
UNDERSTANDING THE WORD ‘GOSPEL’

I. SOME PRE-CHRISTIAN USES OF Εὐαγγέλιον (*Euangelion*)

1. The Septuagint | 2nd century B.C.

The Septuagint (LXX) is a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Koine Greek.

2 Samuel 4:10

. . . when a man told me, ‘Saul is dead,’ and thought he was **bringing good news** [εὐαγγελιζόμενος], I seized him and put him to death in Ziklag. That was the reward I gave him for his **news** [εὐαγγέλια]!

- The word **gospel** is used here as “good news” in the context of the death of a wicked king (although David would have regarded Saul’s repentance, not his death, as truly good news).

2. Diodorus Siculus | 1st century B.C.

Diodorus Siculus was a Greek historian who wrote between 60 and 30 BC.

Library 15.74

Now Dionysius had produced a tragedy at the Lenaea [i.e., the “Wine Press Festival”] at Athens and had won the victory, and one of those who sang in the chorus, supposing that he would be rewarded handsomely if he were the first to give news of the victory, set sail to Corinth. There, finding a ship bound for Sicily, he transferred to it, and obtaining favouring winds, speedily landed at Syracuse and gave the tyrant news of the victory. Dionysius did reward him, and was himself so overjoyed that he sacrificed to the gods for the **good tidings** [εὐαγγέλια] and instituted a drinking bout and great feasts.

- The word **gospel** is used here as “good tidings” in the context of a military victory.

3. Cicero | 1st century B.C.

Marcus Tullius Cicero was a Roman philosopher, statesman, lawyer, orator, political theorist, and linguist. Writing in Latin, he nevertheless used the Greek word twice in his *Letters to Atticus*.

Letters to Atticus 2.3.1 (ca. 60 B.C.)

First, a trifle please for **good news** [εὐαγγέλια]. Valerius has been acquitted with Hortensius as his advocate.

- The word **gospel** is used here as “good news” in the context of a legal acquittal.

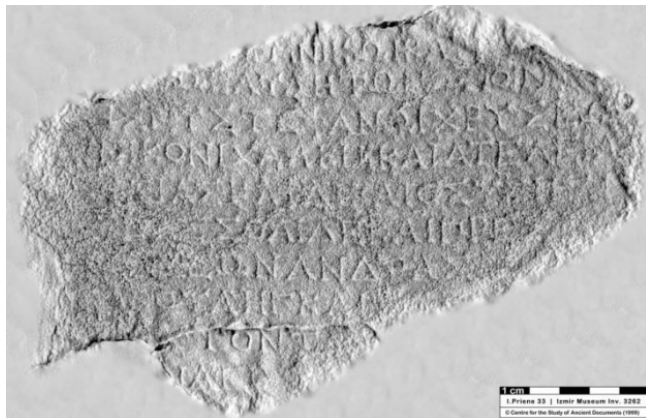
Letters to Atticus 13.40.1 (ca. 45 B.C.)

Is that so? Does Brutus really say that Caesar is going over to the right party? That is **good news** [εὐαγγέλια].

- The word **gospel** is used here as “good news” in the context of shifting one’s political allegiance to a more desirable party.

4. **The Priene Inscription | 9 B.C.**

The Priene Inscription is a letter from Paullus Fabius Maximus, proconsul of Asia. It is engraved in stone in Priene, a city in modern-day Turkey. Other fragmentary inscriptions have been found in Apamea, Maeonia, Eumonia, and Dorylaeum.

The Priene Inscription (Selection)

It seemed good to the Greeks of Asia, in the opinion of the high priest Apollonius of Menophilus Azanitus: ‘Since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a **savior** [σωτήρ], both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance excelled even our anticipations, surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of **the god** [τοῦ θεοῦ] Augustus was the beginning of the **good tidings** [εὐαγγέλιον] for the world that came by reason of him

- The word **gospel** is used here as “good tidings” in the context of the birth of a god and savior to the world (i.e., Caesar), together with the notion that this good news is to be celebrated. (Cf. Luke 2:10; and Mark 1:1, “the beginning of the gospel”)

5. Titus Flavius Josephus | 1st century A.D.

Josephus was a 1st-century Jewish-Roman historian who was born around the time Christ died.

Jewish Wars 2.420

Now this terrible message [that a rebellion was brewing] was **good news** [εὐαγγέλιον] to Florus; and because his design was to have a war kindled, he gave the ambassadors no answer at all [to their request for assistance in stopping the sedition before it grew].

- The word **gospel** is used here as “good news” in the context of an impending desired conflict.

Jewish Wars 4.618

. . . fame carried [the news about Vespasian] abroad more suddenly than one could have thought, that he was emperor over the east, upon which every city kept festivals, and celebrated sacrifices and oblations for such **good news** [εὐαγγέλια].

