



INTRODUCING

# THE GOSPEL

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## What is the Gospel?





# Lesson 1: What is the Gospel?

## Introduction

The Gospel begins and ends with Jesus. Jesus was born more than 2,000 years ago in Judea, and grew up in Galilee. At the age of about thirty, he began to teach the Gospel, but three and a half years later, he was arrested in Jerusalem and condemned to death. He was taken to the place of execution and there killed by crucifixion.

But this was not the end. On the third day after the crucifixion, the Bible tells us God raised Jesus from the dead:

**“God raised him [Jesus] up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.”**

Acts 2:24

This event is core to Christian beliefs. Jesus did not remain dead: on the third day after the crucifixion, the tomb where he had been buried was empty, and Jesus had been raised to life.

In this chapter you will learn:

- The Gospel remains unchanged throughout the Bible
- The Gospel is based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ
- What the evidence is that says Jesus rose from the dead



## Teaching the Gospel

This good news that Jesus had come back to life - the Gospel - was proclaimed for the first time by the Apostles (followers of Jesus and his message) at Pentecost, which was a Jewish festival celebrated on the 50th day after passover.

Jesus had told his followers beforehand that he would die and be resurrected, and there are many places in the Old Testament, written before Jesus was born, that prophesied what would happen.

The Apostles didn't expect their hearers to believe this without reason. Peter, a close follower of Jesus, provided evidence which shows Jesus really did rise. This point is at the start of all the Apostle's teaching about the Gospel.

### Key chapter to read: Acts 2

The first piece of evidence that Peter gives in his speech is that Jesus' death is consistent with the predictions of the Old Testament. Then he sets out two kinds of evidence from people around at the time; eyewitness evidence, where people met Jesus alive after the resurrection, and physical evidence; the evidence of the empty tomb.

### Evidence 1: Eyewitness

Peter's speech includes a mention of the fact that the Apostles, and others, met Jesus alive after he had been raised from the dead:

**"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses"**

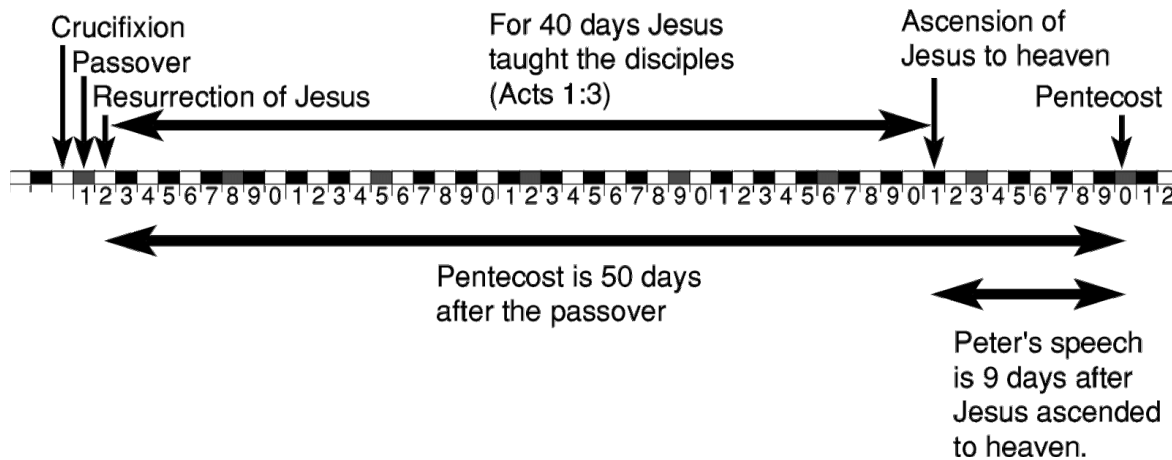
Acts 2:32

These followers had met Jesus after he had risen from the dead and had talked with him. Some had seen him on the day of resurrection, and some had continued to see him for forty days afterwards - the length of time he stayed on earth for before ascending to heaven, according to **Acts 1:3** and verse **9**. During this time he had reinforced his teachings to them, so they were ready to take the Gospel out to the world.



When Peter gives his speech at Pentecost, Jesus would have been speaking to him and the other followers just nine days earlier.

### The Timing of Peter's Speech in Acts 2



A letter from another Apostle called Paul gives a comprehensive list of these eyewitnesses some 25 years later. He writes to the Christians in Corinth in around 55AD, saying:

**“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.”**

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

This list of witnesses isn't full by any means, but it is nonetheless impressive. It includes some of Jesus' closest associates, family and friends. These people would be unlikely to be mistaken about his identity.



