

WEEK 4—Mark 14-15; James; 1-2 Peter

If you've been keeping up with the weekly schedule, you're now entering the fourth week of Bible reading: congrats! I trust you're coming across material that's both familiar and new; is it also the case that you've made some discoveries *and* still have a few unresolved questions...? By the way, if there's something you'd like to talk about from what you're reading, let me know—I'd be happy to chat!

Finishing **Mark's Gospel** takes you through Jesus' 'passion' (the events surrounding His arrest, trial, and crucifixion) once more (that happened with Matthew; it will happen again with Luke!). You see Jesus being worshiped (a woman anointed Him) as well as the scheming against Him by religious leaders. At the last supper with His disciples, Jesus speaks words familiar from our celebrations of communion; reading the account puts one in that room, where the air is heavy as Jesus anticipates His sacrificial death while Judas contemplates his part in betraying the Lord. As terrible as Judas' deed is, though, he is not alone in turning away from Jesus. Peter too will do this, after Jesus goes to Gethsemane with His friends, to pray about what lies ahead.

Are you finding details you hadn't remembered about this final week of Jesus' earthly ministry as you read through this account?

You may have noticed that the ending of Mark's Gospel is flagged by various notes in the Bible you're reading (like, *the earliest manuscripts do not have verses 9-20* in chapter 16). What they're saying is that scholars think Mark's Gospel ended at verse 8, but that later, there was a move to tie up some loose ends. So, while this 'longer ending' is part of our Bible, it probably wasn't in Mark's first edition. And if that's the case, then Mark was OK with leaving his readers hanging, wondering what happened. Maybe that's a bit unsettling—but what if you listen as one of the first people to encounter Mark's Gospel: would the way he tells (and ends!) his story make you want to know more about Jesus?

In the **book of James**, we hear from a sibling of Jesus (check Matthew 13:55 and then Mark 3:21) who goes on to become the leader in the church at Jerusalem which formed after Jesus' return to the Father (see Acts 15:12-20). His book is a letter addressed (primarily) to Jews in churches scattered across the middle east. James notices some problems in these churches, like hypocrisy, disruptive speech, and favoritism, and he urges his readers to recognize how far this is from what God wants—and to change their behavior.

Peter's letters also address Jesus-followers who are scattered through Asia, but Peter's tone is gentler: he writes to people who are facing significant challenges because of their faith. He keeps pointing them to Jesus, recalling for them the difficulties Jesus faced, and reminding them that they can, like Him, live in a God-honoring way. 1 Peter 2:9-10 is one of those wonderfully dense passages that packs so much into a small space; something similar happens at 1 Peter 4:10-11. The second epistle shows Peter's awareness of false teachers who are spreading trouble. His warnings suggest that even now we have to be vigilant when it comes to what gets our attention and influences our thinking. Closing this book with comments about the Lord's return helps readers stay focused on what lies ahead—which is both encouraging as they face difficulties now, and motivational for how they live until the Lord comes.