

# THE GOSPEL OF MARK

## *“Life-Changing Encounters with Jesus”*

### Introduction: The Gospel of Mark

Mark was the first Gospel to be written. This Gospel comes with no name attached. Mark begins by diving right in to the message of John the Baptist and the coming of Jesus to his ministry life. We know that it was written shortly after the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, and the insistence of the believers in Rome.

Mark had been Peter’s interpreter and often would share the stories Peter told about the events in Jesus life and the message he preached. Mark had kept a journal of Peter’s teaching and was a companion in the missionary journeys of both Barnabas and Paul, and later of Peter.

We even know where Mark wrote this Gospel. He was in the home of Senator Quintus Cornelius Pudens in the city of Rome. Peter had led the Senator and his wife Priscilla to the Lord. The Pudens’ family were remarkable believers who hosted the Apostles in Rome and died for their faith. It was later still that their two granddaughters, Praxedes and Pudentiana, hid many hundreds of persecuted saints during Nero’s reign.

Mark was intimate to the details of Jesus’ life, himself being the son of Mary, in whose home the disciples celebrated the Last Supper with Jesus. For this reason Mark included a reference to himself as an eye witness to the arrest of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. It seems that young Mark sneaked out of his home wearing only a sheet around him. He was there at the arrest and was grabbed by the guards. **He fled naked leaving his sheet behind.** (Mark 14:51)

His home was the place of the large upper room, house of Mary and Mark (Acts 12:12). It was in that same home that the disciple hid after the resurrection and where Jesus appeared to them and showed his hands and feet to Doubting Thomas. It was in that upper room where 120 followers of Jesus waited together in prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It was in Mary’s home that the Holy Spirit came upon the disciple and all who gathered at Pentecost – Mark being one of them. Still later, it was in this home that the church gathered to pray for Peter’s release from prison.

Mark was the first Gospel to be written and is the smallest of the Gospels. Later came **Matthew** probably thinking that Mark left out a great deal, still later **Dr. Luke** took it in hand to complete the narrative having interviewed eye witness both the Jesus birth through his ascension to heaven. He did this in two volumes, first the Gospel of Luke, and the second, the Acts of the Apostles. Many years later the youngest **Apostle, John**, thought it necessary to write the Gospel of John with an emphasis on the necessity of being born again and a heavy emphasis of Jesus' deity.

Mark was also related to key New Testament figures. Barnabas was his cousin. He traveled with the Apostle Paul on his first missionary journey. Later when there was a conflict involving him, he traveled with Barnabas on his missionary journeys. Later Mark is seen again in Paul's epistles as being with Paul and Paul requesting to bring John Mark because "*he was helpful to me in my ministry.*" He was close associate with Dr. Luke and was the traveling companion and interpreter for Peter. **(See our list of Scriptures that mention John Mark)**

We know much of Mark through the New Testament writings, the book of Acts, and early church history. We know his father was Greek and his mother was a Jew. He lived in Jerusalem. We know a parchment of the Gospel of Mark was found among the Dead Sea scrolls, dating it far earlier than anyone expected. We know of his missionary journeys before and after Peter and Paul were martyred. He traveled to Alexandria in Egypt to spread the Gospel. When he arrive a strap of his shoe broke. He sought out a cobbler to fix in and in so doing the cobbler wounded his hand. Mark prayed over the wound and it was healed. That cobbler became a believer and eventually became the first bishop of Alexandria. Four years after Peter and Paul were martyred he returned to Alexandria and found a strong church. During Easter of 68 A.D. the pagan crowds rioted and captured Mark dragging him by the neck through the streets. The next morning the dragged him again until he died.

Though the Gospel of Mark is the shortest of the Gospels, its brevity lends itself to easy reading. Mark is not a theologian. He is a historian. **He is interested in people, places, and events** in the life of Jesus more than theology. For that reason it is a good starting place for Christian discipleship. In this exposition we are looking carefully at some of the characters Mark mentioned whose lives were transformed by Jesus. Actually, there are more **than 31 characters that deserve and honorable mention in Mark**, but for the sake of time we will only be looking at 10 of those people.

There are lots of things to look at in this the shortest Gospel. When I begin a study of a book of the Bible I like to outline it, then carefully look at the various aspects of the book that might be interesting to delve into. For instance, in this study I have compiled list of **“All the...” found in the book of Mark.** I have compiled the *“All the...in Mark”* and will make them available as downloadable PDF files later in the series. If you are a good student of the Word you could pour over this Gospel and discover these truths for yourself and perhaps even improve on my findings.

