A. What do you learn about the various people (different groups of Jews [many of whom are made known through representative individuals] or Romans), how do they respond to John the Baptist and Jesus, and why do these people respond in the manner they do?

The character that served to inform me the most was Chuza, the Sadducee. Though, I had read the passage stating that the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection in Mark 12:18 before [let alone the amount of times in this class…], I guess the extension of that belief that implies the soul perishing at death never actually land with me. Reading more about him, and the relationship between he and Joanna (most especially in C.13), allowed me insight that hadn’t previously had into the way that Jesus’ teachings split households, just as well as split the factions and culture of the day. Joanna served as an excellent representative character for not only women, but the whole of oppressed peoples, as Theissen further developed her feelings and response to the teachings of Christ as opposed to her and response to her husband’s belief. Chuza, as a representative model of the Sadducees, also developed the idea of how ‘classism’ played a role in much of the tensions caused throughout the society, as he regarded Jesus as a “lunatic” and a “trouble-maker” because he preached to the “little people.”

Other people that caught my attention, maybe not to such a degree were people such as Gamaliel and Kostabar, Pharisee and toll-collector respectively. It was strange to me to be present with these character models, and not have them immediately demonized. The Pharisees were demonstrated to be people trying to hold fast to beliefs, rather than extortionary priests taking advantage of the authority. The toll-collector was just shown as a man who tries to do a job; an average person trying to feed himself and his family, instead of a traitor or enemy because of the connection to Rome. Both of them reluctance to consider, but also faint intrigue and conviction, when they speak about their response to Christ’s teaching in the land. Because of the lesson’s he teaches, they way of life is being altered because other people are beginning to believe differently.

B. In what ways does the book help you understand the people, places and/or events found in the Gospel of Mark?

In essence, I suppose the point that I want to make most abundantly clear is that, by reading Theissen’s historical narrative, it brought to foreground the idea that Christ did not ruffle so many feathers by simply teaching religion, as Andreas and other characters make sure to elaborate on just as many ways that Jesus agreed on the teaching of the Law as the ways he did not necessarily agree. However, much of Christ’s teaching to the lowly, and the speaking of how the first will be the last, and the last first, carried socio-political ramifications as well. This idea makes it a lot easier to understand why certain people had such a disdain for Christ, though his teachings were regarded as “harmless.”