

## ABIDE: A BIBLE READING CHALLENGE

# JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

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## POWERFUL SERVICE

### MARK

The book of Mark is truly outstanding when you come to learn of the human author who penned these words. Following the journey of Mark is absolutely fascinating.

As was stated before, the first three books of the New Testament are known as the Synoptic Gospels (this is a compound word: Syn- meaning united and Optic- meaning to see), because in large part, you can read these gospels and largely see a unified order of events. However, it is beneficial to mention once more that each writer had a specific purpose, along with specific influences, as to how the Gospel was constructed. This is part of the reason that the Gospel of Mark is so exciting.

As we track through the New Testament in order to view Mark's Gospel through his personal story, the results are amazing.

The writer Mark is also known as John Mark in the New Testament. John was his Jewish name, and Mark was His Roman name. We are first introduced to John Mark as a young man in Acts 12, as some heavy persecution was happening among God's people. In fact, there was a tremendous amount happening at this time. John's brother James had just been killed, and Peter was set to share the same fate and was sitting in jail awaiting execution.

This is the setting of the real "Great Escape" because God, answering the prayers of a church at a prayer meeting, sent an angel to set Peter free from prison. A close look in **verse 12 of chapter 12** reveals some interesting information, "*And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered praying.*"

Obviously, Mark's mother was a godly lady, whose house was used as a meeting place for prayer, and her son was exposed to every bit of it.

After this, Herod was killed by God for his arrogance, and then suddenly, Barnabas and Saul jump on the scene to give a report, and then they're off again. But this time, they have one more fellow with them— the young man, John Mark. **Acts 12:25** says, "*And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.*"

Mark was taken in by these two giants of the faith in order to both help them during their missionary journeys, and be trained by them in the ministry. What an opportunity!

From here, we move into chapter 13, where Paul and Barnabas were on their first major missionary journey, we find this information in **verse 13**, *“Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.”*

In this verse we see that Mark left the missionary party. Why did he leave? Was it too hard? Was it different than he thought? Did he have second guesses about his ministry calling? No one knows. But one thing we do know is that he went to Jerusalem. And who was at Jerusalem? Momma.

Once this event occurred, we read these words in **Acts 15:36**, *“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.”*

Paul wanted to go around to all of the churches that were started to see if they were actually growing and thriving in the faith. Now look at **verse 37**, *“And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.”* Now, let’s see **verse 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.”*

Well, now we have a problem. Barnabas wanted to take Mark, but Paul didn’t want to.

Let’s keep going just a bit more in the passage and find **verses 39-40**, *“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; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.”*

The Bible says that Paul and Barnabas had a sharp contention over taking Mark. Roughly translated, this means that there were probably some loud words involved. Well, who was right? Paul had a point that Mark had turned himself into a liability. But Barnabas had a point in taking him, because if you have the opportunity, you should forgive and restore, if at all possible.

What we’re probably looking at here is a situation where both were a little right, and both were a little wrong. But what this did was create two great missionary teams, instead of just one. Also, we get a little more insight as to Barnabas’ motive in taking Mark when we make our way to **Colossians 4:10**, which says, *“Aristarchus my fellow prisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister’s son to Barnabas...”*

Now this is some important information. It seems that Barnabas was Uncle Barnabas to Mark, and he was trying to restore part of his family for the glory of Christ. We should wish there were more Uncles like this!

But there is one more stop that we should make when tracing Mark’s life, and that is **2 Timothy 4:10-11**. This passage says, *“For Demas hath forsaken me; having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.”*

Would you look at that! The same Mark that was a deserter, the same Mark that was deemed a liability by Paul, is now the same Mark who Paul says was profitable to him for the ministry! What a change!

And this happens sometimes. We don’t all start well, but by God’s grace we can learn how to finish well. By the time Mark was finished, he had completed one of the books contained in the New Testament.

When you read the Gospel of Mark, you’re reading of a man who could tell you almost better than anybody, that God is the God of the second chance— and He always has been.

### ***How to Think About Mark***

Mark is the Gospel of action. It’s like quickly looking through a photo album cataloging His journey all the way to the cross. In Mark’s Gospel you will see more of a focus on what Jesus was doing than what Jesus was saying. Now, we will find a few instances of dialogue, but for the most part, Mark was focused on action.

Furthermore, in focusing on action, Mark shows a particular link between the power of Jesus and servanthood of Jesus.

