

# The Gospel

By Dave DeWitt

How do you define the gospel? Take a minute and write it out.

No, don't read on until you've written it out.

Before doing this study, I defined the gospel this way:

*I am a sinner, Jesus paid for my sins on the cross, and I must receive Him as my God and Savior.*

## The Gospel In the Gospels

Now let's look at the use of the word *gospel* in the gospels. Here are all 17 occurrences of the word *gospel* in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. [I find it interesting that the word *gospel* does not occur in the Gospel of John.]

1. *Matthew 4:23* Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the **gospel** of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.
2. *Matthew 9:35* Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the **gospel** of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.
3. *Matthew 11:5* the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE **GOSPEL** PREACHED TO THEM.
4. *Matthew 24:14* "This **gospel** of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.
5. *Matthew 26:13* "Truly I say to you, wherever this **gospel** is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."
6. *Mark 1:1* The beginning of the **gospel** of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
7. *Mark 1:14* Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the **gospel** of God,
8. *Mark 1:15* and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the **gospel**."
9. *Mark 13:10* "The **gospel** must first be preached to all the nations.
10. *Mark 14:9* "Truly I say to you, wherever the **gospel** is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her."
11. *Mark 16:15* And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the **gospel** to all creation.
12. *Luke 3:18* So with many other exhortations he preached the **gospel** to the people.
13. *Luke 4:18* "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE **GOSPEL** TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,
14. *Luke 7:22* And He answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the POOR HAVE THE **GOSPEL** PREACHED TO THEM.

15. Luke 9:6 Departing, they began going throughout the villages, preaching the **gospel** and healing everywhere.
16. Luke 16:16 “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the **gospel** of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.
17. Luke 20:1 On one of the days while He was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the **gospel**, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted Him,

What did Matthew mean when He said in Matthew 4:23, *Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the **gospel** of the kingdom*? What did Mark mean when he introduced his Gospel with the words in Mark 1:1, *The beginning of the **gospel** of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*? What did Luke mean when he wrote in Luke 20:1, *On one of the days while He was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the **gospel**, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted Him*.

The word *repent* is connected with the gospel in Mark 1:15, and we get some more clues about the *gospel* of Jesus when we look up the word *repent* in the gospels. Here are three examples.

Matthew 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 11:20 Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not **repent**.

Luke 13:3 “I tell you, no, but unless you **repent**, you will all likewise perish.

What gospel did Jesus preach? Was it the statement I made at the beginning of this paper?

- *I am a sinner,*
- *Jesus paid for my sins on the cross, and*
- *I must receive Him as my God and Savior*

I don’t think so. Actually, none of those three things are mentioned in the gospel that Jesus proclaimed. Yet Jesus proclaimed *the gospel*.

Then what can we conclude about the gospel from the gospels? Here are four things I observed:

1. The *gospel* is proclaimed as **fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture**.
2. The *gospel* is connected to the **miracles done by Jesus**.
3. The *gospel* is **connected to the kingdom of God**.
4. The *gospel* is a **message for** the nations (meaning Gentiles or unbelievers) of **the world**.
5. The *gospel* **requires repentance**. The *gospel* is connected to the Kingdom, and the Kingdom is connected to repentance. So repentance is part of the *gospel* of the Gospels.

Also notice that even though repentance is part of the gospel, there is no focus on heaven. It may be implied in the idea of repentance, but all discussions about heaven are addressed to believers. I can find no direct connection between the *gospel* and *heaven*.

## The Word Gospel

The word εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*) translated “gospel” occurs 99 times in the New Testament. Literally, it means “good news.” It is a Greek word, therefore, it does not occur in the Old Testament. εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*) is used (in the LXX) to translate “glad tidings” (2 Samuel 4:10; 18:20, 22, 25; Isaiah 61:1). So the word means a good message, one you should be glad to hear. But like many Greek words (such as the words for *saved*, *love* and *church*), Christ and apostles changed the

meaning. In this case, it was changed from just a greeting, to represent their basic message to a lost world. It was used to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

## Paul Defines The Gospel

In most places, the word *gospel* is used without definition. But in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul defined it. I have placed numbers next to what seems to be seven defining elements of the gospel.

*1 Corinthians 15:1* Now I make known to you, brethren, **the gospel** which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand,

*1 Corinthians 15:2* by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

*1 Corinthians 15:3* For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, **1.** that Christ died for our sins **2.** according to the Scriptures,

*1 Corinthians 15:4* and that **3.** He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day [**2/ repeated**] according to the Scriptures,

*1 Corinthians 15:5* and **4.** that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...

