

The 1st Century Concept of ‘Gospel’

When Jesus went around Galilee and Samaria preaching about the gospel of the Kingdom¹, what did the local community understand by the term ‘gospel’? This is an important question, because the choice of this term has a bearing on the intent of the Gospel writers use of it.

The word “Gospel” (εὐαγγέλιον, *euangelion* Gk.) didn’t originate with the first believers because it was an important regal term already in use in the 1st century. When the people heard this term, they automatically had a concept in their mind as to what it referred to. They didn’t need to learn a new word and get to know the nuances of its meaning.

Here’s what ‘gospel’ meant in the Greek world² of the 1st century.

- A new ruler now sits on the throne of the realm.
- The new ruler is the saviour of the whole world who will bring peace (*pax romana*) to the empire and end all wars, insurrections and civil unrest.
- The new ruler is divine.
- The ruler has won a great victory in battle and that is worth celebrating.
- A new period of time in history has begun.

In other words, it was the colloquial term for earth-shattering news.

As examples, here are some gospel announcements that were made:

1. After defeating Mark Antony for the rule of the Roman empire, after the assassination of Julius Caesar (44 BC), Octavian (AKA Augustus Caesar) sent a message around the empire announcing himself as ruler and also the end of his opposition in battle (31 BC).
2. Octavian sent another encyclical message around the empire 2 years later announcing peace following his crushing of the rioting and civil war that followed Julius Caesar’s assassination.
3. The Calendar Inscription of Priene (circa 9 BC) records Augustus Caesar assuming the throne and about the redefining the calendar around his birth date.

We learn the details about Jesus’ gospel through his words and deeds:

*“In His death we will see Jesus accomplishes the salvation, the all-inclusive fulfillment of the covenant promises first glimpsed in the garden/temple, at the Cross where He battles the powers of wickedness that had been given authority by Adam/Eve He defeats them destroying the chokehold they held over all of Adam’s offspring. He takes the sin of the world upon Himself destroying its power over the Eikons. Then in His resurrection He throws open the door to the promised New Creation and then invites all who will to join Him in the Kingdom of God. This is the euangelion, the “good news” that we looked at earlier. In Jesus, something has happened that changes everything for everyone. And because everything has changed, like with what we considered with Augustus Caesar, there is a new King that has won the battle. And because He is King, Jesus is now cleaning up the mess that existed, and when that task is completed, He will appear again from the throne room of the Kingdom of God, will unite heaven and earth, as He always said He would, and YHWH will again dwell in the midst of His people forever.”*³

1 – Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Mark 1:14 (Matthew 24:14) [NKJV]

2 – Although the Roman empire was the predominant imperium, Greek thought was the vogue of those times. Greek was also the language of learning, commerce and communication. This is why it is classified today as a “Greek world”.

3 – James W. Sheets (March 2017) “The Kingdom of God: The Missing Gospel within the Gospels” [thesis] p:157-158
www.academia.edu/40164708/The_Kingdom_of_God_The_Missing_Gospel_within_the_Gospels

That's earth-shattering good news.

That *euangelion*, that “good news”, was spread around the whole world by word of mouth after Jesus was raised from the dead and Holy Spirit was released.

SOURCE: “The Kingdom of God: The Missing Gospel within the Gospels”⁴

AN ASIDE: It is very easy to see that “the gospel of the Kingdom” would be received as earth-shattering news by the populace. It's also easy to see that it was a ‘red flag’ to the Roman rulers of Palestine and Judea, as well as a worrying sign for the Jewish rulers. Both tried to stamp out the proponents of that gospel. {LDS}

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(Readers will need to look up for themselves any scriptures alluded to in this document)

4 – James W. Sheets (March 2017) “The Kingdom of God: The Missing Gospel within the Gospels” [thesis] p:155-156
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