

The Gospel and its Proclamation

The Greek word “*euaggelion*”, is commonly translated, “gospel” or “good news”. “Good news” it certainly is, though sometimes we point out that what is good news for some is bad news for others. It is intimately related to the verb, “*euaggelizomai*” which we sometimes translate as, “proclaiming the gospel” or simply “proclaiming”. As alternatives to “proclaiming”, translators, often refer to “announcing”, “declaring” or even “preaching”. In one way or another, the verb has the noun written into it. While the word “gospelising” delivers us from introducing the noun when translating the verb, it is not a commonly accepted word.

The gospel is so extraordinary and proclaiming it so much an imperative that I thought it would be a good idea to produce a blog series reminding ourselves of what the New Testament says about the gospel and its proclamation. Furthermore it may prove to be informative to see how these two Greek words are used outside of the New Testament, say, up until the end of the 1st century A.D. There are indeed some interesting differences between New Testament usages and the way the words are used in the Greek literature external to the New Testament.

The Gospel – “Euaggelion” in the New Testament

It can be a temptation to give a once and for all, neat and concise definition of the gospel according to the New Testament but that is to be at odds with the New Testament itself.

This is of course not to dismiss Paul’s statement in 1 Cor 15: 1, 3 ff, “I would remind you in what terms I made known (*gnorizō*) to you the gospel I proclaimed (*euaggelizomai*) to you ... For I delivered to you as of first importance ... that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures and that he appeared ... It is a relatively brief statement but of course not a definition of the gospel . However, it certainly indicates those features of the gospel Paul considered as “of first importance.” or what he considered were conveyed “at first” or “at the beginning”. For Paul, the gospel he proclaimed had the death and resurrection of Jesus at the forefront.

A much broader reference to the gospel is found in Mark’s Gospel in his preface with the headline: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Seeing both these statements alongside of one another should serve as a good reminder of the breadth and the depth of the gospel, its focus and its expanse, how rich it is, how simple it is, and how profound and extraordinary it is. Indeed the gospel is spoken of throughout the pages of the New Testament in many ways and in many places without the word “gospel” even being mentioned.

The gospel is about Jesus

At least 10 times the New Testament refers directly to the gospel of (the) Christ or the gospel of Jesus Christ or the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

Paul writes that he wants to fully proclaim (*pleroo*) the gospel of (the) Christ (Rom 15: 19), that he wants to put no obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ (1 Cor 9: 12), that when he came to Troas with respect to (*eis*) the gospel of Christ a door was opened for him (2 Cor 2: 12), that the Corinthians need to be obedient in acknowledging the gospel of Christ; (2 Cor 9: 13), that he and his group had come to them with the gospel of Christ (2 Cor 10: 14), that there were some in Galatia who wanted to pervert the gospel of Christ (Gal 1: 7), that the life and manner of the Philippians should be worthy of the gospel of Christ (Phil 1: 27) and that Timothy was God's servant in the gospel of Christ (1 Thess 3: 2). And Mark writes of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1: 1). And Paul speaks of those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus (2 Thess 1: 8).

Reference is also made to the gospel of God's Son (Rom 1: 9) and the gospel of the glory of (the) Christ (2 Cor 4: 4). Indeed it is difficult to know when to stop, as passage after passage, such as the 1 Cor 15 text, and 2 Tim 2: 8, which speaks of Jesus Christ his resurrection and his descent from David according to Paul's gospel, clearly indicate that the gospel is about Jesus, whatever designation he is actually given.

We are not the focus of the gospel, neither the circumstances when we first believed nor the way God's grace has been shown to us throughout our journey. He, the Lord Jesus Christ is what the gospel is all about. To him be the glory, majesty and praise forever and ever.

I was once asked to speak to a men's group as part of an evangelistic outreach. Just before I spoke I was asked what I was going to speak on. I replied that I would be referring to some of the extraordinary things Jesus said and some of his mighty works, with a conclusion focussing on his death and resurrection. At once I was advised that the men really needed to hear what God was doing in my life and that I needed to focus on that. Gently I indicated that that would not be the case. I was there to speak about Jesus. I am really glad I stuck to my original intention. The attention given by the men to what Jesus said and did was unwavering. Even if the gospel had received a hostile reception it was imperative that I speak about Jesus.

The gospel comes from God and is about Him

In one way or another, the New Testament refers to the gospel of God at least 10 times. "The kingdom of God draws near. Repent and believe the gospel" (Mark 1: 15). It is "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20: 24). Paul is "set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand" (Rom 1: 1) and it is God's grace given to Paul that he should be "a minister of Jesus Christ in priestly serving the gospel of God" (Rom 15: 16). Paul announced (*euaggelizomai*) "the gospel of God" to the Corinthians without cost (2 Cor 11: 7), "was bold to speak to the Thessalonians of "the gospel of God in much conflict" (1 Thess 2: 2) and worked night and day, so as not to burden them while he "proclaimed (*kerussō*) the gospel of God" (1 Thess 2: 9). Indeed he and his group were willing to impart not only the gospel of God but also themselves (1 Thess 2: 8). Paul writes to Timothy of the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which he had been entrusted" (1 Tim 1: 11). Peter writes of those who disobey the gospel of God (1 Peter 4: 17). In similar vein Paul writes about those who do not

obey the gospel (Rom 10: 16; 2 Thess 1: 8) in contrast with those who demonstrate obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ (2 Cor 9: 13).