*1 Corinthians 15:21* For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead.

*1 Corinthians 15:22,* **5.** For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

*1 Corinthians 15:23* But each in his own order: **6.** Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,

*1 Corinthians 15:24* then comes the end, when **7.** He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

*1 Corinthians 15:25* For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

*1 Corinthians. 15:26* The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

Now let me put these seven points in chronological order.

1. **Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah prophesied by the Old Testament Scriptures.** The first proof of Him being the Messiah is that He fulfilled what the prophets prophesied in the Scripture.
2. **Jesus preformed miracles,** proved in this passage by the fact that He died and rose from the dead. The evidence for the resurrection from the dead is another great proof that Jesus was not only the Christ of the Scripture, but also the Son of God.
3. **Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to many.** This is further evidence that He was the Son of God because those appearances were not to one or just a few, but to many.
4. **Jesus will return from heaven** and believers will be raised from the dead.
5. **Jesus will establish a kingdom of God on earth,** which ultimately will be given to God the Father.
6. **We are sinners excluded from God and hopelessly lost,** and we have been lost ever since the sin of Adam.
7. **The death of Christ on the cross paid for our sins.**

What is important to notice is that we usually only think of the last two points as the gospel (at least I do). And 1 Corinthians 15 does not call for repentance, which the Gospels *gospel* did.

## Peter Preached Paul's Definition of the Gospel

Now let's look briefly at Peter's sermon in Acts 2.

*Acts 2:14* But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: “Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.

*Acts 2:15* “For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day;

*Acts 2:16* but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel;

*Acts 2:17* ‘AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,’ God says, ‘THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND...’

*Acts 2:22* “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know —

*Acts 2:23* this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

*Acts 2:24* “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

*Acts 2:25* “For David says of Him,...

*Acts 2:27* BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES,  
NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.

*Acts 2:28* ‘YOU HAVE MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE;  
YOU WILL MAKE ME FULL OF GLADNESS WITH YOUR PRESENCE.’

*Acts 2:29* “Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

*Acts 2:30* “And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE,

*Acts 2:31* he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY.

*Acts 2:32* “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.

*Acts 2:33* “Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

*Acts 2:34* “For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, “SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,

*Acts 2:35* UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.’”

*Acts 2:36* “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ — this Jesus whom you crucified.”

*Acts 2:37* Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”

*Acts 2:38* Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

*Acts 2:39* “For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

Notice that the points Peter made in his sermon are very similar to what Paul called the *gospel* in 1 Corinthians 15.

- 1. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah prophesied by the Old Testament Scriptures.** This is established by quotations from Joel and David.
- 2. Jesus performed miracles.** *Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst*

3. **Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to many.** *Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day... he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ... This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.*
4. **Jesus is in heaven seated at the right hand of God.** *For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET."'*
5. **Jesus will establish the kingdom of God on earth.** *Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ."*
6. **We are sinners excluded from God and hopelessly lost.** Peter pointed out their sin with the accusation, *this Jesus whom you crucified. Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?*
7. **The death of Christ on the cross paid for our sins, but we must repent and receive Him as our God and Savior.** *Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins*

In Acts 2, Peter's sermon added the subject of repentance, which was part of the *gospel* in the gospels, other than that, it is basically the same as Paul's definition of the *gospel* in 1 Corinthians 15. Now let's take the same seven points and look at Peter's next sermon and response to the rulers and elders after he healed a lame man by the temple.

*Acts 3:19 "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;*

*Acts 3:20 and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you,*

*Acts 3:21 whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.*

*Acts 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, Acts 4:9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well,*

*Acts 4:10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by this name this man stands here before you in good health.*

*Acts 4:11 "He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone.*

*Acts 4:12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."*

Notice again that Peter's message had the same basic points that Paul called the *gospel*.

1. **Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah prophesied by the Old Testament Scriptures.** *"He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone... about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.*
2. **Jesus performed miracles.** Peter said, *by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene... by this name this man stands here before you in good health.*
3. **Jesus then rose from the dead and appeared to many people.** *Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.*
4. **Jesus is in heaven seated at the right hand of God.** *Christ...whom heaven must receive.*
5. **Jesus will establish a kingdom on earth.** *until the period of restoration of all things*

6. **We are sinners excluded from God and hopelessly lost.** *Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away.*
7. **The death of Christ on the cross paid for our sins, but we must repent and receive Him as our God and Savior.** *And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."*

Not every message always covered every point and sometimes other things are called part of the gospel. For example, God as the Creator was mentioned as part of the *gospel* in Acts 14:15. Also, the presentation of the *gospel* was followed by making disciples in Acts 14:21. But the *gospel* basically follows these seven points. What is interesting is that Paul's seven point of the gospel are what Peter preached about 20 years before Paul wrote his definition in 1 Corinthians 15.

