

A Second Chance for Mark (Acts 15:32-41)^a

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Context

1. Paul and Barnabas recently returned from the 1st missionary journey during which many Gentiles came to faith in Jesus
2. Jewish believers from Jerusalem came to the church at Antioch teaching that Gentiles must also be circumcized in order to be saved
3. Paul and others from the church at Antioch went up to Jerusalem where the apostles and elders determined that circumcision and following the law of Moses were not requirements for salvation
4. Even so, they issued guidelines to facilitate fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers

Passage (Acts 15:32-41)

1. “[32] Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words. [33] And after they had stayed [there] for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. [34] However, it seemed good to Silas to remain there. [35] Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. [36] Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, [and see] how they are doing.” [37] Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. [38] But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. [39] Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; [40] but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. [41] And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”¹

Start of 2nd Missionary Journey

1. v. 36 - *Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, [and see] how they are doing.”*
2. Dates (49-51 AD)

3. Passages (Acts 15-18)

4. Regions: Cilicia, Galatia (modern-day eastern Turkey); Asia (modern-day western Turkey); Macedonia and Achaia (modern-day Greece)

Christians in conflict

1. vv. 37-39 - ***Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another.***

A. Both Barnabas and Paul were influential and fruitful believers in the early church: yet they could not agree

B. Barnabas was *determined* (from βούλομαι [*boulomai*]) to take John Mark

I. “of decisions of the will after previous deliberation”²

II. It would seem that Barnabas had been thinking about John Mark’s previous failure for some time and saw the upcoming journey as an opportunity to encourage and restore Mark—a “second chance,” if you will.

C. Paul saw things otherwise: he was equally determined not to take John Mark!

I. He referred to John Mark as, *the one who had departed from them* — seeming to view Mark as “the failed one.”

II. Paul *insisted* (“kept insisting”, NASB95) John Mark should not go

III. He was convinced that Mark’s previous failure meant he remained unsuitable for the challenge of traveling evangelistic work

D. The “contention [became] so sharp”

I. “[sharp] contention” is from παροξυσμός [*paroxysmos*]

a. “intense argument, sharp contention implying exasperation, i.e., an intense (unreconcilable) difference of opinion”³

E. They “parted” (from ἀποχωρίζομαι [*apochōrizomai*]) - used only here and in Rev. 6:14 where it describes the dramatic way in which “the sky receded (or parted) as a scroll”

F. The intensity of their disagreement and the resulting disunity was clearly dramatic and feelings no-doubt ran high!

2. Why couldn't they agree on this issue?

A. Barnabas, the “son of encouragement,” was determined to mentor and restore John Mark: although Mark had previously failed, Barnabas wanted to see him succeed.

I. Mark was also a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10)

B. From Paul's perspective, Mark had already proved to be unreliable and Paul seemed to be convinced this was a lasting character flaw

C. Both were strongly convinced in their different assessments of Mark—but time would show that Barnabas was right!

3. Although it is easy to miss, even in the short-term something good came from this disagreement: it resulted in two evangelistic outreaches rather than one:

A. Barnabas with Mark departed for Cypress whereas Paul/Silas headed to Syria and Cilicia

Mark - a real-world example of failure and success in our walk with the Lord

1. Mark's Christian heritage: his godly mother

A. The early church was gathered at her house interceding for Peter after Herod had killed James and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12:12)

2. Mark's early failure

A. *Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13).*

B. Here we learn that Mark's earlier departure was seen as a major failure by Paul. Mark “had not gone with them to the work” (Acts 15:38)

3. Despite his earlier failure, Mark was willing to go out on another missionary work. Even though rejected by Paul, Mark departed with Barnabas for Cyprus

A. We hear nothing further of evangelistic trip by Barnabas and Mark

B. But woven within the NT record we see evidence that, despite his early failure, Mark became a mature and reliable servant of the Lord