**Journey to His Baptism (Mark 1:1-11):** This marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry. As you'll notice, there are no genealogies listed, no prophecies mentioned, and no announcement made. Mark simply tells you how it is. Jesus, from the time He was baptized and was ordained to ministry.

**Journey to His Temptation (Mark 1:12-13):** Where Matthew devotes a detailed explanation of the temptations of Christ in the wilderness, Mark settles on a few lines simply to tell you, that Jesus was tempted and prevailed proving that He indeed was the Messiah and that sin could not defeat Him.

**Journey to His People (Mark 1:14- Mark 7:23):** Here you will see that Jesus spends His time in Eastern Galilee. This is where Jesus picks His disciples and begins to engage in all kinds of healing to display his power by serving the people from all over.

**Northern Galilee (7:24-9:50):** Next Mark takes us to Northern Galilee where Jesus performs more miracles and has some more serious run ins with the religious leaders. This is also where we find the transfiguration of Christ and some disciple disputes.

**Judea— South (10:1-31):** Mark then takes us south where we see the narrative of the rich young ruler and teachings on salvation.

**Jerusalem— South (10:32-52):** Then you will find this phrase that Jesus and His disciples went up to Jerusalem, even though Jerusalem is further south. Well, Jerusalem sat on a high elevation, so no matter what direction you were approaching from, you always had to travel upward. And it is in this section where see another disciple dispute and another healing by Jesus.

**Jerusalem— South (11- 13):** At this time, Mark stays in Jerusalem for the remainder of Jesus' ministry and we find a few more healings, some parables, and even more problems with the religious leaders.

**Journey to His Passion (Mark 14-15):** This is when the plot against Jesus was officially made, and then His trial and execution that followed shortly after.

**Journey to His Home (Mark 16):** Jesus did not come to earth to make a permanent home. He came to provide redemption and once this was accomplished by Jesus' resurrection, Mark tells us that Jesus ascended back into heaven to be sat on the right hand of God.

### ***What to Look for in Mark***

#### **Look for Translations—**

Mark is the Gospel that was originally aimed toward the Roman citizen. When we approached the Gospel of Matthew, we saw that it was the book with the Jew in mind and so it answered every question about how Jesus was the predicted Messiah from the Old Testament. The way Matthew accomplished this was by quoting a large amount of Old Testament prophecies that were placed in the ministry narrative of Jesus.

When you're reading the Gospel of Mark on the other hand, you'll notice that there are very few quotes from the Old Testament. But what he lacks in Old Testament prophecies, he makes up for in explaining certain things that the average Roman would need in order to better understand what was happening.

For instance, as you read this Gospel you'll notice that words that would be unfamiliar to the Roman are translated. In Mark 5, when Jesus raised a little girl from the dead, Mark quoted the Aramaic words that Jesus said in **verse 41**, "*Talitha cumi*", but then translated those words for his Roman audience, "...which is, *being interpreted, 'Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.'*"

Or sometimes you see certain places translated. In **Mark 13:3** we find these words, *“And as he sat upon the mount of Olives...”* the Roman readers would ask, “Where in the world was the mount of olives?” Well Mark answers “... *over against the temple*” and suddenly, the imagery would become clear.

### **Look For Works—**

Once again, this is a Gospel that is taking you somewhere. You are moving quickly and swiftly through the actions of Jesus and what you need to pay attention to is what Mark is telling you about Jesus’ purpose and power. Mark tells you about Jesus’ purpose in mentioning all of the healing Jesus performed— Mark is telling you that Jesus came as a servant. But Mark is also telling you about the power of Jesus— that there was nothing that could come close to stopping Him.

### ***What to Gain from Mark***

**Meet People Where You Are Physically—** Mark teaches us that if God gives us an audience, then we have an obligation to those people. They need to hear this message and God forbid if this truth seems inconvenient to us. Mark was provided a specific audience providentially by God, and in obedience to and guidance by God the Holy Spirit, Mark crafted an eternal document in order to minister to the people around him.

**Meet People Where They Are Spiritually—** Mark (along with the other Gospel writers), teaches us a very valuable lesson on how to present God’s truth to people. Some scholars have criticized Mark for omitting pieces of information (like the genealogies), and are confused as to why he would do this. The answer is obvious— this was done to be of greater benefit to Mark’s original audience. Much of what a Jew would be interested to hear would not interest a gentile at all.

We would do well to do the same. When sharing the Gospel, people do not need to be impressed with your vast knowledge of theological matters if that is not where they are spiritually. What they need is for you to meet them where they are and communicate on the level that they can understand.



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