

## What is the Gospel?

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**You've probably heard of "the gospel." But what is the gospel? Do you really know what the gospel is?**

**Does it matter? Yes, it really does matter, in the most profound way!**

**Why? Because Jesus Christ commanded us to believe the gospel (Mark 1:15). Jesus Christ said those who believe the gospel, which also implies obedience, would be saved, but those who reject it are subject to punishment (Mark 16:15-16; cf. Romans 1:16; 10:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; 2:13-14; 1 Peter 4:17-18).**

**But to believe the gospel you must know what it is. And there is a great deal of confusion about what the gospel actually is.**

Is it solely a message about the person of Jesus Christ, for example? Is the gospel just a syrupy sweet, sentimental message about "unconditional love" and "unconditional acceptance"? (Many today make no distinction between the two concepts). Is the gospel summed up in the idea of "accepting Jesus as your Savior," with no real requirement for a change in your conduct?

On the other hand, is the gospel, as some contend, solely a message about the "Kingdom of God," exclusive of the message of salvation, and the forgiveness of sin through Christ's sacrifice? Is the history of the life of Jesus Christ a part of the gospel?

Jesus warned that there would be **many** coming in **his name**, proclaiming him to be the Christ, yet **deceiving many** (Matthew 24:5). How? Appearing to be righteous, but **perverting** the gospel so that it becomes a *false gospel* – a **lie!** (Matthew 7:15; Acts 20:29-30; 2 Corinthians 4:2; 11:13-15; Galatians 1:6-9).

In order to deal with contentions and questions relating to the gospel, it's important that we understand what the gospel actually is. That is, what does the *Bible* itself say about the gospel?

For genuine Christians the word of God is the final authority on all matters of faith and doctrine (Psalm 119:105; Isaiah 8:20; Matthew 4:4; Mark 7:13; John 8:31; 14:23-24; Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 2 Timothy 2:15; James 1:22-25). One of the keys to Biblical understanding is, **let the Bible interpret the Bible.**

To understand a given subject, gather every scripture on that subject, and examine each in its immediate context and in the context of the Bible as a whole (Isaiah 28: 9-10). And examine each in relation to the others, noting how they add to and complement one another. A major source of misunderstanding and outright deception is taking only one or two or a few scriptures on a subject and

misapplying them, reading into them a false meaning, or excluding other scriptures that add information and provide a basis for deeper understanding.

To understand what the Bible reveals about what the gospel is we must consult not just a handful of selected scriptures that form an incomplete picture, but a number of scriptures that can together give us a comprehensive view of the subject. You could, for example, look up every one of the ninety-seven verses where the word “gospel” appears in the New King James Version, and study them in their immediate context. That wouldn't tell you everything there is to know about what the Bible teaches about the gospel, but it would help you gain a broad perspective on how the term is used in Scripture.

What does the word gospel mean? It's translated from the Greek *euangelion*, which means “good message,” or, you could say, “glad tidings,” or “good news.”

Jesus Christ, during his three and a half year ministry, proclaimed a “good message,” the gospel. Concurrently, he also trained men he had selected from among his disciples to proclaim that same message after his departure from the earth (Luke 6:12-13). They are called “apostles,” from *apostolos*, meaning a delegate, or a herald, a messenger, one sent forth to proclaim a message.

What was that message? It was the gospel (Mark 16:15).

But what is the nature of the message they were sent to proclaim? What are its contents?

### **The Kingdom of God**

John the Baptist had been sent ahead of Jesus Christ, to prepare the way for him, preaching the gospel, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:1-3). Coming on the heels of John the Baptist, Jesus also proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15).

The twelve apostles, even as they were being trained, were also sent to preach the Kingdom of God (Luke 9:1-2; Matthew 10:5-7). Later, Paul was separated and commissioned as an apostle to preach the gospel, and he, too, preached the Kingdom of God (Acts 28:30-31).

Certainly the Kingdom of God is a vital aspect of the gospel. It is this vital dimension of the gospel that most Churches claiming to represent Christ have left out of their teaching. Or they've perverted the concept of the Kingdom, often reducing it to nothing more than a sentimental, warm feeling in your heart. Nevertheless, Jesus said the true message of the coming Kingdom of God must be proclaimed right up to the end of this age (Matthew 24:14).

