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**“Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry” (II Timothy 4:11).**

## Follow Through

**Central Truth:** A brother who falls may be reclaimed for a lifetime of faithful service to the Lord.

**L560. Date:** May 1980. **Text:** Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37-39; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; II Timothy 4:11. **Topic:** John Mark.

*“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand” (Psalm 37:23, 24).*

John Mark, author of the second Gospel recorded in the New Testament, is a living demonstration of the truth of that statement. Across his life might be written the title, “The man who came back!” Mark's experience of having erred seriously from the way of Christian duty, yet being used of the Holy Spirit to write one book of inspired Scripture, teaches that it is possible for a man to be used of God after a fall.

There is but one person named Mark (Latin, *Marcus*) in all the New Testament. He was a young man, at the time he was introduced, who carried a double name: John Mark. His first name was Hebrew (*Jochanan*) and meant “Gift of God.” That might indicate the joy with which his Jewish mother greeted his birth. His second name was Latin (*Marcus*) and means “Hammer.” That might indicate that his father was Roman, though such a thought is mere conjecture. Due to his work among the Gentiles as a Christian missionary, the name Mark became the more predominant. It is logical to assume that the only Mark mentioned in the New Testament was the one who wrote the biographical account of Jesus which is called “The Gospel According to Mark.”

What is known of the family background of Mark? Very little. His

father is never mentioned. That might indicate that his mother was a widow. His mother is called "*Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark*" (Acts 12:12). Mark and his mother lived in Jerusalem in quite favorable financial circumstances.

What is known of Mary, mother of Mark? That she was a woman of wealth is indicated by the size of her house. She had room for a great number to assemble to pray. She had at least one maid, named Rhoda. Her house seems to have been a regular meeting place for the Christians, indicating that she was a disciple of Jesus. (See Acts 12:12-17). Since her husband is never mentioned, he was probably dead. She was relative of the kindly Barnabas (Colossians 4:10). It is very possible that it was in Mary's house in Jerusalem that Jesus and the apostles observed the Passover and He instituted the Lord's Supper, If so, Mark may have been "a man bearing a pitcher of water" who directed the disciples to the proper house (Mark 14:12-16).

Mark must have known personally most of the great Christian leaders in Jerusalem. He might have known Jesus personally, also.

He was probably "the young man" who was almost arrested in Gethsemane, escaping only by tearing out of his cloak when a temple guard seized him (Mark 14:51, 52). That would have been about A.D. 30. Imagine the impression made on the young man when Christians met in his mother's house to pray for the protection of Peter who was in prison for the witness of Jesus. Then, Peter knocked on the door and told them how an angel of the Lord had delivered him in answer to their prayer (Acts 12:12-17).

Simon Peter seems to have had a great impression and influence on John Mark. Peter was often a guest in his Jerusalem home. Later in life Mark was with Peter in Babylon in a missionary outreach. Peter referred to him as "Marcus my son," which might indicate that he had either led Mark to faith in Jesus Christ or that he had helped Mark grow to spiritual maturity. See I Peter 5:13. Tradition reports that much information recorded in the Gospel According to Mark was provided by the eyewitness accounts of Peter.

Nothing is known of Mark from the years A.D. 30 to 45. Barnabas and Paul had been in Jerusalem where they were sent on a relief mission from Antioch (Acts 11:27-30). They took John Mark with them (Acts 12:25). For a while they served the Lord in the church at Antioch. Then the Holy Spirit called Barnabas and Saul to a missionary journey (Acts 13:2) and they took John Mark along with them as their "minister" or assistant (Acts 13:5).

What were John Mark's duties as assistant to Barnabas and Saul? He was probably a business manager, tending to such things as travel arrangements, food, and lodging. He was also a helper in spiritual ministries,

telling people the historical events in the life and ministry of Christ. (Could that have been God's providential preparation for his writing the Gospel?) He would be useful in teaching the new converts.

The missionary party traveled from Antioch in Syria to the seacoast, took ship to the island of Cyprus, and traveled through it from end to end as they preached the gospel. They entered the island at Salamis and came to Paphos at the other end. Where to from there? They took ship again and headed for Asia Minor. Then something unexpected happened: John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13).

Why did Mark desert the party? Many suggestions have been made. (1) Leadership of the party had changed from “Barnabas and Saul” to “Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 11:30; 12:35; 13:43, 46, 50). He might have been jealous for his relative. (2) He may have been homesick and worried about his widowed mother in Jerusalem. (3) He may have had misgivings about offering salvation to Jew and Gentile alike, for he was reared in the conservative Jewish influence of Jerusalem. (4) He may have been unwilling to endure the hardships which travel through Asia Minor would surely bring. Whatever the reason, Paul looked upon John Mark as a deserter who quit rather than go on with them to the work (Acts 15:38). Mark drops from the historical record with a severe blemish on his record: deserter!

Sometime later, following the completion of the first missionary journey and the Jerusalem Conference on conversion of Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas agreed to go on a second mission tour. Barnabas resolved to take John Mark with them on this second trip. Paul thought it not good to take with them a man who had deserted them before. Each man was strongly convinced that he was right. *“The contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God”* (Acts 15:39, 40). Not only had John Mark deserted the work, but faithful brethren had broken fellowship over him. The church in Antioch seems to have taken the side of Paul (according to Luke's account), recommending him and Silas to the grace of God but not so recommending Barnabas and John Mark.

Barnabas took John Mark back to Cyprus to continue the ministry begun there. Paul and Silas went into Asia Minor. Luke followed Paul's ministry. Nothing further is mentioned of Barnabas. However, historical records indicate almost the entire population of the island of Cyprus became Christian in the next several years. God honored the witness and work of Barnabas and John Mark in Cyprus.

Nothing is known of John Mark for years following that ministry with

Barnabas. Tradition says he journeyed to Egypt and founded Christianity in Alexandria, remaining there until about A.D. 61. There is no historical proof of the report.

Something happened in those “silent” years which caused Mark to be reestablished in the confidence of Paul. About the year A.D. 61, Paul wrote the epistle to the church in Colosse and the epistle to Philemon who lived in Colosse. He made specific mention of salutations sent from Rome to those brethren in Colosse by “*Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him)*” (Colossians 4:10). He wrote to Philemon that greetings were sent to him by Mark, Luke, and others (Philemon 24). Mark was back in the good graces of Paul.

By the year A.D. 63, John Mark was in Babylon with Simon Peter (I Peter 5:13). Three years later he was back in Rome with Paul during his imprisonment, acting as Paul's assistant once again.

The final reference to John Mark in the Bible can be dated about A.D. 66. Paul's final letter was to Timothy, who was probably at Ephesus. It includes the request, “*Take Mark, and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for the ministry*” (II Timothy 4:11). John Mark had recovered from his fall!

There is one great lesson to be learned from this historical review: A man can fall and yet return and be used of God. The very young man whom Paul would have cast away as unworthy and undependable afterwards became “profitable for the ministry” and was used by the Holy Spirit to write an infallible account of the life and work of Jesus, the Christ. So do not give up on anyone. Read Psalm 37:23, 24 and have hope!

1. What does Psalm 37:23, 24 mean to you?
2. What is known of the family background of John Mark?
3. What was his early exposure to Christianity?
4. How do you explain Mark 14:51, 52?
5. How would you explain Mark's desertion of Paul and Barnabas?
6. How can you explain events like Acts 15:39, 40?
7. How was John Mark reclaimed for the service of God?
8. How can you help a brother who has stumbled today?
9. How could one help you if you fell?
10. How does Galatians 6:1 contribute to the lesson?