Some of the witnesses were followers of Jesus, but others were opponents. James, a half-brother of Jesus, actually opposed him during his teachings (see [John 7:5](#)) but afterwards he proclaimed that Jesus was alive, became one of the leading Apostles, and was the writer of one of the books of the Bible. According to Roman historians, he was killed for his faith in the Gospel in 62AD.

The most impressive part is the 500 witnesses described in verse 6. Have a look at [Matthew 28:16-20](#) to see another account of some of these witnesses seeing Jesus alive before he ascended.

It's important to remember at this point that these witnesses did not have an easy time. Over the following years they would be imprisoned, beaten, their property confiscated and they were forced to flee from city to city. Not long after in 64AD, the Romans declared that Christianity would no longer be tolerated as a religion, and began a severe persecution under the instructions of the Emperor Nero.

The Christians became well known for maintaining their witness, even though this often resulted in gruesome deaths. It is clear that those with the evidence before them believed their own message - and at the core of this message was the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

## **Evidence 2: Physical**

The tomb of Jesus was near Jerusalem, and if anyone wanted to visit it to check, they could do so easily. Many of those in the crowd that Peter spoke to had probably already done this, as the rumours of problems following the burial of Jesus were rife.

However, there is additional evidence. Look at [Matthew 28:11-15](#), which describes a curious scene where the authorities bribe the guards to say the body was stolen by the disciples of Jesus, in order to explain the empty tomb. The passage ends:

**“And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.”**

Matthew 28:15

This could have easily been checked by the first readers of Matthew's book: all they had to do was find a knowledgeable Jew and ask. The fact that this note appears in the book shows that



when it was published, most likely in the decade before 70AD, the Jews were attempting to explain the empty tomb by claiming that the body had been stolen.

Any explanation of what happened must account for both the empty tomb and the sheer weight of witnesses who met Jesus alive after the crucifixion, and must also account for the way that the witnesses were prepared to die rather than deny what they had seen.

**There is only one satisfactory explanation: Jesus was crucified and was raised from the dead.**

## What it means

Looking back at Acts 2, Peter has established the fact of the resurrection, he goes on to explain what it means:

**“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”**

Acts 2:36

Jesus has been given a position of great authority and declared to be Christ - the Greek word ‘Christos’, the equivalent of the Hebrew word ‘Messiah’. It refers to the person who is chosen by God to be king. Through the resurrection, God has made Jesus the Christ (the Messiah).

The Apostle Paul puts it in these words in his letter to the Romans:

**“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord...”**

Romans 1:1-4

The resurrection shows that Jesus is approved of by God, and is the Son of God. In later lessons, we will look at how he is set to return to judge the world, and then will rule over a Kingdom of peace, prosperity and happiness. In this Kingdom, suffering will cease and there will be eternal life.

This Kingdom is the hope of the Gospel, and is the hope for all mankind.

**Lesson summary:**

This lesson shows three main points as essential parts of the Gospel - or good news - of the Bible.

1. The basic fact on which the Gospel is built is that Jesus rose from the dead
2. Jesus is now in heaven, but will one day return to the earth
3. Jesus will rule God's Kingdom when he returns at the day of judgment



## Lesson 1 summary questions:

**1: What evidence is there that the tomb of Jesus was empty after the resurrection?**

**2: What, according to the New Testament, does the resurrection of Jesus show?**

(Acts 1:3-16, Acts 17:30-31, Romans 1:1-4, 1 Corinthians 15:12-19)

**3: How many times is the resurrection of Jesus mentioned in the letters of the New Testament?** *The way to work this out is to use the Bible app on your computer or mobile device to search for the words "raised" or "resurrection" in the books of the Bible after Acts. Alternatively, use a Bible concordance if you have access to one.*

### Deeper dive questions

**4: The Acts of the Apostles contains several summaries of speeches in which the Apostles outline the message of the Gospel to a new audience.**

**Read: Acts 2:14-40, Acts 3:12-26, Acts 10:34-47, Acts 13:16-41 and Acts 17:22-32**

- a) What are the key points in these speeches?
- b) What points appear in all of the speeches?
- c) Can you identify the most important aspects - those that are repeated or emphasised most often?

**5: 1 Corinthians 15:3-9** contains a list of people who met Jesus alive after the resurrection. Choose one of these people (or groups of people) and, using your Bible app or concordance, research the following:

- What do we know about these people from elsewhere in the Bible?
- Why are they important as witnesses?
- Were they a follower of Jesus before the resurrection, and if not, what would have made them change their mind?