

What is a Gospel?

The word “Gospel” comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *godspell* that means “good news.” The Greek word that the Gospel writers use to describe what they wrote for other Christians is εὐαγγέλιον, which is also translated as meaning “good news.” While Gospels have been around for almost 2000 years, when Mark wrote his Gospel it wasn’t as though its first readers looked at it and said, “*That’s a Gospel alright!*” They would have thought it looked and sounded like a biography of a famous person, philosopher or teacher. It’s true that the Gospels hand on sayings and teachings of Jesus, but they are more than that because they set out to change the life of the reader forever.

The Gospels Timeline



As John writes:

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

(John 20:30–31)

Messiah

a king sent by God to rescue the people from oppression

John 20:31

³¹ But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

IN YOUR WORDS

Read John 20:31 then write your response using as many of the following words as possible.

saviour
mankind

leader
hope

The Gospels set out to change the life of the reader forever.

DID YOU KNOW?

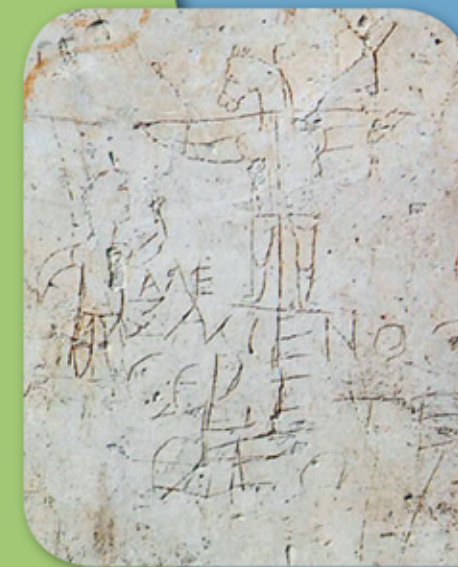
The Gospel writers would have been very surprised to know that their collections of the sayings and deeds of Jesus would still be read nearly 2000 years later. They hoped that Jesus was going to return in their lifetime (*Matthew 16:28*) but they also wanted to make sure that the traditions of Jesus would be passed on accurately to the next generation of Christians. They passed on their understanding of the person of Jesus and what they learned about being a Christian.

The Messiah

John tells us a great deal about Jesus as the Messiah (anointed king) and Son of God, and the life that comes through Jesus to those who believe in his message. That all sounds well and good, but we need to remember that many people did not see Jesus like this at all. In a guard-room on the Palatine Hill in Ancient Rome a piece of graffiti was found that has a crucified figure with the head of a donkey. This is an example of the ways that Christians were made fun of and ridiculed because they believed in Jesus.

► This ancient graffiti reads: Alexamenos worships his god.

St Paul had many experiences of being rejected for the sake of the Gospel and he shares his experience when he writes to the Corinthians that:



1 CORINTHIANS 1:23

Gentile

the way Jewish people describe a person who is not Jewish

1 Corinthians 1:23

²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

IN YOUR WORDS

Read 1 Corinthians 1:22–24 then write your response using as many of the following words as possible.

nonbeliever
atheist

Christian
misbeliever

For many people the message about Jesus was understood very differently.

DID YOU KNOW?

A Roman historian, Seutonius, in his *Life of Claudius* wrote that the emperor expelled Christians from Rome because they were seen to be “continually making disturbances”. It was the Roman Emperor Nero who persecuted the Christians and falsely blamed them for burning the city of Rome.