Because the word of God is both a message about God and a message from God (1 Thess 2: 13), so we understand that the gospel is about God and comes from God just as it is about his Son. That it comes from God is a stark reminder of the fact that the gospel is not the creation of mankind. It does not arise out of some philosophical reflection on perceived emotional or other needs. It is the message which comes from God. Some may not like it. Others may disagree with it. Some may belligerently disobey it while others may simply refuse to acknowledge it. It makes no difference. It is a word which comes from the Creator, Lord over all, the source of all wisdom, the giver of all good things. The gospel comes from God. It is the gospel of the kingdom of God (Matt 24: 14, Mark 1: 14). It is about his rule and woe betide those who one way or another ignore his rule.

The gospel is proclaimed, announced, preached, declared

In the New Testament the gospel is written about as being proclaimed (*kerusso*) about 10 times. Jesus proclaims the gospel of the kingdom (Matt 4: 23; 9: 35, Mark 1: 14) and speaks of the gospel being proclaimed (Matt 24: 14; 26: 13, Mark 13: 10; 14: 9). Paul writes of his proclamation of the gospel of God to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2: 9) and to the nations (Gal 2: 2) and how a certain brother's proclamation of the gospel has become well known among all the churches (2 Cor 8: 18). He also writes of how God is able to strengthen the believers in Rome established according to his gospel and the proclamation (*kerugma*) of Jesus Christ (Rom 16: 25). To the same believers he writes of given a full account of (*pleroo* - "making full") the gospel of Christ (Rom 15: 19).

There are 4 references in the New Testament to "the", or "a" gospel being proclaimed, preached or announced (*euaggelizomai*). The use of "proclaim", "preach" or "announce" here for "*euaggelizomai*" will be referred to later. Paul refers to the terms in which he proclaimed the gospel to the Corinthians, (1 Cor 15: 1), and speaks of the gospel of God which he preached (2 Cor 11: 7, Gal 1: 11). An angel announces an eternal gospel to all those who dwell on the earth (Rev 14: 6).

On one occasion Paul refers to those who declare (*kataggello*) the gospel.

Paul also writes that as a consequence of having been entrusted with the gospel so he speaks (1 Thess 2: 4), that the gospel did not come to the Thessalonians by word only (1 Thess 1: 5) and prays that in opening his mouth he may boldly make known (*gnorizo*) the mystery of the gospel (Eph 6: 19). And the gospel having been spoken, people hear the word (message) of the gospel, the word (message) of truth of the gospel, the gospel which brings hope (Acts 15: 7; Col 1: 5, 23). And having heard, some are called by the gospel (2 Thess 2: 14) though it is hidden to others (2 Cor 4: 3). Paul also speaks of his defence (*apologia*) and confirmation (*bebaisis*) of the gospel (Phil 1: 7) or simply of the defence of the gospel (Phil 1: 16). He even writes of his chains leading to the advancement of the gospel (Phil 1: 12).

The gospel must be proclaimed, announced, preached, declared or spoken of. It has been so proclaimed. We have heard and obeyed but woe to us if we do not continue in the proclamation of the glorious gospel.

The truth of the gospel

Of course the gospel is the truth. It comes from God and is about him and his Son. But Paul sometimes found it necessary to refer to the gospel in connection with the notion of truth presumably to remind his hearers that the gospel is indeed true. The gospel deals with reality. Paul did not want them to be drawn towards a false gospel. His warnings still apply today.

To the Thessalonians he writes of the truth to which they were called through the gospel (2 Thess 2: 1), to the Ephesians of the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation, and to the Galatians of the need to preserve the truth of the gospel (Gal 2: 5). But he also speaks of those who do not walk uprightly according to the truth of the gospel (Gal 2: 14), those who pervert the gospel of (the) Christ (Gal 1: 7) and the possibility of a different gospel and people turning to such a gospel (2 Cor 11: 4; Gal 1: 6).

The glorious gospel

Paul speaks to the Ephesian elders of the gospel of the grace, the great kindness of God (Acts 20: 24) and writes to the Galatians about turning to a different gospel, so quickly deserting him who called them in the grace of Christ (Gal 1: 6). Life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel (2 Tim 1: 10) and there is light to be seen in the glory of the gospel of (the) Christ (2 Cor 4: 4). The gospel is the gospel of peace (Eph 6: 15) and one can speak confidently of the hope of the gospel (Col 1: 23). For Paul it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith (Rom 1: 16) and in accordance with the mercy of God, we gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (Eph 3: 6). The blessings of the gospel are to be experienced by those who promote the gospel (1 Cor 9: 23).

How good is this gospel! To experience the grace of God which comes through Christ is to have light shine in one's heart and to know and experience now and in the world to come all that flows from God's merciful bounty. Why would anyone turn to a different gospel or have their hope in any philosophy, any religious belief, any endeavour, any achievement, anything constructed, thought of, by man?