- All the Commands of Jesus in Mark (12)
- All the Miracles of Jesus in Mark (12)
- All the Healings in Mark (12)
- All the Demons mentioned in Mark (13) (35 times of devil, demons)
- All the Parables of Jesus in Mark (7)
- All the Promises of Jesus in Mark (41)
- All the Characters of Mark (31)
- All the Places in Mark (24)
- All the Unusual Things in Mark (5)
- All the Verses to Memorize in Mark (21)

If I could choose one verse that characterizes Mark’s Gospel message it would be Mark 8:34-35

***“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.”***

## Who Was John Mark?

Who is Mark and what can we learn from his life?

### **Mark Is Well Connected**

I have already given you a brief description of Mark's identity and background, but there is more, much more. Mark was born in North Africa, in the Roman colony of Cyrenaica. His mother was a Jew but his father was a Roman father, probably a God-fearing Greek proselyte. His father seems to disappear from the scene like Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, which would indicate an early death, but his mother, Mary, figures prominently among the disciples. Mark's Roman name was Marcus (Mark) but his Jewish name was Jonas (John). Thus he is referred to in the New Testament as John, surnamed Mark, as well as simply John.

Mark had important connections in the early church. Not only did his mother Mary host Jesus the first disciples in Jerusalem, but he was related to important people in the early church. He must importantly he knew all the Apostles personally, having hosted them in his home through the first years of the church. He was a cousin to Barnabas. (Colossians 4:10)

Barnabas was important early on in the book of Acts. It was he who sold money and gave the entire amount to the church, which inspired Ananias and Sapphira to pretend to do the same. He was of the Tribe of Levi, from Cyprus. His original name was Joseph, but the disciples nicknamed him Barnabas, which means son of encouragement. He was wealthy, as was his sister Mary, and his brother Aristobulus. Aristobulus traveled with Paul as well and tradition says he ended his life in Roman Britain as the first missionary there. He was among the 70 disciples Jesus sent out, and he is mentioned by Paul in Romans 16:10.

Of course he knew the Apostle Paul and was his interpreter in their first missionary journey. (Acts 13:5, 13) *"When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John (Mark) was with them as their helper."* By helper he probably served as interpreter, secretary, stenographer, and letter writer, which later he did for Peter.

Later in life he travelled with Peter to Rome and was his interpreter and the recorder of Peter's sermons. In 1 Peter 5:13 Peter endearingly calls him his son Mark. Early church history records that Mark was in Rome with Peter and probably witnessed his execution. It was the Pudens family that hosted Peter and Mark and were instrumental in hiding the saints, including Mark, during Nero's purge of Christians in Rome.

## Mark in the Book of Acts

Mark is frequently mentioned in Luke's account of the Acts of the Apostles. He is first mentioned in Acts 12:13. Luke seemed intentional in mentioning John Mark, first that he was in the prayer meeting in his mother's house that prayed for Peter's release from prison. Then he is mentioned again in 12:25 when Barnabas and Saul finished their first mission to Antioch and Cyprus. (Acts 11:19-26) If you remember, it was Barnabas that went to Tarsus to search for Paul, then called Saul, and bring him to Antioch to help with the teaching there. (Acts 11:25-26) And again when Barnabas and Saul began their mission to Cyprus, Luke is careful to say, "*John (Mark) was with them as their helper.*" (Acts 13:4-5)

It was early in this journey that Luke records that John Mark left them to return to Jerusalem. (Acts 13:13) We are not told why John Mark left them or why Luke recorded that minor detail, but it becomes obvious in Acts 15 when they wanted to go on the next missionary journey Paul adamantly refused to let John Mark go with them since he had "**deserted** them in Pamphylia and did not continue in the work." The words "deserted" are very strong words.

The word deserted is very strong. It is the same Greek word used in Hebrews 3:12 "*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in **departing** from the living God.*" There are only two men that Paul laments for abandonment. The first is Mark here in Acts 13:13, the second is Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10 "*For **Demas** hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica.*" He used a different word here expressing the same word Jesus used on the cross, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama lama sabachthani?*" My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But both Greek words can be used interchangeably. It is clear in Paul's condemnation of Demas, "*he has loved this present world.*" The same is implied of John Mark. He abandoned the work. He fled from responsibility. He put his hand to the plow but looked back. He took up his cross to follow then quit.

We don't know the cause for John Mark leaving Paul and Barnabas and returning to Jerusalem. But we do know there must have been some strong conflict to warrant the criticism Paul rails against him in Acts 15.

