



THE HISTORICAL JESUS IX:

The Gospel According to Whom?

THE WORD *GOSPEL* is derived from the Old English *godspell*, which means “good news.”¹ However, the biblical *gospel* originates in the Greek term *euangelion* and occurs 101 times in the New Testament.² Yet in the Septuagint (LXX) — the Greek translation of the Old Testament — the term *euangelion* does not simply mean “good news” but rather the “*reward* given for good tidings.”³ For example, shortly after Abram rescued Lot and his family from captivity, “the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: *I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward*” (Genesis 15:1, emphasis supplied). In this context, Jesus Christ, as the human manifestation of God, constitutes the *Euangelion* — the Gospel. Jesus Christ himself is the Ultimate Reward, for he is the one who brought/brings the “good news” to all humanity.

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When the New Testament was being assembled in the time of Irenaeus (ca. 185 CE), Bishop of Lyons (France), he was asked why he insisted on limiting the canon to just four Gospels. He replied somewhat in jest, “There actually are only four authentic gospels. And this is obviously true because there are four corners of the universe and there are four principal winds, and therefore there can be only four gospels that are authentic. These, besides, are written by Jesus’ true followers.”⁴ Meanwhile, numerous noncanonical Gospels have been discovered or referenced over the centuries, but almost without exception these so-called Gospels are heretical, fictional or hypothetical (see appendix).

For centuries the nature of both the canonical and noncanonical Gospels has been the subject of research, discussion and disputation. Scholars have debated whether the gospels are fundamentally mythical, legendary or historical in nature. Did Jesus actually say, do and experience what is recorded in the Gospels, or do the Gospels have another origin, purpose or destiny?

The present effort is designed to show that, while the Gospels use various narrative styles — historical, mythical, parabolic, etc. — to portray the Christ event, their fundamental purpose is to define the ultimate identity of Jesus Christ as the relational, corporate Person — the Ultimate Reward — for all humanity. This effort also will explore how the Gospel of Mark focuses on Jesus Christ as the new Davidic ruler, the Gospel of Matthew on Jesus Christ as the new Abrahamic/Mosaic Patriarch, the Gospel of Luke on Jesus Christ as the new Adamic Man, and the Gospel of John on Jesus Christ as the new, human God. Long ago St. Ignatius (ca. 110 CE), Bishop of Antioch, struggled with this same concept when he declared that the gospel is “the flesh of Jesus.”⁵

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Appendix: The Noncanonical Gospels⁶⁻¹⁰

Editorial Note: The number of noncanonical Gospels that have survived as titles, fragments, and incomplete and/or complete manuscripts has not yet been verified.

A

1. Arabic Infancy Gospel
2. Apelles, The Gospel of
3. Armenian Infancy Gospel

B

4. Bardesanes, The Gospel of
5. Barnabas, The Gospel of
6. Bartholomew, The Gospel of
7. Basilides, The Gospel of

C

8. Cerinthus, The Gospel of

E

9. Ebionites, The Gospel of the

10. Egyptians, The Gospel of the
11. Epistula Apostolorum
12. Eve, The Gospel of

F

13. Fayyum Fragment
14. Four Heavenly Regions, The Gospel of
15. Freer Logion

G

16. Gamaliel, The Gospel of
17. Genna Marias

H

18. Hebrews, The Gospel of

J

19. James, The Apocryphon of (Apocryphon Jacobi)
20. James, The First Apocalypse of
21. James, The Second Apocalypse of
22. James, The Protoevangelium of (a.k.a. The Infancy Story of James)
23. James, The Secret Book of
24. Jeu, The Two Books of
25. John, The Apocryphon of
26. John, Life of, According to Serapion
27. John and Jesus, Fragments of a Dialogue between
28. John the Baptist, The Gospel of
29. Judas, The Gospel of

L

30. Latin Infancy Gospel in the Arundel Manuscript

M

31. Mani, The Gospel of
32. Marcion, The Gospel of
33. Mark, The Secret Gospel of
34. Mary, The Questions of
35. Mary, The Gospel of
36. Matthias, The Gospel According to (The Traditions of Matthias)
37. Memoria Apostolorum

N

38. Naassene Fragment
39. Nazareans, The Gospel of
40. Nicodemus, The Gospel of (Acts of Pilate and Christ's Descent into Hell)

O

41. Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 840
42. Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1224

P

43. Papyrus Berolinensis 11710
44. Papyrus Egerton 2
45. Papyrus Cairensis 10 73
46. Perfection, The Gospel of
47. Peter, The Gospel of
48. Peter to Philip, The Letter of
49. Philip, The Gospel of
50. Pistis Sophia, The
51. Pseudo-Matthew, The Gospel of

Q

52. Q (Quelle Gospel)

S

53. Saint Andrew, The Gospel of
54. Savior, Dialogue of the
55. Savior, The Gospel of the
56. Seventy, The Gospel of the
57. Signs Gospel
58. Sophia Jesu Christi, The
59. Strasbourg Coptic Papyrus

T

60. Thaddeus, The Gospel of
61. Thomas, The Book of
62. Thomas, The Coptic Gospel of
63. Thomas, The Infancy Story of
64. Truth, The Gospel of
65. Twelve, The Gospel of the

66. Twelve, The (Kukean) Gospel of the
67. Twelve Apostles, The (Manichean) Gospel of the
68. Twelve Apostles, Other Gospels of the

Endnotes

1. See *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1976), s.v. “gospel.”
2. See “Dictionary and Word Search for ‘Gospel,’” *Blue Letter Bible* (1996-2002), at www.blueletterbible.org/cgi-bin/words.pl?word=gospel&page=1.
3. “Gospel, Godspel, Godspell, Evangelion,” at mb-soft.com/believe/txw/gospel.htm.
4. “Emergence of the Canon,” at www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/emergence.html.
5. Quoted in James A. Kleist, *The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch* (New York: Paulist Press, 1946), pp. 137, 138.
6. See “Were the Miracles of Jesus Invented by the Disciples/Evangelists?” at www.christian-thinktank.com/mq10.html.
7. See “Gnostics, Gnostic Gospels, & Gnosticism,” at www.earlychristianwritings.com/gnostics.html.
8. See “New Testament Apocrypha,” at www.jamesclarke.co.uk/jc/titles/nta1.htm.
9. See Charles W. Hedrick, “The 34 Gospels,” *Bible Review* 18, no. 3 (June 2002): 20-31, 46, 47.
10. See Joseph Wheless, “Forgery in Christianity,” at altreligion.about.com/library/texts/bl_forgerychristianity23.htm.