

THE GOSPEL

Background

The word 'Gospel' means 'good news'. In the English language the word derives from two ancient Anglo-Saxon words 'God' [good] and 'spell' [story]. In English translations of the Bible, the expression 'good news' is sometimes used to denote all that Jesus has done. The good news is the glad tidings of salvation – it is about something that has happened which can benefit all mankind. The Greek word often translated 'gospel' or 'good news' is *euangelion*, from which we have the word 'evangelise' [proclaim the good news about Jesus]. One writer explains the original significance of the word thus:

Very often in the Roman empire there was a big war going on at some distant boundary, and the people waited, breathless, in the city of Rome, for news of the battle, to hear whether it had been won or lost. If it had been won, the messenger would come running into Rome, shouting, 'Gospel, gospel, gospel!' And he meant victory. Good news: the battle is over and it has been won. That is what the word gospel means. It does not just mean something nice to hear or a good story, or even the story of God, it means this: a battle has been fought and we can now announce the victory — peace can be ours. . . . In the very first part of the Gospel [Mark], the battle is shown to be between God and Satan. That is the warfare. That battle was engaged two thousand years ago, and the victory has been won by God — the beginning of the Gospel, the good news of victory. How did it all take place? Where was the warfare engaged? The answer is: in a man called Jesus Christ, who was also the Son of God [© David Pawson *Come with me through Mark*, 2009. Used by permission]

Salvation (*from* the penalty of sin; *into* eternal life) is promised to those who repent, believe in Jesus, are baptised, and go on believing and trusting him, abiding in him. The good news is entrusted to Christ's followers, who are to tell others about that salvation, about atonement, about the crucifixion of Jesus for our sins, about his resurrection from the dead, and about the new birth which marks the beginning of a new life 'in Christ', which is possible for each and every man and woman – and indeed every child, too.

Note that there is a distinction to be made (generally indicated by capitalisation of the initial letter) between a 'Gospel' and 'the gospel'. The former denotes each of the four canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, respectively) whilst the term 'the gospel' signifies the heart of the apostolic message (e.g. in Romans **15:1**, where Paul writes of, 'the gospel which I preached to you . . .'. The true apostolic gospel is elsewhere contrasted with a false 'gospel' to which some were turning; see Galatians **1:6**.)

The promise of a Saviour and Redeemer of the world runs through the pages of the Old Testament

In Genesis **22:15–18**, God promises faithful Abraham that through his seed all nations shall be blessed. Whilst the first application is to the ancient people of God, we can see how the blessing of people of all nations is happening as salvation through Jesus Christ is being made known worldwide. (See also Galatians **3:8** in the New Testament.) See Isaiah **9:2, 6–7** in which the birth of Jesus is foretold, and especially Isaiah **53**. Other Old Testament passages can be read as having messianic significance in the light of the New Testament.

Jesus the Messiah, when he came to the world, claimed to fulfil God's promises

See Isaiah **61:1–2**; Luke **4:16–21**; Matthew **3:1–2**; **4:23**; Mark **1:15**; **8:35**; **10:29–30**; Luke **2:10**; **9:6**. Christ's followers are commissioned to proclaim him throughout the world. Only after Jesus has been proclaimed to 'the ends of the earth' shall the end of this world come. Many Christians today believe that the ease of communications stemming from globalisation and modern media mean that we are rapidly reaching the time when the gospel will indeed be accessible throughout the world. Accordingly, they expect active opposition to church and gospel to accelerate and to reach new levels of intensity.

See Matthew **24:14**; Mark **13:10**; **16:15**; Acts **8:1–4** and v. **25**; **13:1–4**; **14:21**; **15:7**; **16:9–10**; Romans **1:1** and v. **16**; **15:18–20**; 1 Corinthians **1:17**; **9:12**; 2 Corinthians **10:16**.

Jesus taught that after his death and resurrection the Holy Spirit would be sent. Then the disciples would be enabled to proclaim the gospel to the world. See John **14:16** and **26**; **15:26–27**; **16:7** and vv. **13–14**.

See also: Romans **2:16**; **16:25**; 1 Corinthians **1:17**; **9:17–18**; Ephesians **3:1–8**; **6:19**; Acts **20:24**; 1 Thessalonians **1:5**; **2:2**; Revelation **14:6**.

There are two key warnings in relation to the gospel. Firstly, any other 'gospel' is evil. Secondly, we are told that the true good news will not be accepted by everyone. Sadly, some will reject it. See Matthew **13:1–23**. Some would be mistaken and fall into error. See Galatians **1:6–9**; **2:11–14**; Colossians **2:16–18**; 2 Corinthians **11:1–4** and vv. **13–15**.

The apostle Paul said, 'Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!' (1 Corinthians **9:16**). It is vital that Christians tell others the good news of salvation. The eternal destinies of the unsaved depend on this good news, and Christians themselves miss great blessings if they fail to proclaim it.