Judgement and the gospel

Paul states that according to his gospel, on the day of judgement, the secrets of men will be judged and the judgment will be carried out by Christ Jesus (Rom 2: 16). In a passage that most of have some difficulty in understanding, Paul speaks of Israel, that though with respect to election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers, as regards the gospel, they are enemies of God (Rom 11: 28). Shall those who remain the enemies of God, whatever their heritage, escape judgement? The coming judgement is an aspect of the gospel. In a solemn text in Revelation there is a reference to an angel with an eternal gospel to proclaim (*euaggelizomai*) to all earth dwellers, but when he speaks with a loud voice, it is, "Fear God

and give glory to him for the hour of his judgment has come; worship him” (Rev 14: 6). The gospel that this angel has to proclaim may be a particular gospel (see later) but it too concerns judgment.

Life under the gospel

Living under the gospel can be and should be expected to be very difficult and yet not without blessings beyond compare. Those who leave house or brothers or sister or mother or father or children or lands for the sake of Jesus and for the gospel receive extraordinarily much together with persecutions and in the coming age eternal life (Mark 10: 29). Indeed living under the gospel can cost a person his life but it means his life will be saved. Jesus said he who loses his life for my sake and the gospel will save it (Mark 8: 35). Paul himself suffered much and was shamefully treated at Philippi but with courage in God he spoke (*laleo*) to the Thessalonians the gospel of God in the face of much opposition (1 Thess 2: 2). Paul had been imprisoned for the gospel (Philemon 13) and not only once. He could write to Timothy in his last days exhorting Timothy not to be ashamed of testifying to the Lord but sharing in suffering for the gospel in the power of God (2 Timothy 1: 8). Yet in spite of his suffering for the gospel, Paul lived his life in a way that promoted the gospel. To the weak he become weak that he might win the weak and become all things to all men that he might by all means save some, doing it all for the sake of the gospel that he might share in its blessings (1 Cor 9: 22, 23). Living as God would have us to live we must not lose heart (2 Cor 4: 1, 21).

Paul and the gospel

Paul saw himself as serving God in the gospel (Rom 1: 9), the gospel that God had entrusted to him (Gal 2: 7; 1 Thess 2: 4; 1 Tim 1: 11). This was the gospel he proclaimed (*kerusso*) (Gal 2: 2) and announced (*euaggelizomai*) (1 Cor 9: 18; 15: 1; 2 Cor 11: 7; Gal 1: 11). But he did not want to abuse his authority in the gospel (1 Cor 9: 18). He became the father of the believing Corinthians through the gospel (1 Cor 4: 15) and acknowledged others who were fellow workers with him in the gospel (Phil 1: 5, 27; 2: 22; 4: 3, 15; 1 Thess 3: 2). His proclaiming and announcing was so associated with the gospel that he could speak of “my gospel” (Rom 2: 16; 16: 25; 2 Tim 2: 8) and when referring also to those who worked with him, “our gospel” (2 Cor 4: 3; 1 Thess 1: 5; 2 Thess 2: 14).

Paul was absolutely aware that the gospel came from God and not himself and was about God and his Son and was not about him. When he wrote of “my gospel” and “our gospel” he was merely identifying himself as a preacher of that gospel, the gospel that had been entrusted to him.

In summary

The gospel has a primary focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus but has a breadth and depth to it not to be captured by some simple definition. Nor is it to be understood simply by referring to the word “*euaggelion*” alone. However the word occurs 75 times in the New Testament in a large variety of contexts and reference only to that word makes it clear that

the gospel is about Jesus, comes from God and is about him, has been proclaimed and announced, is true and glorious, relates to the great judgement day, when lived by results in both suffering and blessing, and was the substance of Paul's preaching. There is one instance where "*euaggelion*" may be a reference to a particular gospel (Rev 14: 6) rather than the gospel that so dominates the passages of the New Testament (see below).

The New Testament books in which the word occurs and its frequency in those books are as follows:

Matthew (4), Mark (7), Acts (2), Romans (9), 1 Corinthians (8), 2 Corinthians (8), Galatians (7), Ephesians (4), Philippians (9), Colossians (2), 1 Thessalonians (6), 2 Thessalonians (2), 1 Timothy (1), 2 Timothy (3), Philemon (1), 1 Peter (1), Revelation (1). The books with the greatest relative frequency are: Galatians and Philippians. In the case of Galatians this is probably to be explained by recognising its overriding concern that the believers in Galatia not be wooed away from the gospel. In Philippians the bulk of the instances relate to the fellowship that Paul had with the believers in Philippi in the promotion of the gospel.

"Euaggelion" in the Greek literature outside of the New Testament compared with "Euaggelion" in the New Testament

Using the TLG (Thesaurus Linguae Graeca) program I located 45 instances of the neuter noun "*euaggelion*" and its female equivalent "*euaggelia*" in the Greek literature external to the New Testament up until the beginning of the 2nd century AD. Of course, "*euaggelion*" and "*euaggelia*" were found in various forms. There were 25 instances where the actual word, "*euaggelia*" occurred. Although it is not possible to be absolutely definitive as to whether a plural neuter form or a single feminine form was involved, the judgement as to whether or not a feminine or neuter form was in use was made, with some confidence, on the basis of the existence of other forms used in the particular source where the actual form, "*euaggelia*" was found. As a result it was determined that there were 34 instances of the neuter noun "*euaggelion*" and 11 instances of the female equivalent "*euaggelia*".

