

# John Mark's Mistake

**Introduction.** Today we will engage in brief study of young man mentioned in the Bible who made a pretty serious mistake he had to live with for long time. Studying this young man's mistake can teach us a valuable, practical lesson in overcoming past mistakes.

We all understand mistakes because we all make them. We do not all make the same ones, but we certainly all make our share of mistakes. Many of our mistakes may have been foolish but not sinful. But there are plenty of the sinful kind also.

The young man that we will study is John Mark. He had a great background. His mother was a prominent Christian in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). John Mark probably "grew up in the church" and had background advantages that many others did not have. He was the cousin of Barnabas, an outstanding and respected Christian in the early church (Colossians 4:10). He was also relatively young when he was given the privilege of traveling with Paul and Barnabas on Paul's first preaching trip (Acts 12:25; 13:5; cf. Mark 14:51-52).

## I. ***He Made A Decision That Must Have Haunted Him***

- A. What he did is first mentioned in an incidental way (Acts 13:13).  
Although it is not clear from the first reference, it becomes clear later that what John Mark did was not inherently sinful; however, it was a serious breach of the commitment he made (Acts 15:36-40).
- B. Exactly why John Mark went back is not known. Maybe he was homesick, frightened, uncomfortable with the Gentiles, or resented Paul's prominence over Barnabas. What John Mark did destroyed Paul's confidence in him. Even though Barnabas wanted to give John Mark a second chance, as far we know, even he did not defend what John Mark did.

## II. ***He Was Eventually Able To Overcome His Mistake***

- A. Although it took time, John Mark was eventually able to regain Paul's confidence (2 Timothy 4:11). This is a great reminder that we can also overcome mistakes in our past.
  - 1. We do not mean to minimize foolish mistakes in judgment or the sinfulness of actual transgressions of God's will.
  - 2. Even when serious and sinful mistakes have been made in the past, it is not hopeless because in time it is possible to overcome them.
- B. It is good to think of what John Mark did not do.
  - 1. He did not give up on himself and quit the Lord.
    - a) Tragically some give up when they realize they have "messed up".

- (1) They may decide they can never do better than their past failure.
    - (2) They may think they can never regain the confidence they lost.
  - b) The past, whether good or bad, was not the end of Paul's story (Philippians 3:13).
- 2. He did not become so embarrassed that he withdrew into a shell.
  - a) John Mark's desertion was not clearly called a "sin," but no matter its severity, he eventually realized it was a blemish on his record that became widely known.
    - (1) He would have to explain why he left to Paul and Barnabas.
    - (2) People would learn that Paul and Barnabas separated over taking John Mark on the second trip.
    - (3) God even put the story of his mistake in the Bible for all to know.
  - b) John Mark must have realized that rebuilding his reputation would take time.
    - (1) People are apt to forget the difference between confidence and forgiveness.
    - (2) Forgiveness is something we can receive when we repent. But confidence usually takes time to re-earn when people lose it in us.
- 3. As far as we know, he did not become bitter toward Paul over the loss of confidence.
  - a) Sometimes teenagers who have been untrustworthy resent it when parents no longer trust them. Sometimes Christians who have foolishly ruined their influence resent those who once had confidence in them.
  - b) What resentment shows is misplaced anger. Instead of being angry at ourselves, we are angry at those who are reasonably reacting to what we have done.

### III. ***John Mark Sustained Faithfulness And Trustworthiness***

- A. John Mark must have continued to be faithful because Barnabas would surely have never proposed taking him on a second trip if he had become unfaithful.
- B. Although Paul opposed taking John because he quit on the first trip, there was no objection based on any later fault.
- C. In Colossians 4:10, Paul told the Colossians that if John Mark came to them, they should "receive him" (cf. Philemon 23-24).
- D. John Mark and Peter were close associates. It is generally agreed that Mark received much of the information in his gospel from Peter (1

Peter 5:13). His important gospel is a book of action, emphasizing what Jesus did rather than what He said.

**Conclusion.** So although John Mark made a decision that must have haunted him for years, instead of giving up on himself or quitting the Lord, he “bounced back” and lived faithfully and regained his confidence, reputation, and trust. Paul (Acts 9:1-2; 2 Timothy 4:7) and Peter (Matthew 26:75; 2 Peter 3:17-18) are great examples of what needs to happen when someone makes a mistake and sins. A huge part of overcoming yours sins of the past is confession and repentance (Joel 2:12-13).