

John Mark

We will now spend some time considering John Mark, called Marcus in PHILEMON 1:24, COLOSSIANS 4:10, and 1 PETER 5:13, another man whose life demonstrated what it takes to be a New Testament full overcomer, and we will see these qualities as we progress in studying the little we do know of John Mark from scripture. The Lord had worked some serious overcoming in the heart of John Mark to even find himself visiting Paul at Rome, and this will be apparent as we review his life.

In scripture John Mark is called by the following names: John, whose surname was Mark, {ACTS 12:12; 12:25; and 15:37}; John, {ACTS 13:5; and 13:13}; Mark, {ACTS 15:39; and 2 TIMOTHY 4:11}; and Marcus, {COLOSSIANS 4:10; PHILEMON 1:24; and 1 PETER 5:13}. John Mark, has quite a history in scripture, and we first see that he was associated with the church at Jerusalem. One of his relatives was Barnabas, who is mentioned this way by Paul in COLOSSIANS 4:10 *...Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas,...* . ACTS 12:12 tells us that John Mark's mother's name was Mary, who had a house at Jerusalem where Saints met to worship and pray; an assembly like a church if you will. In the 12th chapter of ACTS it was Peter who came to John Mark's mother's house after being set free from Herod's prison by the angel of the Lord. In ACTS 12:12 we read this concerning Peter: *And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; (his Jewish surname was Mark) where many were gathered together praying.* Thus we see that John Mark knew Peter, and no doubt the rest of the twelve apostles of the Lamb from way back, and so we don't find it unusual for Peter to mention John Mark (also called Marcus, his Latin surname) in 1 PETER 5:13 *The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son.* (The words *...my son...* here means a close follower in the faith, and not a natural son.) Thus we note that John Mark (Marcus) was a follower of Peter from the early years of his ministry, as was Barnabas. We should also note here that John Mark's boyhood home seems to be Jerusalem.

While these events were occurring, Paul and Barnabas had journeyed from Antioch, Syria to Jerusalem bring relief to those drought stricken Saints that dwelt at Jerusalem, which is noted in ACTS 11:27-30. At the conclusion of ACTS 12 when Paul and Barnabas returned from their first trip to Jerusalem from Antioch they *...took with them John, whose surname was Mark.* (ACTS 12:25). John Mark was a young man during the time frame of ACTS 12 & 13. Paul's acquaintance with Barnabas is how Paul was introduced to John Mark. As Paul and Barnabas began their missionary journey in ACTS 13, we find in verse 5 that *...they had also John to their minister.* ACTS 13:13 tells us that John Mark stayed with Paul and Barnabas only a short time on this missionary journey, and as soon as he could after leaving Cyprus, Barnabas' home country, John Mark headed back to Jerusalem, having not been with Paul and Barnabas long enough to be of any real value or help. ACTS 13:13 *Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.* Paul and Barnabas spend a couple of years on their missionary journey, and return to Antioch, Syria in the last verses of ACTS 14, where they abide "long time." While encouraging the disciples of the Lord at Antioch, there came certain men from Jerusalem to saying: *...Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved...* ACTS 15:1. This prompted another journey by Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, which is recorded in ACTS 15. Apparently as Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch, Syria from Jerusalem they once again are accompanied by John Mark. We read what happened next in ACTS 15:35 *Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. 36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. 37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. 38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. 39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; 40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.*

In the days just prior to this we find that the Apostle Peter had come from Jerusalem to Antioch to pay a visit after the conference in Jerusalem, and Paul records in GALATIANS 2:11 *But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. 12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. 13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. 14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? 15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.* Paul was telling once again how we all are justified by faith, and not the works of the law. In other words Paul pointed out to Peter, and in turn Barnabas, that they really weren't living this example before the Gentile witnesses here at Antioch, having feared the reaction of the Jews from Jerusalem that had also come to Antioch. Besides this, Peter and the other Apostles from Jerusalem had already written a letter to the Gentiles who had turned to God that their intention was not to trouble them with demands from the law of Moses, but suggested *...that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood...* ACTS 15:20. The intention of those from Jerusalem in writing this was to point out four things that Gentile believers could do to aid in keeping the peace between fellow Jewish believers. We see that even Peter, even though he agreed that the gospel of Jesus Christ was to be preached unto the Gentiles, he was continuously wrestling against old Jewish customs of the law, and while doing so he was in effect putting himself again under the law. Paul wrote in GALATIANS 5:4 *Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.* If the Apostle Peter had such a hard time because of his traditional Jewish upbringing in reaching out unto the Gentile, how much more a hard time did the unbelieving Jew have? By his actions Peter, and in turn Barnabas, were in the least being a poor testimony to the Christian Saints in Antioch, Syria. {Review the chapter "The Separation of Paul and Barnabas" starting on page 306 of these notes.}