With respect to "*euaggelion*", Plutarch supplied the bulk of the references (20) with a few multiple examples from Aristophanes (3), Appianus (3), Homer (2), Xenophon (2) and Isocrates, Aeschines, Diodorus Siculus and Achilles Tatius (1 each).

Concerning "*euaggelia*", 8 instances were found in the Septuagint and 3 in writings by Flavius Josephus. In one of the instances in the Septuagint, the sense is probably something like a "reward" but its usage appears to involve a pun based on the sense of "good news". The messenger had brought what he thought was good news so he would have like to have received good news himself.

In what follows, given that there are no instances of the female noun in the New Testament, the focus is on the neuter noun, "*euaggelion*".

"Euaggelion" – "good news"?

In all instances found in the Greek literature external to the New Testament (including where the female noun was involved), the concept involved was one of “good news”. Often the good news was with respect to a battle having been won, or an enemy having died. Sometimes it was in terms of a person being appointed again to a prestige office. By way of some other specific examples, on one occasion it was with respect to having heard that a brother was safe, on another occasion there was a request for a reward for bringing good news, and in another there was a general comment about good news coming in quick succession by letter and messenger. Very commonly, and associated with a military victory, reference was made to offering a good tidings sacrifice.

In the New Testament, the gospel certainly reflects a “good news” character in almost all instances. The concept of “good news” being present in all known instances outside of the New Testament up until around New Testament times would seem to suggest that one should so understand the gospel in all New Testament examples. However, the text of Romans 2: 16 and perhaps that of Revelation 14: 6 seem to argue against reaching such a conclusion. In Romans 2: 16 Paul identifies as one element of the gospel that one day God will judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. Though there is a focus on the fact that Christ Jesus will be the judge, that judgement will occur, is the ultimate context. The text in Revelation is also concerned with judgement. It is not good news for some. God is about to execute judgement. Righteousness will be upheld, wickedness will be punished and justice will be the outcome.

Consequently translating “*euaggelion*” as “good news” or something similar, throughout the New Testament, would seem to be inappropriate particularly when judgment is the context. However, that may partly be because we are not seeing things from God’s perspective. Yet even when judgement is the context, “good news” even seen as such from God’s point of view, as a translation, may convey too light hearted an understanding. A translation referring to “great news”, which can carry with it a sense of solemnity, may sometimes better express the intended meaning. In fact “solemn news” may be an even better rendering in some instances. Furthermore, the idea of “news” does not automatically carry with it the grandeur that belongs to the “gospel”. It is not “news” so much as an important announcement, a proclamation from a king, a declaration from a ruler over all. So while “good news” will continue to be a common translation, we do well to remember the greatness, the grandeur, the wonder and the surpassing goodness of the “gospel” as well as in some respects, its very sober and sombre character.

The grammatical form

As referred to above, “*euaggelion*” is neuter in gender. Of the 34 instances found outside of the New Testament, 25 were plural in form – “*euaggelia*” (20), “*euaggelion*” (4), and “*euaggeliois*” (1) with all 9 that were singular in form being “*euaggelion*”. The plural forms dealt with singular entities in almost all if not all instances.

Of the 75 instances occurring in the New Testament, all were singular in form: “*euaggelion*” (39), “*euaggeliou*” (26) and “*euaggelio(i)*” (10)

The use of the plural in neuter forms to describe a single identity is not uncommon. The use of the singular exclusively in the New Testament is however deserving of some comment. Perhaps an explanation of, or an understanding of the phenomenon, can be found in what follows.

The use of the definite article

In the New Testament all but four of the 34 instances were accompanied by the definite article. In two of the 34 occurrences the definite article was accompanied by “*touto*” providing the meaning of “this” – the demonstrative adjective. In the Greek literature external to the New Testament there were only three instances of the use of the definite article and it was with “*euaggelion*” in the singular. It may be thought that there could be a general situation that when “*euaggelion*” is in the singular it is accompanied by the definite article. However in the Greek literature external to the New Testament, the definite article only accompanied the singular form in 3 of the 9 possibilities observed.

Perhaps what should be recognised about the New Testament examples is that the gospel being referred to is the one and only definitive gospel, no matter how varied the terms in which it is expressed. It is **the** gospel, spoken of twice as “**this** gospel”, which comes from God and is about him and his Son. Of all the “good news” events, ideas, situations and pronouncements in the world, there has been this one and only supremely “good news” announcement from God.

However some comment should be made about the four instances in the New Testament where no definite article appears. In two of the examples, the actual reference is to “a different gospel” (2 Cor 11: 4; Gal 1: 6). Although in both instances Paul seems to have particular expressions of a different gospel in mind, his remarks were applicable to any different gospel and were probably so intended. This leaves us with the two “exceptional” instances – found in Rom 1: 1 and Rev 14: 6.

Rom 1: 1 reads, “*eis euaggelion Theou*”. There are several examples of “*eis to euaggelion tou Christou*” and “*to euaggelion tou Theou*” in the New Testament, so the lack of the definite article in Rom 1: 1 is not to be explained by appealing to other aspects of the construction involving “*euaggelion*”. Perhaps, if the real explanation is not a mundane one, it is Paul giving considerable solemnity to the “gospel” of God as he refers to at the very beginning of his lengthy theological and pastoral treatise.