Many theologians and preachers have speculated the motive for Mark's returning to Jerusalem. Obviously, it wasn't a crisis at home or there would have been merciful understanding.

- He was homesick and returned home.
- He had a girlfriend or fiancé and wanted to go home.
- He missed his mommy's apron strings and the comfort of home.
- He left to go into business and make money.
- He didn't get along with Paul. He didn't like his bossiness.
- He had a premonition of the persecution to come.
- He didn't want to go to the gentile world of Asia Minor.
- He disagreed with the Apostle Paul's strong grace doctrine. (see Acts 15:2, Galatians 2:11-14)
- He had a period of backsliding away from his first love.

All those, or a mixture of those, are possible. We are left to our speculations about what really happened. What we do know is that the contention between Paul and Mark was strong and severe. What did Mark do during the two year hiatus from ministry?

### **The Backsliding of Mark**

Here is my speculation. I believe that Mark had a crisis of faith. He left, like Demas, loving this present world more than suffering for Christ. He missed the luxuries of home. He was a spoiled rich kid that had everything handed to him on a platter. Just like the Jews who left Egypt and three days later cried about the hardships of being on the road and longed for the good things in Egypt. He missed the wealth and popularity of home. Perhaps he had an unbelieving girlfriend that gradually led him astray. Perhaps he let the world squeeze him into its mold.

All of these things are the same things that draw young disciples away from Christ. Jesus spoke of the sowing of the word. First there came the excited acceptance and reception of the word. But soon that love got choked out by 1) the cares of this life 2) the deceitfulness of riches 3) the love of other things. Even if it was not the case with John Mark it speaks to the same issues that have plagued Christians for two millennia. Mark was not

different that you or me. The Scriptures says backsliding happens slowly. First there is abandoning of daily Scripture reading, then the prayer life withers away. Then the joy of worship and going to church becomes boring and you start to miss the fellowship, just a few Sundays at a time, but after a few months you no longer attend at all. It is not farfetched to think that perhaps Mark had a period of backsliding. The danger is always present for all of us. Mark was no different.

### **Mark's restoration – Barnabas took him under his wing**

The other reason I speculate that Mark was backsliding is because of a letter his cousin Barnabas would write to the Hebrews, called Hebrews. No, Paul did not write Hebrews. Paul always signed his letters and prefaced them with his name. Hebrews is written by a Levi, a man of the priestly lineage. I would speculate that soon after Mark left the mission and Barnabas started hearing of his backsliding he may have written to his nephew in a letter similar to Hebrews, certainly shorter but containing the same admonitions and warnings against falling away.

Then it was probably Peter who picked up the baton at Barnabas' urging to speak to John Mark about his backslidden condition. Peter of all the disciples knew about backsliding. He denied the Lord three times. Jesus had great mercy on him and restored him. So too Peter may have approached John Mark with his own wanderings and backsliding. Peter, we find later, considered Mark to be his son in the Gospel. Why? Did Peter lead John Mark to faith in Christ? Not likely, Mark was already a believer and a participant in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Peter, like the Apostle John, pursued the wandering sheep and brought him back into the fold.

I am going to include here some of Hebrews warnings as I think Barnabas may have sent to John Mark for translation and as a first reading, with a wink of his eye, and a prayer that Mark would see the light and repent of his love of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Thank God Mark returned to the fold. Somewhere in his two year absence Mark came to his senses, repented of his backsliding, and renewed his commitment to Jesus Christ with a deeper fervor and passion for the things

of God. For this reason, when Barnabas and Paul returned from their missionary journey. Though Paul was still angry with Mark, Barnabas, the son of encouragement, took him under his wing and departed from Paul and sailed to Cyprus, while Paul and Silas went to Syria and Cilicia.

### **Mark's transformation – He became mighty in word**

Years went by, we hear nothing more of Barnabas and Mark until later in Paul's life when he wrote letters to churches and mentions Mark in a kind and loving way.

#### Colossians 4:10

My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, **as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)**

It appears that the breach has been healed between Mark and Paul. It also is apparent that Paul already sent a message ahead concerning John Mark. Perhaps there was a knowledge in the church abroad of the severity of Mark's sin and backsliding. It seems there were some people that were dubious of Mark's repentance and renewal. But Paul wants the church to restore him.

#### Philemon 23-24

<sup>23</sup> Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. <sup>24</sup> **And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.**

Mark is present with Paul when he writes to Philemon, who lived in Colosse, and sends greetings. He is included with some of the beloved brothers Aristarchus, and Luke, and he also mentions the later ill-fated Demas.