Back in ACTS 15:35-39 we find John Mark being noted as the reason Paul and Barnabas went separate ways. ACTS 15:39 *And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other...* The word "contention" is found 9 times in scripture, 9 being the number of FINALITY or DIVINE COMPLETENESS. This was the finality of the team of Paul and Barnabas, however both of these church Apostles went on future missionary journeys as Apostles. The contention was between Paul and Barnabas, and was not between any others of the church. ACTS 15:39 *And the contention (provocation or incitement) was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other...* ROMANS 8:28 *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* This separation of Paul and Barnabas was no exception to ROMANS 8:28, and ended up working good for both Paul, and Barnabas, and John Mark, and even you and I! How so? The contention was between Paul and Barnabas, and was not between any others of the church. Paul and Barnabas *...departed asunder one from the other.* AMOS 3:3 states: *Can two walk together, except they be agreed?* Paul and Barnabas were not in agreement, so they separated. The gospel was spread by both of these Apostles, and probably at a faster rate than had they stayed together. Had Paul and Barnabas stayed together we may not have left for us any of Paul's gospel! Paul has not written one epistle up to this point in time. Paul begins his writing epistles on his next missionary journey. Barnabas never writes us an epistle, but it is Paul's gospel that we are to follow anyway. The last part of ACTS 15:39 reads: *and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus.* That is the last time we read of Barnabas and John Mark in the book of ACTS. Paul and Barnabas had spent six plus years together prior to this time. Conybeare and Howson place this separation between Paul and Barnabas as occurring about 51 A.D.

Paul makes reference to Barnabas five more times in his future writings however without once mentioning the sharp contention he had with Barnabas over John Mark. Barnabas took John Mark and sailed unto Cyprus, his home country, thus separating himself from those of Jerusalem who may have been negatively influencing him. Barnabas must have visited Corinth for Paul makes reference of him to those of the church at Corinth, like they must have known who Barnabas was from first hand experience, (1 CORINTHIANS 9:6). Barnabas must have been a patient man. Barnabas was patient with Paul, having been the first Saint from Jerusalem to take Paul in and get him acquainted with those at Jerusalem. Then after letting some years go by, Barnabas set sail for Tarsus, where he patiently searched for Paul, then after finding him brought him to Antioch where they taught together. Now Barnabas was being patient with John Mark, teaching him Paul's gospel.

More than ten years pass before we read of John Mark again. And it is the Apostle Paul who mentions him during this time frame we are studying about in which Paul is being held prisoner for two years at Rome as noted in ACTS 28:30 & 31. Paul calls him "Marcus" in PHILEMON 1:24, and notes him now to be "my fellowlabourer." Obviously Barnabas has taught John Mark well. COLOSSIANS 4:10 & 11 summarizes a couple of more thoughts Paul now has towards John Mark: *...and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;) 11 ...These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.* Here is verse 11 John Mark is noted to be a "fellowworker," which is exactly the same word used in PHILEMON 1:24 translated "fellowlabourer." Here we get a hint that John Mark may go to Colosse, and we need to take a closer look at this statement: *...(touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)... .* Obviously Paul previously had communicated with the Saints at Colosse some information, some instructions concerning John Mark. This little tid-bit gives us some insight into the current status between Paul, and John Mark. We are not told how long before this writing of PHILEMON, and COLOSSIANS that this information, these commandments, concerning John Mark were given. Nor are we told why or when John Mark looked Paul up here in Rome. Let's consider some possible reasons for this reconnection between Paul and John Mark at this point in time in Paul's life.

It is apparent that John Mark somehow knew where to find Paul these two years while he was awaiting his trial before Nero. Recall in ACTS 28:21 after Paul first arrived in Rome, he had called for the chief Jews of Rome to come unto him so he could tell them his reason for being held a prisoner there. When they came to him, here is part of what they had to say: ACTS 28:21 *...We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee.* Obviously the Jews of Jerusalem, who had wanted Paul dead ever since ACTS 21:31, hadn't arrived in Rome to present their case before Caesar yet. Remember that Paul was sent to Rome in the fall, and didn't arrive until the next spring. It was too late in the year for the Jews of Jerusalem to go to Rome after find out Paul had already sailed, so it wouldn't be until the same spring when Paul arrived at Rome before the Jews of Jerusalem could follow with their side of the legal case they were to present before Caesar. By the time they would get to Rome and present their side of Paul's case it would be late summer. No doubt Caesar then would want to hear from witnesses, and he probably would give them about twelve months to bring these witnesses from all over the Empire before him. By the time all of this process takes place, two years goes by. Yet John Mark somewhere along the way learned also that Paul was shipped to Rome, and he embarked upon following Paul there. Perhaps John Mark had done so at the urging of Barnabas. There are also some other possibilities as to why John Mark pursued Paul to Rome. This is just pure speculation on my part, but consider this. John Mark's Mother lived in Jerusalem, and we know this from ACTS 12:12. The first time John Mark left Paul and Barnabas, John Mark returned again to Jerusalem (ACTS 13:13). Paul and Barnabas again went to Jerusalem in ACTS 15, and when they returned to Antioch, Syria John Mark had once again joined them. Later in ACTS 15:39 when Paul and Barnabas departed company, Barnabas took John Mark, and sailed to Cyprus, Barnabas' home country. That was the last we heard of John Mark until Paul wrote about him in PHILEMON 1:24, and COLOSSIANS 4:10 & 11. More than ten years have now passed between these events of ACTS 15 and where we are now in Paul's prison here at Rome.