So it seems the gospel message stayed pretty much the same throughout the first century.

## **Paul Added Discernment to the Gospel**

In the book of Galatians, Paul added an interesting element to the use of the word *gospel*. Let's have a look.

*Galatians 2:1* Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also... who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

*Galatians 2:4* But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.

*Galatians 2:5* But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the **gospel** would remain with you.

*Galatians 2:6* But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) — well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me.

*Galatians 2:7* But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the **gospel** to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised

*Galatians 2:14* But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the **gospel**, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

At the Council in Jerusalem (verses 1-7), the *gospel* is the word used for the basic message of Christianity, but it included something different. In verse 5, the truth of the *gospel* included a message against false teachers who were claiming that Gentile converts needed to be circumcised and (apparently) keep the Mosaic Law. Later in Antioch (verse 14), the *gospel* included the message that faith alone is the vehicle of salvation, not the Law. The attempt at separating the Jewish and Gentile believers was also considered a violation of the *gospel* when some men came teaching that there were two churches, a Jewish church and a Gentile church. When Peter supported that, Paul said Peter was *not straightforward about the truth of the gospel*. I take it that's because if there are two churches, there might be two different messages of salvation, the Jewish one, claiming Jews came to Christ through the Mosaic Law, and a Gentile one, where people came to Christ without the Law.

So in these two occasions, correction for false teaching became part of the *gospel*. It seems that the *gospel* might take on some unique aspects depending on what false teaching is prominent at the time.

The *gospel* was much more than the plan of salvation, but it did not seem to include the apostles' teaching to believers. The *gospel* was not the message proclaimed to believers in house-church

assemblies or carried to them by messengers, or written to them in epistles. Paul talked about his call to proclaim the *gospel* in his epistles, and unbelievers might repent from what they hear while visiting a gathering of the church. But the apostles did not call those epistles the *gospel*, nor did they focus on the *gospel* as the message in the assemblies. It seems that the *gospel* was the message of Christ and the apostles to the lost.

In his introductory comments to the Romans, Paul spoke about the *gospel*. Included in that are these comments:

*Romans 1:14* I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.

*Romans 1:15* So, for my part, I am eager to preach the **gospel** to you also who are in Rome.

*Romans 1:16* For I am not ashamed of the **gospel**, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Here it seems that the *gospel* is what Paul proclaimed to *Greeks and to barbarians*, because it is the *power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*. The *gospel* was the message of salvation to unbelievers.

## In Conclusion

It seems that the New Testament uses the word *gospel* to refer to God's message to unbelievers.

It included:

1. **Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah prophesied by the Old Testament Scriptures.** So it starts with the significance of the Old Testament. In many cases, an overview of Bible history was , including creation.
2. **Jesus performed miracles.** The *gospel* presents Jesus as the most unique figure in all of history, not merely a good man but a worker of supernatural miracles, which could only be done by the power of God.
3. **Jesus lived, died, rose from the dead, and appeared to many.** The *gospel* includes the case for the validity of the historic physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead and His public appearances alive in a resurrected body after the resurrection.
4. **Jesus is in heaven seated at the right hand of God.** The *gospel* proclaims that Jesus is currently in heaven interceding for the saints and awaiting a Second Coming to earth.
5. **Jesus will establish a kingdom on earth.** The *gospel* includes the prophetic revelation of the future where Christ will return and establish a kingdom on earth.
6. **We are sinners excluded from God and hopelessly lost.** The implication of the *gospel* makes it clear that man is lost in sin. So it includes a discussion of what sin is and its implications on the human soul in relation to a holy God.
7. **The death of Christ on the cross paid for our sins but we must repent and receive Him as our God and Savior.** The *gospel* also includes the sufficiency of the cross, the fact that God demands a blood sacrifice, and that the demand was satisfied by Christ on the cross. But the *gospel* also includes the need of a person to make a personal decision of faith to receive that sacrifice.

There were also special applications, depending on the belief system of the hearer. Jesus focused on the traditions of the Pharisees, Paul took on the false teaching of the Judaizers in Jerusalem and the polytheism on Mars Hill in Athens. But the *gospel* is not a simple "plan of salvation," a way to avoid hell and get to heaven. This might (or might not) get people saved. But it is not the salvation that led to the maturity in Christ that the apostles wanted to see in their disciples.