As mentioned above, the passage in Rev 14: 6 concerns an angel who proclaims “an eternal gospel” (*euaggelion aionion*) to all those who dwell in earth, saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water”. Perhaps the reason why “*euaggelion*” is not accompanied by the definite article in this case is that unlike other occurrences of “gospel” in the New Testament, in this situation “gospel” refers to this isolated pronouncement. If that is the case, one should not consider this instance as an example of the usage of “gospel” as “the gospel” as referred to almost entirely throughout the rest of the New Testament.

Finally, though the gospel of the New Testament is “the” gospel, it is not to be thought of as some simple statement concerning a single event. In its totality it would require a lengthy description concerning a number of weighty matters. By comparison the “good news” of the Greek literature external to the New Testament is almost always concerned with just one event, situation or activity.

“Euaggelizomai” in the Greek literature external to the New Testament

Using the TLG program I located 55 instances of “*euaggelizomai*” in the Greek literature external to the New Testament up until about the beginning of the 2nd century AD. 17 were in the indicative mood, 3 were in the imperative mood and there was 1 example where the optative mood was involved. 11 were infinitives and 23 were participles. All participles referred to the person, persons or means by which the “good news was proclaimed”. As for voice, 5 were passive with 50 judged to be of middle voice, while recognising that in many cases, middle and passive voices cannot be distinguished using form alone. Additionally, there were 2 instances where the active verb, “*euaggelizō*” was found. 1 occurred as an infinitive, the other as a participle. The sources for both “*euaggelizomai*” and “*euaggelizō*” were: the Septuagint (20), Flavius Josephus (13), Philo Judaeus (12), Plutarch (3), Menander (2) and Aristophanes, Demosthenes, Lycurgus of Athens, Theophrastus, Soranus, Vitae Aesopi and Clement of Rome (1 each). There was no reference to the noun, “*euaggelion*”, in any of the instances.

In a number of cases, it seems appropriate simply to translate “*euaggelizomai*” as “announcing” or similar without an explicit reference to “good news”. Some examples: the announcing that it was the time for reaping a crop, the blossoming of an almond tree indicating that there would be a plentiful supply of fruit, and the declaring to certain Arabs by their women folk that they had so seduced some Hebrews that they had turned from God.

The general rule seems to be that, when what is being announced or conveyed in some way or another is directly and explicitly referred to at that point in the text, a translation that refers simply to “announcing” or similar seems permissible. Conversely, it seems to be that where there is no direct explicit reference to what is being “announced” or conveyed at that place in the text, something like “good news” may need to be referred to. None the less, depending on the actual text, the omission of any reference to “good news” may sometimes seem appropriate even when there is no direct and explicit mention of what is being announced or conveyed at that point in the text.

If something like, “making the announcement” were used in a translation, then supplying “good news” as part of the translation might be considered unnecessary, even if no direct an explicit reference were made to what that announcement was about at that place in the text. The same would be true if “preaching”, in one grammatical form or another, could have been used as a translation for the verb. However there were no instances in the Greek literature external to the New Testament were, “preaching” in any grammatical form could have been used as an appropriate translation of “*euaggelizomai*” in any of its forms.

However, in all instances, whether or not there was a direct and explicit reference to what was being announced or conveyed, what was being announced or conveyed was “good news”, at least from someone’s point of view. Consequently, however the text is translated the underlying sense is that of announcing or conveying in one way or another, “good news”.

Some further examples: husbands eager to send good news to their wives, longing for and expecting them; a person stating he did not exult in the good fortune of foreigners telling glad tidings to anyone, the advice being given that good news being delivered should be carried swiftly, bad news, slowly, the Philistines sending good news to their idols and to their people, the good news that Gaius had made a complete recovery being announced by travellers as they arrived in a city, Joshua announcing the good news of the impending capture of the city, a person bringing good news that a person’s asses are safe. A deserter bringing good news to Vespasian concerning the disposition of a general’s troops. In the first four instances, there being no direct explicit reference to what was being spoken of, the translation probably needs to make a reference to “good news” or something similar, given the actual verbs being used. In the other examples given, it might be judged that a simple reference to “announcing”, “declaring” or similar is sufficient. Sometimes the news is of such a nature that one must be careful not to give too grand a sense to the announcing, by using a word such as, “proclaiming” or even the word “announcing” itself.

For some additional and confirmatory material see, Hauck, F.¹ He provides an extensive survey of the usage of the verb (and related forms) and its meaning both in Biblical and non-Biblical material.

Though not explicitly referred to in Hauck’s work, the verb may have sometimes carried with it the sense of a messenger delivering his news with considerable flourish or gravitas. The “good” aspect of his delivery was the considerable style in which the announcement was made. If my memory is correct, some years ago D. Robinson argued for something along these lines. This would give weight to the idea that sometimes, the verb could simply be translated using “announcing”, “declaring”, “proclaiming” or similar, with the understanding that this was done with flourish, gravitas, grandeur or even exuberance.

