

## Mark (February 11)

### Reading Mark

The old farmer knew this corner of the field well. His plow had turned up rocks here for years. He and his brothers picked up the rocks and worked them into a retaining wall not far away. He could see there a row of sick and lame people sitting on the stones, waiting for their turn to see the Teacher. Families with small children also sat nearby, awaiting their turn. The farmer sat and scratched the soil. It felt warm and loose to the touch. Then he struck a rock. “Another rock,” he said. “Still too stony – unfit for seed.”

Mark describes how the disciples and the crowds immediately responded to the authority of Jesus’ teaching. They flocked to receive his healing touch and blessings for their children. But beneath the surface of this excitement, their hearts remained hardened and crippled by unbelief. As you read Mark’s account of Jesus’ ministry and passion, consider Jesus’ patience. He plows and replows matters of repentance, faith, and the promises of God, picking out hard hearts and calling people to believe and to bear fruit.

### Author and Date

Although there is no direct internal evidence of authorship, it was the unanimous testimony of the early church that this Gospel was written by John Mark. It is generally agreed that the Mark who is associated with Peter in the early non-Biblical tradition is also the John Mark of the New Testament. Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but he deserted them at Perga, in Pamphylia, to return to Jerusalem. Mark reappears in Colossians and was apparently beginning to win his way back into Paul’s confidence. By the end of Paul’s life, Mark had fully regained Paul’s favor.

Some, who hold that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a major source, have suggested that Mark may have been composed in the 50s or early 60s. Others have felt that the book was written shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

### Recipients and Purpose

The evidence points to the church at Rome or at least to Gentile readers. Mark explains Jewish customs, translates Aramaic words, and seems to have a special interest in persecution and martyrdom – subjects of special concern to Roman believers. Mark may have been writing to prepare his readers for suffering and martyrdom by placing before them the life of our Lord. There are many references, both explicitly and veiled, to suffering and discipleship throughout his Gospel.

### Special Characteristics

Mark’s Gospel is a simple, succinct, unadorned, yet vivid account of Jesus’ ministry, emphasizing more what Jesus did than what he said. Mark moves quickly from one episode in Jesus’ life and ministry to another, often using the adverb “immediately.” The book as a whole is characterized as “The beginning of the gospel” (Mark 1:1). The life, death, and resurrection of Christ comprise the “beginning,” of which the apostolic preaching in Acts is the continuation.

### Blessings for Readers

As you read Mark’s account of Jesus’ ministry and passion, take special note of the emphasis on discipleship and faith. Jesus tells his followers that he will suffer and will ransom them. They, too, will face suffering on account of him and the gospel. Yet, through repentance and faith, they will inherit eternal life.

When you face difficulty, cry out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). The Son of God, who ransomed you from the bondage of sin and death, will hear you in compassion and have mercy.