The prophets had long declared that a Messiah (anointed one), eternal, bearing

divine names and titles, would be sent to the earth to establish a **literal world-ruling kingdom** that would never end (Isaiah 2:1-4; Daniel 2:44; 7:14, 26; Zechariah 14:1-5, 9, 16-17). The name Jesus Christ helps identify him as the long awaited Messiah. "Christ" is the anglicized Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word for Messiah, or "anointed one." Jesus plainly said, "I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me" (John 8:42; cf. Mark 8:27-30; John 1:41; 4:42; Acts 2:36). To back up such claims, Jesus publicly worked many miracles, and displayed other signs of the fact that he was the promised Messiah (Matthew 11:2-6; John 5:36; 7:31; Acts 2:22; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

In proclaiming the gospel, Jesus Christ and those he sent forth after him taught that he would one day return, no longer flesh and blood, but with eternal, divine power and glory, to establish the promised Kingdom of God (Matthew 24:30-31; Luke 1:33-34; Acts 3:19-21; 1 Corinthians 15:23-25). Having established the Kingdom at his return, Jesus - and with him the resurrected saints - will literally rule over the nations of the earth (Luke 19:11-19; Revelation 2:26-27; 5:10; 11:15-18; 19:11-16; 20:4-6).

But is there more to the gospel? Does the gospel, for instance, also include a message of personal salvation, and salvation for Israel and mankind? If that, too, a part of the gospel? And the life and teachings of Jesus Christ - are those part of the gospel?

### Salvation

We've seen that John the Baptist preached the Kingdom of God, but what else did he preach? In prophesying of the work to be performed by his son, who came to be called John the Baptist, Zacharias, a priest among the Jews, said, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, To give **knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins**, Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the **way of peace**" (Luke 1:76-79).

Luke wrote also of John, that being inspired of God, "...he went into all the region around the Jordan, **preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins**, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough ways smooth; And all flesh shall see the **salvation of God**'" (Luke 3:3-6).

Clearly, the message of the gospel preached by John the Baptist included salvation by repentance and the remission of sins, and the way of peace, as well as the kingdom of God. It was all part of his message in preparing the way for the

Messiah. Indeed, all these facets of the gospel message are interconnected and all are essential to a comprehensive understanding of the gospel.

Jesus, in explaining the purpose for which he was sent, quoted a prophecy from the book of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19); cf. Isaiah 62:11). The gospel is a message of healing, of liberty, of enlightenment, and of prophecy.

The preaching of the gospel is in part an **invitation** to the "wedding" feast representing the Kingdom of God (Matthew 22:1-3). **Those who hear the gospel are being called to salvation** (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). (See our articles, ["Are 'Many' or 'Few' Called In This Age? "](#); and ["Marriage Feast Parables"](#)).

Jesus trained men he had chosen to become Apostles and commissioned them to preach the gospel (Mark 16:15-16). That included their bearing witness to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, of his exaltation at the right hand of God, and the plan of salvation through repentance and the forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:30-32; 1 Peter 1:3-13).

Did Paul preach a false gospel? He said that he'd been sent to "testify to the gospel of the grace of God," which was a part of the message of the Kingdom of God (Acts 20:24-25). He also referred to the gospel as the "gospel of your salvation" (Ephesians 1:13). He said to the Corinthians that he'd been sent to preach the gospel, which includes the "message of the cross," that is, Christ's crucifixion (1 Corinthians 1:17-18, 23). Salvation, and the means through which salvation may be obtained, is an essential part of the message of the gospel.

### **The Gospel of Jesus Christ**

No government is any better than those who administer it. How can we believe in God's Kingdom without knowing the character of the King? The gospel includes vital information about the King - Jesus Christ, the Messiah. He is mentioned many places in the Old Testament. The Messiah's coming was equated in the minds of the Jews with the establishing of God's Kingdom. Four books of the Bible were written to record the story of his birth, life and death as a human being, his teachings, and his resurrection to former glory. These four books, commonly called "the gospels" (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), constitute about one third of the volume of the new Testament. And much more is said concerning him in the other books of the Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

To believe in the gospel of the Kingdom of God we must believe in the King, and the true gospel leads us to such faith (Romans 10:8-17). Note that the message

preached is referred to as the “word of faith” (Romans 10:8). We find in Mark 16:15-16 that **salvation requires believing the gospel**. In Romans 10 we are told that **salvation requires genuine belief in Jesus Christ, in his resurrection, and confessing Jesus Christ**. Obviously, the gospel message contains these elements. The gospel is referred to in Romans 10 as the “gospel of peace” (Romans 10:15). But all of these things are a part of the same gospel, not different gospels (2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:6). And the various names by which the gospel is referred to do not imply different gospels, but simply highlight facets of the one true gospel. Also, of utmost importance, the gospel must be **obeyed** (Romans 10:16).