“Euaggelizomai” in the New Testament

“Euaggelizomai” is found 52 times in the New Testament. Five times it occurs in the passive voice (Gal 1: 11, 1 Pet 1: 25; 4: 6, Heb 4: 2, 6) and on the other occasions it is judge to be in the middle voice, though many forms are common to both middle and passive voice. Additionally, the verb in active voice, “*euaggelizō*”, occurs twice (Rev 10: 7:14: 6). Combining all voices, the moods represented are indicative (20), and subjunctive (4), and it occurs as an infinitive on 10 occasions and as a participle 20 times. All participles referred to the person, persons or means by which the “good news” was proclaimed.

¹ Hauck, F. , “*euaggelizomai, euaggelion, proeuaggelizomai, euaggelistes*” in **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament**, volume II, (trans. Bromiley, G.W.), Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1964, 707-737

Even though the number of New Testament instances of “*euaggelizomai*” and “*euaggelizo*” and the number of those external to the New Testament that were examined were relatively small, the distribution of voices, moods and the number of instances of the verb forms occurring as infinitives or participles were quite similar. See Tables 1 and 2

Voice/Source	Passive	Middle	Active	Total
New Testament	5	47	2	54
External to the New Testament	5	50	2	57

Table 1

Distribution of the passive, middle and active voice for the verb forms “*euaggelizomai*” and “*euaggelizo*” in the New Testament and external to the New Testament

Mood, Infinitive, participle/ Source	Indicative	Imperative	Subjunctive	Optative	Infinitive	Participle	Total
New Testament	20	-	4	-	10	20	54
External to the New Testament	17	3	-	1	12	24	57

Table 2

Distribution of the indicative, imperative and subjunctive moods, and occurrences as an infinitive or as a participle for the verb forms “*euaggelizomai*” and “*euaggelizo*” in the New Testament and external to the New Testament

“Euaggelizomai” in close association with “euaggelion”

There are 4 instances where “*euaggelizomai*” is mentioned in close association with “*euaggelion*” and on each of these occasions “*euaggelion*” is delivered by “*euaggelizomai*” (1 Cor 15: 1, 2 Cor 11: 7, Gal 1: 11, Rev 14: 6).

Given that what is being announced is “good news”, the verb itself does not need to be translated in such a way as to refer again to “good news”. Indeed it would be quite strange to do so. In each case, the verb is commonly translated simply by such as, “preach”, “proclaim” or “announce”. The words, “preach”, “proclaim”, “announce” and even “declare” tend to convey the idea of something “sober” or “grand” being brought to notice. Besides, the general rule referred to earlier, that “when what is being announced or conveyed in some way or another is directly and explicitly referred to at that point in the text, a translation that refers simply to ‘announcing’ or similar seems permissible” certainly applies in these cases.

Explicit and direct reference is being made to what is being “announced”. Referring to “good news” as “great news”, Paul had proclaimed “the great news” (1 Cor 15: 1, 2 Cor 11: 7), “the

great news” had been preached by Paul (Gal 1: 11) [passive voice]) and an angel announced “great news” (Rev 14: 6).

Instances of “euaggelizomai” in relatively close association with “euaggelion”

There are 4 instances where the verb is in relatively close association with the noun “euaggelion”. The references are to “how beautiful are the feet of those who announce good news ... but not all the Israelites accepted the good news” (Rom 10: 15, 16), “in proclaiming the good news I make the gospel free of charge not making use of my right in the gospel” (1 Cor 9: 18) (note the two references to “gospel”), “I am astonished that ... you are turning to a different gospel ... some want to pervert the gospel of Christ but if we or an angel should proclaim good news to you contrary to the good news we proclaimed to you let him be eternally condemned” (Gal 1: 6-8) (note the two references to “proclaiming good news” and the two references to “good news”).

The active forms

A brief comment should be made on the two active forms derived from “euaggelizō”. One text has already been referred to above - Rev 14: 6. The other (Rev 10: 7) occurs in a reference to the mystery of God that he had proclaimed to his servants the prophets. Like the usage in Rev 14: 16, translations simply refer to “proclaiming” rather than “proclaiming the good news”. The reference to “proclaiming” alone is deemed to be sufficient. In one case, the presence of the noun “euaggelion” is sufficient for the notion of “good news” to be evident. In the other case, “the mystery of God” is what is being announced. That the active voice is used in both instances may be partly a reflection of there being no need to refer to any other object of the verb, or it may simply reflect an idiosyncratic choice by the author.

The passive forms

The occurrence in Gal 1: 11 has already been mentioned – “the good news announced by me”. The two instances in 1 Peter translate: “The word of the Lord abides forever and this is the word, the good news announced to you” (1: 25) and “For this is also why the good news was announced to the dead” (4: 6). The other two cases are found in Hebrews: “For we also have had the good news announced to us just as to them” (Heb 4: 2) and “Those who formerly had the good news announced (to them) failed to enter because of disobedience” (Heb 4: 6). From the point of view of the English language, each of these instances is indeed in the passive voice. In the last three instances “good news” is probably not the most appropriate rendering. Something like, “great news” or even “great declaration” may be more suitable.

