

The Gospel: Four Stages

The word “gospel” (in Greek, *euangelion*) means “good news,” and in the first century it appears to have passed through four stages of application:

First, the term “gospel” was used to describe the content of Jesus’s preaching: “Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the good news [gospel] of God” (Mark 1:14). The “gospel” was essentially equivalent to “what Jesus said about God.”

Second, the word “gospel” was used to describe the content of early Christian preaching, which focused on the death and resurrection of Christ. When the apostle Paul says that he preached “the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1–5), he does not mean that he repeated what Jesus said about God, but rather that he told people the good news of how Jesus had died for them and risen from the dead (see also 1 Cor. 15:1–8).

Third, as a combination of the above, the term “gospel” came to refer to preaching that summarized the ministry of Jesus in a way that included both what Jesus had said was the good news about God and what Christians had said was the good news about Jesus. A summary of such a sermon is found in Acts 10:34–43. And Mark 14:9 indicates that such preaching included anecdotes about the life and ministry of Jesus.

Fourth, the word “gospel” came to be used for books that offer in written form what previously had been proclaimed orally. The first such book probably was the one that we know as the Gospel of Mark, and it uses this term in its very first verse: “The beginning of the good news [*gospel*] of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

See Mark Allan Powell, *Fortress Introduction to the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 8–9.