Note that Mark opens his “gospel” account with the statement: “The beginning of the **gospel of Jesus Christ**, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). There is no definite article in the Greek original associated with “beginning” (*arche*) here. The idea is that Mark begins, at this point, his “gospel” – good message – concerning Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The subject dealt with in the book is the preaching and public ministry of Jesus Christ, which identifies him as the Son of God – the Messiah. He begins his discourse by showing that what was to follow had been prophesied. And that John the Baptist, as prophesied, had come to “prepare the way” for Christ. Then he continues with his account of the public teaching and ministry of Jesus Christ.

After his resurrection, Jesus instructed his disciples to take his message to the world, “...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). Having been beaten and threatened for preaching “in the name of Jesus,” Christ's apostles were, “...rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and **preaching Jesus as the Christ**” (Acts 5:40-42).

A man named Philip had been ordained a deacon in the early Church (Acts 6:2-6). He soon began acting more in the capacity of an evangelist (Acts 21:8). Due to a great persecution against the Church in Jerusalem, its people were “scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8:1). “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and **preached Christ to them**” (Acts 8:5). Further, “...when they believed Philip as he **preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ**, both men and women were baptized” (Acts 8:12).

Saul had been a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest legislative and judicial body among the Jews at that time. He had been a participant in the persecution of Christians (Acts 9:1-2; 26:9-11; Galatians 1:13). But Jesus Christ appeared to Saul as he journeyed to Damascus on a mission to persecute Christians. Saul was struck blind, temporarily, and Christ revealed that he had a mission of a wholly different kind for Saul (Acts 9:3-14). Jesus said of Saul, “...he is a chosen vessel of Mine **to bear My name** before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). This Saul is more commonly called Paul in the New Testament (Acts 13:9).

In his epistle to the Romans Paul wrote: “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the **gospel of God** which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, **concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord**, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:1-4). Paul wrote in his epistle to the Galatians that God “...separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to **reveal His Son in me**, that **I might preach Him** among the Gentiles...” (Galatians 1:15-16). In so doing, he preached “the faith which he once tried to destroy” (Galatians 1:23).

Of course, he wasn't just preaching the name of Christ, nor about Christ's person, divorced from Christ's teachings, but as Paul's writings reveal, he was preaching and teaching the full message of the gospel, including the obligation to obey it (cf. Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 6:16-17; 10:16; 16:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Hebrews 5:9). The last we hear of Paul in the book of Acts, he is under house arrest in Rome, where “...he explained and solemnly **testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus** from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets...” (Acts 28:23). And he continued, “**preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ** with all confidence, no one forbidding him” (Acts 28:31).

Peter, in writing to the Church, says: “...you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may **proclaim the praises of Him** who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

In its largest sense, the gospel is the Word of God, God's “good message” to mankind, contained in the pages of the Bible. Where the truth of God's word is being preached or taught, so is the gospel. “In Him [Jesus Christ] you also trusted, after you heard the **word of truth, the gospel of your salvation**; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13).

Some of the ministers who worked with the apostles are called **evangelists**, from the Greek *euaggelistes*, meaning one who preaches the gospel. In preaching the gospel an evangelist was to preach and teach the doctrines of the word of God. As Paul wrote to Timothy, “Preach the word... do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:2, 5). We find that the same gospel preached in the New Testament Church was preached to the Israelites in the wilderness. “For indeed **the gospel was preached to us as well as to them**; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it” (Hebrews 4:2).

The gospel, the word of God, endures forever. “All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls

away, But the word of the Lord endures forever' Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you" (1 Peter 1:24-25). "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the **everlasting gospel** to preach to those who dwell on the earth--to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people – saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water'" (Revelation 14:6-7).

There should be no confusion about the gospel. The gospel is the message of God to mankind, the message of his kingdom, of his salvation, of the Savior Jesus Christ, and the message of everything else encompassed by the word of God. That is the gospel.