

JOHN MARK

Jon Macon

John Mark is a key figure of the New Testament. He is one of only four individuals whom God inspired with the words describing the life of Christ on the earth, the so-called “Gospel accounts.” Of course, the Apostle Matthew, the physician Luke, and the Apostle John are the other three inspired writers of the Gospel accounts. The New Testament does contain other information about John Mark. Therefore, he is worthy of our study and consideration as one of the important examples of a follower of Christ.

Background information

John was surnamed Mark (Acts 12:12,25; 15:37). His mother was named Mary (Acts 12:12), and Mary was the sister of Barnabas (Col 4:10). Barnabas was a Levite of Cyprus (Acts 4:36), so Mark was descended from Levi at least on his mother’s side. In the New Testament, the ones who converted others to Christ are frequently referred to as the spiritual “father” of those people (see 1 Cor 4:15,17; 2 Cor 6:13; 12:14-15; Gal 4:19-20; Php 2:22; 1 Thes 2:11; 1 Tim 1:2,18; 2 Tim 1:2; 2:1; Titus 1:4; Phm 10; 1 Jn 2:1,18,28; 3:7,18; 4:4; 5:21; 3 Jn 4). Peter refers to Mark as his son: “*The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, salutes you; and so does Marcus my son*” (1 Pet 5:13). We know that Peter was well known to Mark and his family. After the angel of God released Peter from Herod’s prison (Acts 12:3-11), Peter went straight to “the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying” (Acts 12:12-17). From this, it appears quite likely that Peter had been the one who had converted John Mark to Christ.

John Mark’s work as a young man

After taking relief from Antioch to the needy brethren in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30), Paul and Barnabas took John Mark with them back to Antioch (Acts 12:25). From Antioch, the Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to begin their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-2), and the Holy Spirit first sent them to Barnabas’ native Cyprus (Acts 13:3-4). Paul and Barnabas took John Mark with them on this journey as their “minister” (Acts 13:5). When Paul and Barnabas left Paphos on the island of Cyprus to go to Perga in Pamphylia, Mark departed from them and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13).

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Mark was probably still quite young at that time, and on Cyprus he likely had the encouragement of other relatives in addition to his uncle Barnabas, but upon entering very new and distant territory, he chose to return home (Acts 15:38). For that reason, when Paul and Barnabas were ready to begin their second missionary journey (Acts 15:36), Paul was utterly unwilling to take Mark with them again (Acts 15:38). Barnabas was determined to take Mark (Acts 15:37), the fact that Mark was his nephew being a likely factor in his willingness to give him another chance. Paul and Barnabas had a sharp contention between them about Mark (Acts 15:39), and they went their separate ways, Barnabas with Mark back to Cyprus and Paul with Silas to Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:39-41). The rift between Paul and Barnabas was eventually resolved (see 1 Cor 9:6), and Mark evidently proved himself faithful because he later became a valuable companion of the apostle Paul's on his later journeys to the end of his life.

John Mark's profitable service in later years

John Mark was one of just a few "fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God" who were a comfort to Paul during his first imprisonment in Rome (Col 4:10-11). Paul also sent Mark to Colossae (see also Phm 23-24) and commanded the brethren there to receive Mark (Col 4:10). During Paul's second imprisonment in Rome, just before he was executed (2 Tim 4:6-8), Paul urged Timothy to come quickly to see him (2 Tim 4:9,21). At that time, Demas had forsaken Paul (2 Tim 4:10), and Crescens, Titus, and Tychicus had left Rome to preach in Galatia, Dalmatia, and Ephesus respectively (2 Tim 4:10,12). Only Luke remained with with Paul (2 Tim 4:11). No one had stood with Paul in his defense before the Roman government (2 Tim 4:16). At this lonely time, Paul desired to see Timothy and instructed Timothy: "*Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry*" (2 Tim 4:11). It is interesting and comforting to see that Mark had become that valuable to Paul and the Lord's ministry. In the space of about 20 years, Mark had grown from being young, timid, and not entirely reliable to become one of the most faithful and valuable ministers of the gospel that existed in the latter half of the First Century A.D.