#### 2 Timothy 4:11

Only Luke is with me. **Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.**

What an about-face in Paul's attitude! Now he is languishing in prison he sends an urgent message to bring John Mark with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. This once useless failure, quitter, backslider and sinner is restored.

## **Mark's martyrdom – at Alexandria, Egypt**

The final chapter in Mark's life is a good one. He finished well.

After Peter and Paul were executed the church at Rome, particularly the Pudens family urged Mark to write down some of the sermons of Peter and all that he learned of Jesus' life from conversations with Peter. Mark decides to keep it short and simple with the message that Jesus transformed the lives of everyone he touched.

He then wanders back to his birthplace in North Africa and visited Alexandria with the Gospel message. As he entered the city by the eastern gate his sandal strap broke, so he went in search of a shoemaker to repair his shoe. He meets a leather worker, a shoemaker, named Anianus. While the cobbler worked on his shoe his awl slipped and he punctured his hand. He cried out, "Heis ho Theo" – God is One! (literally, "one God is." Today we would say, "God help me!") Mark hearing this rejoiced in the man's faith in God and immediately laid hands on him and healed him in Jesus' name, then proclaimed Christ to him. Anianus took him to his home and he and his family were baptized. Out of that encounter many became believers and a church was formed. But in the city there was rising persecution against the preaching of Mark. Rumors spread that he was preaching the destruction of their idols. Mark became public enemy number one and many sought to kill him. In 68 A.D. Easter fell on the same day as the pagan festival of Serapis, their idol, the Egyptians Sun god. While the church celebrated Easter and the resurrection a mob descended on the church. Mark was seized, a rope was thrown around his neck, and he was dragged through the streets. He was then put into prison and the following morning he was pulled out again by the neck and dragged through the streets until he died. They attempted to burn his body but the wind and rain began to fall preventing it. The Christians found his body and secreted it away for burial in a rock cave. A church was built over the tomb.

## **What Can We Learn from Mark's Story?**

As you read the Gospel of Mark you will be impressed with his focus on lives that were transformed by Jesus. His own life was transformed by Jesus when he went astray. He is not embarrassed to write that he as a young man ran away naked. Perhaps he was implying that he later did the same when he ran away from their missionary journey to seek the safety of home.

The central theme of Mark I believe it his call to sacrificial discipleship. He learned it the hard way. Perhaps the central verse of Mark's Gospel and the theme of his own heart should be Mark 8:34-35

*"If anyone would come after me, **he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.** For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."*

**It is not unusual for once faithful believers to lose their faith or walk away from Christ because of some tragedy that tests their faith. But more commonly is the slow drifting away from the word of God, prayer, and assembling together with other believers. Scripture says, "The little foxes spoil the vine." It is not the big things that usually defeat us. It is the little things that get in the way of following Jesus. Backsliding is easy. It is the easy road. It is downhill. Once you start down the trail of loving something else more than Christ it is easy to keep on slipping. There are many stories that illustrate that. Christianity is strewn with the wreckage of countless followers whose faith made shipwreck.**

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### **The House of Mary and Mark**

**It is believed that the discovery of the actual foundation of the house of Mary, the mother of Mark, has recently been made in the basement of the church of St. Mark in Jerusalem. An ancient inscription discovered and displayed there tells that the original church was built on the site of the house of Mary and Mark. That was the place of the Last Supper, the "upper room" of Pentecost, and the home where prayer was made by the church for Peter's release from prison. (Acts 12:12)**

**If this is all true, then the experience of St. Mark is one of the richest of all the New Testament characters! Of course, his authorship of the Gospel of Mark immortalizes him for all Christians.**

**Excerpted from *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, by William Steuart McBirnie.**

# THE GOSPEL OF MARK

## Scriptures Mentioning John Mark

### Mark 14:51

<sup>51</sup> A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus.

### Acts 12:25

<sup>25</sup> When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

### Acts 13:5, 13

5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

<sup>13</sup> From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.

### Acts 15:37-39

<sup>36</sup> Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing.” <sup>37</sup> **Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them,** <sup>38</sup> **but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.** <sup>39</sup> They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus,

### Colossians 4:10

<sup>10</sup> My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)

### Philemon 24

<sup>23</sup> Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. <sup>24</sup> And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.

### 2 Timothy 4:11

<sup>11</sup> Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.

### 1 Peter 5:13

<sup>13</sup> She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.