During this time period Barnabas has taken John Mark under his wing (so to speak), and taught John Mark, Paul's gospel. How long John Mark and Barnabas stayed together we are not told. But if John Mark and Barnabas stayed together five years, Paul would still be on his third missionary journey. Certainly somewhere along the way John Mark would have returned to Jerusalem for that was his home. Perhaps John Mark was in Jerusalem when Paul was arrested there. This would have been about six or seven years after Paul and Barnabas departed ways. Maybe John Mark had returned to Jerusalem a little later, and then learned of Paul's arrest. Recall in ACTS 24:23 that governor Felix allowed Paul to have some liberty, and that being he wasn't forbidden to have any of his acquaintance to minister, or come unto him, and that Paul was held under Felix's care for two years according to ACTS 24:27. This was ample time for an old acquaintance named John Mark to look Paul up, and minister unto him. We are not told whether this happened or not, but for John Mark the journey from Jerusalem to Caesarea was a lot shorter than the journey from Jerusalem to Rome, and we do know that John Mark did make that one. So the possibility is out there that John Mark had already reconnected with Paul before Paul was ever sent to Rome. One thing is clear, and we know this from reading what Paul later will write Timothy in 2 TIMOTHY 4:11 concerning John Mark: *...Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.* When did John Mark become profitable to Paul in the ministry? Obviously before the time frame of 2 TIMOTHY 4:11, and after the events of ACTS 15:36-41. John Mark was already profitable to Paul in the ministry in PHILEMON 1:24, and COLOSSIANS 4:10 & 11 where Paul called him a "fellowworker," and "fellowlabourer." And even before this Paul had given instruction to those of Colosse on how profitable John Mark was to the ministry of Paul's gospel, Paul having reminded them in COLOSSIANS 4:11 *...(touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)*. What a work the Holy Ghost had done in the life of John Mark to elevate him in status to be "fellowworker" and "fellowlabourer" and profitable to Paul in the gospel.

The Holy Ghost took John Mark even one step further, and inspired John Mark to pen The Gospel According to St. Mark, where we find Jesus pictured as the perfect servant, a position in life that John Mark could relate to have been a "servant" in the gospel to both Barnabas and Paul. {Review page 1170 of these notes.} Recall that John Mark, paints a picture of Jesus as the perfect servant, figured in REVELATION 4:7 as the faith ox, which is the king of the domestic beasts. Having now studied some things of what we know about John Mark, we see a little clearer picture of the steps ordered of the Lord that John Mark took to become himself a perpetual servant unto his Master in heaven, following the footsteps of his uncle Barnabas, and now the Apostle Paul.

In Mark's gospel he records an event that happened on the night that Jesus was betrayed by Judas; an event that isn't recorded in the other gospel records. We read this event in MARK 14:51 & 52: *And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: 52 And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.* Since this portion of scripture seems to have no real connection with the context of the rest of the story other than an interesting side light, one scholar notes that this may be a reference to John Mark himself. If that is the case then we note that John Mark was a young man at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, and a first hand witness to Jesus arrest. Add thirty plus years to that time, and we find that John Mark is approaching fifty as he visits Paul in Rome.

John Mark's name is mentioned as Mark five (GRACE) times in scripture. Do you suppose he was a "grace" minister? Sure he was, having received the best teaching from the best teachers, which were before him Apostles of Jesus Christ. We didn't mention this till now, because it probably makes better sense here to note that Mark's name means: polite; shining; defence. Perhaps this defines the character of John Mark, a polite shining example of one who ended up standing for the defence of the gospel. The John in John Mark means: Jehovah is a gracious giver. Truly John Mark was a polite GRACE minister, who ended up being an asset in the ministering of Paul's gospel. Thus we find Paul writing Timothy in his last letter concerning John Mark: *...Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.* What a legacy, and a testimony to the fact that Jehovah is a gracious giver.