Instances of “euaggelizomai” in general

In the Gospels

Jesus at his birth is the subject of the good news of great joy brought by an angel of the Lord to shepherds (Luke 2: 10). Jesus proclaims the great news. He proclaims the great news of the kingdom of God (Luke 4: 43; 8: 1) and he declares that from the time of John the great

news of the kingdom of God is being proclaimed (Luke 16: 16). He preaches good news to the poor (Matt 11: 5; Luke 4: 18; 7: 22). He declares that he must proclaim the great news to towns other than Capernaum (Luke 4: 43) and he preaches the good news in the temple (Luke 20: 1). His disciples proclaimed the great news (Luke 9: 6).

Zechariah is informed by an angel of the Lord of the good news of the coming birth of John, the “immerser” to be (Luke 1: 19) and of John himself it is written that having spoken of the coming Messiah and his judgement “with many other exhortations he preached great news to the people” (Luke 3: 18). Given how closely this latter text of proclamation follows upon the reference to that judgement that will be carried out by Jesus, it is difficult to simply translate “*euaggelizomai*” as proclaiming “good” news. The news is actually awesome. Perhaps translations should simply refer to “preaching” or similar.

It is of some interest to note that when Jesus instructs the disciples of John to tell him that good news is preached to the poor, it literally reads, “the poor are proclaimed/preached/announced” (Matt 11: 5, Luke 7: 22).

In Acts

Understandably, the word “*euaggelizomai*” occurs a number of times in the Acts of the Apostles.

The apostles proclaim Jesus the Christ (5: 42). Peter and John preach the great news to many Samaritan villages (8: 25). Peter speaks of the proclaiming of the great news of peace by Jesus Christ (10: 36). Those who were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria preach the word (8:4). Some who were scattered preach the Lord Jesus to some Greeks (11: 20). Philip preaches the good news of the kingdom of God (8: 12), proclaims the great news about Jesus to the Ethiopian Eunuch (8: 35) and preaches the good news in many towns (8: 40). Paul proclaims the great news to the Jews at Antioch concerning what God had promised (13: 32) and later both he and Barnabas proclaim the word of the Lord at that same city (15: 35). Paul and Barnabas proclaim the great news at Iconium (14: 7), Lystra (14: 15) and Derbe (14: 21). Paul recognises that God had called his group to proclaim the great news to the Macedonians (16: 10) and at Athens proclaims Jesus and the resurrection (17: 18).

In the Pauline letters

Mention has already been made of the occasions when Paul uses “*euaggelizomai*” in close association with “*euaggelion*” [he proclaims the gospel (1 Cor 15: 1; 2 Cor 11; 7 and Gal 1: 11] and where “*euaggelizomai*” is used by him in relatively close association with “*euaggelion*” [Rom 10: 15, 16, Gal 1: 6-8 (2x) and 1 Cor 9: 18].

Paul’s desire to preach the good news is evident in his letter to the believers at Rome (“I am ready to proclaim to you at Rome also” [Rom 1: 15] and “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ has not already been named [Rom 15: 20]) as well as in his second letter to the believers in Corinth (“so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you” [2 Cor 10: 16]).

Paul writes against either himself or an angel proclaiming a gospel contrary to the one received (Gal 1: 8, 9). In perhaps the only use of “*euaggelizomai*” in the New Testament that is not directly related to gospel proclamation, Paul writes of Timothy declaring the faith and love of the Thessalonian believers (1 Thess 3: 6). He quotes from Isaiah 52: 7 in referring to “how beautiful are the feet of those who proclaim peace” while referring to the necessity of the preacher and the preacher being sent (Rom 10: 15). And he writes of Christ who proclaimed peace to the gentiles who were far off and peace to the Jew who was near (Eph 2: 17).

But in the vast majority of occasions when he refers to the proclaiming the gospel – it is with reference to himself, the proclaimer - Rom 1: 15, 15: 20; 2 Cor 10: 16 and Gal 1: 8 have already been referred to. There are another 12 instances where the reference is to himself: “Christ did not send me to baptise but to proclaim the gospel” (1 Cor 1: 17), “For though I preach the great news I have nothing of which to glory (1 Cor 9: 16), “Woe to me if I do not preach the great news” (1 Cor 9: 16), his reward is that in preaching the gospel he makes it free of charge (1 Cor 9: 18), he reminds the Corinthians the gospel which he had proclaimed to them (1 Cor 15: 1) by means of which preaching of the gospel they are saved (1 Cor 15: 2), it was the gospel of God that he had proclaimed to them (2 Cor 11: 7), the gospel which Paul had preached to the Galatians did not have its origin in man (Gal 1: 11), God’s Son had been revealed to Paul so that he could proclaim him among the gentiles (Gal 1: 16), he could refer to others who reported of him in earlier days as, the one who had persecuted believers but then proclaimed the faith (Gal 1: 23), he writes to the Galatian believers of how when he first proclaimed the great news to them it was while he was in the weakness of the flesh (Gal 4: 13), but explains to the believers in Ephesus how grace had been given to him to proclaim among the gentiles the unsearchable riches of the Christ (Eph 3: 8).

