

THE GOSPELS



What are the gospels?

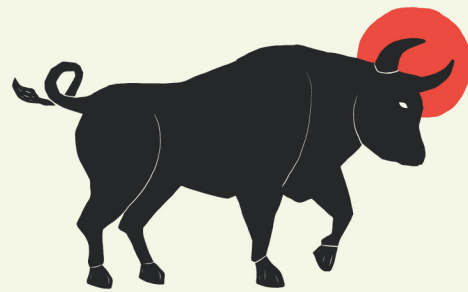
Gospel comes from the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion* or *evangelion*) meaning “good news.” It came into English as the Old English *gōdspel*. Gospel had a Roman connotation during the

time of Jesus. It originally referred to the good news of Caesar Augustus’s *Pax Romana*. Christians initially used the word to refer to any proclamation of the good news of God’s saving activity in Christ. The word later came to refer to the specific genre of stories of the life of Christ.

Why do we have gospels?

We may assume written accounts of Jesus’ life are an automatic part of the tradition because we’ve always had gospels. But for early Christians, *gospel* meant the proclamation of Jesus’ death and resurrection; these written, extended accounts of his life and ministry marked a fundamental shift in Christian identity. It is

likely they were composed as the generation of eyewitnesses to Jesus was dying off and they wanted to give future generations a way to know about the life of Jesus.



Who decided which stories made it in the Bible?

The four gospels that the early church came to accept almost universally are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These four are named for their association with certain apostles and other followers of Jesus. The author of Luke likely wrote the Book of Acts as well, and the author of John has been associated with the letters of John. While early church leaders asserted apostolic authorship, we do not know for sure who wrote any of the gospels.

How are the gospels related?

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called *synoptic* (from a Greek word meaning “seen together”) because of their shared narrative accounts of Jesus’ life and use of similar and identical language. Most scholars accept Mark as the oldest of the three and that it was used as source material for Matthew and Luke. John’s Gospel, on the other hand, does not seem to draw upon the same sources. For instance, John does not include parables and follows a very different chronology for Jesus’ ministry.



What about other Gospels?

In the early years of Christianity, a number of other accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry proliferated beyond the four accounts that made it into the New Testament. Some, such as the Protevangelium of James, expanded the birth stories. Others, like the gospels of Judas and Mary Magdalene or the gospel of Truth, were written after Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Unlike the gospels that would become canon, these others were not widely used by the whole church and included ideas outside of accepted church teaching.

