sacred site

- Presence of Bible in Africa creates a sacred site
- Bible study group is often a safe site
- A sacred and safe site is required for an articulation of local embodied theologies
- A sacred and safe site is required for ownership of the Bible study process and product