- The word **gospel** is used here as “good news” in the context of a leader assuming an emperorship to much celebration.

Jewish Wars 4.656

And now, as Vespasian was come to Alexandria, this **good news** [εὐαγγέλια] came from Rome, and at the same time came embassies from all his own habitable earth, to congratulate him upon his advancement; and though this Alexandria was the greatest of all cities next to Rome, it proved too narrow to contain the multitude that then came to it.

- The word **gospel** is used here as “good news” in the context of a leader assuming an emperorship, along with congratulations from other embassies.

6. Plutarch | 1st century A.D.

Plutarch was a Greek-Roman historian, essayist, priest, ambassador, and magistrate.

Agesilaus 33.4

For up to this time they were wont to think the conquest of their enemies so customary and natural a thing for them to achieve, that no sacrifice for victory was offered in the city to the gods, beyond that of a cockerel, neither did the winners of the contest exult, nor those who heard of their victory show great joy. Nay, even after the battle at Mantinea, which Thucydides has described, the one who first announced the victory had no other reward for his **glad tidings** [singular] than a piece of meat sent by the magistrates from the public mess.

- The word **gospel** is used here as “glad tidings” in the context of a military victory that has been announced.

Demetrius 17.5

Accordingly, when [Aristodemus] had come near, he stretched out his hand and cried with a loud voice: ‘Hail, King Antigonus, we have conquered Ptolemy in a sea-fight, and now hold Cyprus, with 12,800 soldiers as prisoners of war.’ To this Antigonus replied: ‘Hail to thee also, by Heaven! But for torturing us in this way [Aristodemus had a solemn face and approached the king in total silence], thou shalt undergo punishment. The reward for thy **good tidings** [plural] thou shalt be some time in getting.

- The word **gospel** is used here as “good tidings” in the context of a military victory that has been announced.

Moralia 347d-e

The Spartans merely sent meat from the public commons to the man who brought **glad tidings** [εὐαγγέλιον] of the victory in Mantinea, which Thucydides describes! And indeed the compilers of histories are, as it were, reporters of great exploits who are gifted with the faculty of felicitous speech, and achieve success in their writing through the beauty and force of their narration; and to them, those who first encountered and recorded **the events** [εὐαγγέλιον] are indebted for a pleasing retelling of them.

- The word **gospel** is used here as “glad tidings” and “the events” in the context of a military victory that has been announced.

7. Older Occurrences of Εὐαγγέλιον (*Euangelion*)

- Aristophanes (5th century B.C.) in *The Knights* 647-656
- Aristophanes (5th century B.C.) in *Wealth* 765
- Aeschines (4th century B.C.) in *Against Ctesiphon* 160
- Isocrates (4th century B.C.) in *Areopagiticus* 10
- Xenophon (4th century B.C.) in *Hellenica* 1.6.37 and 4.3.14
- Menander (4th century B.C.) in *Peric.* 933

Note: Because the meanings of words can change over time—sometimes drastically so—the usage of “gospel” four to five centuries prior to New Testament times may not be as illuminating as those occurrences that are more contemporaneous. (E.g., consider how the meanings of the following words have changed over time: apology, nice, pot, gay, etc.)

II. OCCURRENCES OF Εὐαγγέλιον (*Euangelion*) IN THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT

The word εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*), and its verb form εὐαγγελίζω (*euangelizō*), and its related verb form προεὐαγγελίζομαι (*proeuangelizomai*) occur 93 times in the Greek New Testament.

1. εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*) | 68 of 93 occurrences

Matt 24:14

And this **gospel** of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Matt 26:13

I tell you the truth, wherever this **gospel** is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.

Mark 1:1

The beginning of the **gospel** about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Mark 8:35

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the **gospel** will save it.

Mark 10:29

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the **gospel**

Mark 13:10

And the **gospel** must first be preached to all nations.

Mark 14:9

I tell you the truth, wherever the **gospel** is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.

Acts 15:7

After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the **gospel** and believe.”

Acts 20:24

However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the **gospel** of God’s grace.

Romans 1:1

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the **gospel** of God.

Romans 1:9

God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the **gospel** of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you

Romans 1:16

I am not ashamed of the **gospel**, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Romans 2:16

This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my **gospel** declares.

Romans 11:28

As far as the **gospel** is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs

Romans 15:16

. . . to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the **gospel** of God

Romans 15:19

. . . by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the **gospel** of Christ.

Romans 16:25

Now to him who is able to establish you by my **gospel** and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past

1 Corinthians 4:15

Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the **gospel**.

1 Corinthians 9:12

If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the **gospel** of Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:14

In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the **gospel** should receive their living from the gospel.

