

Mary, Mother of John Mark

Among the Marys mentioned in the New Testament, Mary, the mother of Mark who wrote the second gospel, is spoken of but once (Acts 12:12 - read Acts 12:1-19), yet this brief description of her is suggestive of her life and labors. She was probably the aunt or sister of Barnabas, the one-time companion of Paul (Colossians 4:10), and such a relationship accounts for Barnabas' choice of Mark as his companion—a selection over which Paul and Barnabas parted. Further, being related to Mary would account for the leadership among the saints gathering in her spacious home. Evidently the family belonged to Cyprus, hence the choice of such by Barnabas as the first station in his journeyings (Acts 4:36; 13:4). Sir William Ramsay holds that the narrative of Mary in the Acts was by Mark, which would account for the details of his mother's large house becoming a well-known center of Christian life and worship. There is a legend to the effect that this same house was the scene of a still more sacred gathering when, in its upper room, Jesus observed the Lord's Supper on the night of His betrayal.

It was to Mary's home that Peter found his way after his miraculous escape, for he knew that a company of believers had gathered there to pray for his release. Peter had a peculiar affection for the godly home. He called Mark, "his son" (1 Peter 5:13) - a spiritual son, having led him to yield his life to the Saviour. The way in which the saints met in Mary's home bespeaks her tried steadfastness and the bond of intimacy that existed between them. That Rhoda was one of the maids indicates that the household was considerably large, implying that Mary was a widow with means to maintain such a commodious home. As Barnabas her relative gave up his land for Christ, Mary gave up her Jerusalem home to be used as an infant church.

Mary was a woman of sterling qualities and was loyal to her Christian ideals. At that time Christians were a persecuted sect, yet she faced the consequences of yielding up her home as a center of spiritual power and influence, and was self-sacrificing in time, effort and money to serve the Lord. It has been suggested that young Rhoda who went to open the door for Peter was hesitant thinking perhaps it was the soldiers of Herod who had come to arrest some of the homeless Christian friends whose benefactress and patron Mary had become. As for Mark the evangelist, her son, he was deeply attached to his mother which was probably one reason why he returned to Jerusalem from Perga (Acts 13:13). He wanted to be nearer the one who had meant so much in his life. Doubtless he derived something of Mary's straightforward and decided character so prominent in the gospel he wrote portraying Jesus as the lowly servant of God.