4. With Paul during his first imprisonment at Rome (Acts 28:30, circa A.D. 60-62)

A. John Mark is mentioned in two of Paul's letters written from prison: Colossians and Philemon

B. A little over a decade later (from start of 2nd missionary journey in A.D. 49)

C. Reconciled to and recommended by Paul

- I. Colossians - *Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him) and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me (Colossians 4:10-11).*
- II. Philemon - *But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers (Philemon 1:22-24).*

5. With Peter in Babylon circa A.D. 64 (1Pe. 5:13)

6. Favored by Paul near the end of Paul's life, during his second imprisonment at Rome (circa A.D. 67)

- A. Almost 2 decades after his rejection by Paul
- B. 2 Timothy - *Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry (2 Timothy 4:11).*
- C. Ministered to Paul in important ways during the final 5 years of Paul's life

7. Writer of second gospel

- A. How important and historically valuable is THAT?!
- B. Might there be a connection between the life lesson of Mark — the importance of serving — and his emphasis concerning the life of Jesus in his gospel? We can't know for certain.

In Mark we have Christ as a Servant, just as He appears as King in Matthew, Man in Luke, and God in John. . . . It is preeminently the gospel of Jehovah's Servant, "the Branch" (Zech. 3:8). Chapter 10:45 describes the scope of the book, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve." No genealogy is included, for such is not important for a servant. . . . In keeping with the servant character, the gospel is one of deeds rather than of words.⁴

- C. When you stumble and "blow it," remember that a man who wrote one of the four most important books in the history of the world testifying of Jesus started out with a BIG, FAT, FAILURE!

- I. Always remember: *God's not done with us yet!*
- II. Our failures are less important than our willingness to get back up and walk with God.

III. The failures of *others* are less important than our desire for forgiveness and restoration.

- a. As Paul wrote, *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who [are] spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted* (Gal. 6:1)

8. End of life - according to tradition

Tradition states that Mark was [eventually] sent on a mission to Egypt by Peter, that he founded the church of Alexandria, of which he became bishop, and suffered as a martyr in the eighth year of Nero.⁵

Realism and hope in the Christian walk - initial failure can still lead to success and usefulness to God

1. Initial failures

- A. Mark's departure from the 1st missionary journey
- B. Paul's persecution of the church
- C. Paul and Barnabas' sharp and irreconcilable contention over Mark

2. Eventual successes

- A. Paul, Barnabas, and Mark reconciled
- B. Paul forgives and values Mark
- C. Mark forgives and serves Paul

3. What if . . .

- A. . . . Paul had remained angry and unforgiving concerning John Mark's earlier failure?
- B. . . . Barnabas had not been an encourager—unwilling to oppose and separate from Paul for the sake of mentoring John Mark?
- C. . . . John Mark hadn't forgiven Paul over his refusal to give him a second chance—to take him on the second missionary journey?
 - I. Instead, it seems that Mark understood that Paul's refusal to take him was well-deserved, and did not hold it against Paul

4. The “stool” of Christian sanctification has three important legs of support: patience, grace, and forgiveness

- A. Patience: to hang in there when other believers let you down . . . or worse

B. Grace: to realize their failures are no different than our own—that we are in need of unmerited favor just as they are

C. Forgiveness: the willingness to extend grace and to move forward realizing that we all blow it at times and that God isn't done with any of us yet

5. If we will stay the course of service and allow Christian principles to work in our lives and the lives of those we disagree with, God can accomplish great things in spite of our failures.

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Endnotes:

1. [Acts 15:32-41](#), NKJV
2. [Ref-0334](#), *boulomai*
3. [Ref-0617](#), *paroxysmos*
4. [Ref-0633](#), *Mark, Gospel of*
5. [Ref-0633](#), *Mark*

Sources:

- Acts 15:32-41** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0334** Arndt, W., Gingrich, F. W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 1979).
- Ref-0617** James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Greek (New Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).
- Ref-0633** Unger, M. F., Harrison, R. K., Vos, H. F., Barber, C. J., & Unger, M. F. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988).

Links Mentioned Above

- a - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/52_Acts_15_32-41/index.htm.
- b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.