1 Corinthians 9:23

I do all this for the sake of the **gospel**, that I may share in its blessings.

1 Corinthians 15:1

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the **gospel** I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand.

2 Corinthians 2:12

Now when I went to Troas to preach the **gospel** of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me

2 Corinthians 4:3

And even if our **gospel** is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.

2 Corinthians 4:4

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the **gospel** of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2 Corinthians 8:18

And we are sending along with him the brother who is praised by all the churches for his service to the **gospel**.

2 Corinthians 9:13

Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the **gospel** of Christ

2 Corinthians 10:14

We are not going too far in our boasting, as would be the case if we had not come to you, for we did get as far as you with the **gospel** of Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:4

For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different **gospel** from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.

2 Corinthians 11:7

Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the **gospel** of God to you free of charge?

Galatians 1:6

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different **gospel**

Galatians 1:7

. . . which is really no **gospel** at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the **gospel** of Christ.

Galatians 1:11

I want you to know, brothers, that the **gospel** I preached is not something that man made up.

Galatians 2:2

I went in response to a revelation and set before them the **gospel** that I preach among the Gentiles.

Galatians 2:5

We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the **gospel** might remain with you.

Galatians 2:7

On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the **gospel** to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews.

Galatians 2:14

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the **gospel**, I said to Peter in front of them all

Ephesians 1:13

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the **gospel** of your salvation.

Ephesians 3:6

This mystery is that through the **gospel** the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 6:15

. . . and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the **gospel** of peace.

Ephesians 6:19

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the **gospel**

Philippians 1:5

. . . because of your partnership in the **gospel** from the first day until now

Philippians 1:7

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the **gospel**, all of you share in God's grace with me.

Philippians 1:12

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the **gospel**.

Philippians 1:16

The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the **gospel**.

Philippians 1:27

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the **gospel** of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the **gospel**

Philippians 2:22

But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the **gospel**.

Philippians 4:3

Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the **gospel**

Philippians 4:15

Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the **gospel**, when I set out from Macedonia

Colossians 1:5

. . . the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the **gospel**

Colossians 1:23

. . . if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the **gospel**. This is the **gospel** that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven

1 Thessalonians 1:5

. . . because our **gospel** came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

1 Thessalonians 2:2

We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his **gospel** in spite of strong opposition.

1 Thessalonians 2:4

On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the **gospel**. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.

1 Thessalonians 2:8

We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the **gospel** of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

1 Thessalonians 2:9

Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the **gospel** of God to you.

1 Thessalonians 3:2

We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the **gospel** of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith

2 Thessalonians 1:8

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the **gospel** of our Lord Jesus.

2 Thessalonians 2:14

He called you to this through our **gospel**, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 1:11

. . . that conforms to the glorious **gospel** of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

2 Timothy 1:8

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the **gospel**, by the power of God

2 Timothy 1:10

. . . but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the **gospel**.

2 Timothy 2:8

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my **gospel**

Philemon 1:13

I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the **gospel**.

1 Peter 4:17

For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the **gospel** of God?

Revelation 14:6

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal **gospel** to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.

2. εὐαγγελίζω (*euangelizō*) | 19 of 93

Luke 9:6

So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the **gospel** and healing people everywhere.

Luke 20:1

One day as he was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the **gospel**, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him.

Acts 8:25

When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the **gospel** in many Samaritan villages.

Acts 8:40

Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the **gospel** in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Acts 16:10

After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the **gospel** to them.

Romans 1:15

That is why I am so eager to preach the **gospel** also to you who are at Rome.

Romans 15:20

It has always been my ambition to preach the **gospel** where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

1 Corinthians 1:17

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the **gospel**—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

1 Corinthians 9:16

Yet when I preach the **gospel**, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the **gospel**!

1 Corinthians 9:18

What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the **gospel** I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it.

2 Corinthians 10:16

. . . so that we can preach the **gospel** in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man's territory.

Galatians 1:8

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a **gospel** other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

Galatians 1:9

As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a **gospel** other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Galatians 4:13

As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the **gospel** to you.

Hebrews 4:2

For we also have had the **gospel** preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.

Hebrews 4:6

It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the **gospel** preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience.

1 Peter 1:12

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the **gospel** to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

1 Peter 4:6

For this is the reason the **gospel** was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

3. προεναγγελίζομαι (*proeuangelizomai*) | 1 of 93

Galatians 3:8

The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the **gospel** in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.”

Note: In some occurrences in the Greek New Testament, the word “gospel” appears as a pronoun or some other part of speech. In several other places, the word “gospel” is *implied* and is usually supplied in our English translations. This is why occurrence counts will sometimes vary slightly according to different analyses. Any discrepancies are simply a function of how the Greek language works and how Greek words are sometimes translated into English.