In Hebrews, 1 Peter and Revelation

Reference has already been made to the angel with an everlasting gospel to proclaim (Rev 14: 6) and the use of the active voice in the reference to the mystery of God, announced to his servants the prophets in times past, about to come to its fulfilment (Rev 10: 7). The two instances in Hebrews, each occurring in the passive voice, have already been referred to: “For we also have had the good [great?] news announced to us just as to them” (Heb 4: 2) and “Those who formerly had the good [great?] news announced (to them) failed to enter because of disobedience” (Heb 4: 6). Two of the three instances in which “*euaggelizomai*” occurs in 1 Peter, both being in the passive voice have also been mentioned above: “The word of the Lord abides forever and this is the word, the good news announced to you” (1: 25) and “For this is also why the good [great?] news was announced to the dead” (4: 6). The third instance found in 1 Peter is where he writes of the prophets of times past and their involvement in the things which have now been announced (*anaggellō*) to his readers by those who preached the good news to them through the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1: 12). All but the first of these seven texts have some reference to the past. As suggested earlier, the only exception, (Rev 14: 6), is probably not a reference to the proclaiming of the great news which so dominates the pages of the New Testament.

Frequency of “euaggelizomai” in the New Testament books

Of the 52 instances of “*euaggelizomai*” and the 2 instances of “*euaggelizo*” in the New Testament, 15 occur in the book of Acts, 10 in Luke, 7 in Galatians, 6 in 1 Corinthians, 3 each in Romans and 1 Peter, 2 each in 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews and Revelation, and 1 each in Matthew and 1 Thessalonians.

The book with the greatest relative frequency is Galatians.

Euaggelizomai as proclaiming, announcing, declaring, preaching

As discussed earlier, “*euaggelizomai*” in the New Testament carries with it the sense of conveying information in a grand or sober manner. Words such as, “proclaiming”, “announcing”, “declaring” or even “preaching” seem admirably suited for conveying such sense. Which one of those words is more suitable could be determined by a consideration of context though often there is little available for deciding between one word and the other. Whether or not one should also refer to “good news”, “great news”, “solemn news” or something similar, is however another matter.

When considering how “*euaggelizomai*” is used in the Greek literature external to the New Testament the suggestion was made that there appears to be a general rule that when what is being announced or conveyed in some way or another is directly and explicitly referred to at that point in the text, a translation that refers simply to “announcing” or similar seems permissible. This general rule seems to apply to New Testament usage as well. This is most obvious when the direct object is “*euaggelion*” (1 Cor 15: 1; 2 Cor 11: 7; Gal 1: 11; Rev 14: 6).

Consider also the following:

“I was sent to announce these things to you” (Luke 1: 19), “I declare to you, “great joy” (Luke 2: 10), “(Jesus) preaching and proclaiming the kingdom of God” (Luke 8: 1), “From that time the kingdom of God is announced” (Luke 16: 16), “They did not cease teaching and proclaiming Jesus the Christ” (Acts 5: 42), “they went everywhere, proclaiming the message” (Acts 8: 4), “They believed Philip as he proclaimed the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 8: 12), “(Philip) proclaimed to him Jesus” (Acts 8: 35), “certain of them spoke to the Hellenists proclaiming the Lord Jesus” (Acts 11: 20), “we declare to you the promise made to the fathers” (Acts 13: 32), “because he proclaimed to them Jesus and the resurrection” (Acts 17: 18), “how beautiful are the feet of those announcing peace” (Rom 10: 15), “the message I proclaimed to you if you hold fast” (1 Cor 15: 2), “if we or an angel from heaven proclaimed to you contrary to what we proclaimed to you” (Gal 1: 8); “I should proclaim him among the nations” (Gal 1: 16), “He who once persecuted us now proclaims the faith” (Gal 1: 23), “(Christ) proclaimed peace” (Eph 2: 17), “I should proclaim among the gentiles the unsearchable riches of the Christ” (Eph 3: 8), “Timothy having declared to us your faith and love” (1 Thess 3: 6), “This is the message that was declared to you” (1 Peter 1: 25), “the mystery of God as announced to his servants the prophets” (Rev 10: 7).

In each case, one may judge it sufficient to refer to “proclaiming”, “announcing”, “declaring” or even “preaching” without also adding “good news” or the like as indicated in the translations provided. Alternatively, in a number of cases, the translator may sense that the addition of “good news” or similar is appropriate. This may be particularly so when it is very obvious that what is being proclaimed etc is indeed “good news”.

There are also other instances, where no direct and explicit reference is being made to what is being announced, and contrary to the few examples cited from the literature external to the New Testament, no reference to “good news” or similar seems to be necessary. For example, Jesus referred to the requirement for him to preach in other towns beyond Capernaum (Luke 4: 43) and Paul in his letter to the Galatians writes of his preaching to them in the weakness of the flesh (Gal 4: 13). The word, “preaching” delivers the translator from having to automatically refer to “good news”.

The proclaimers as messengers

What is clear both within the New Testament and in the Greek literature external to the New Testament is that a messenger (an “*aggelos*”) proclaims, announces or declares something of moment, something of importance. And in the Greek literature outside of the New Testament it appears to be always a reference to “good news”. The same is nearly always true in the New Testament. However, in the case of the New Testament, except say with respect to Timothy bringing the good news of the faith and love of the Thessalonians, it is God’s message that is being proclaimed and it fundamentally concerns his son. And those who announce it, declare it or proclaim it, do so simply as his messengers.

Again, in case we need reminding, we are not announcing what emanates from us. We are the messengers. We are not the message. We carry it with sincerity, with sobriety, with jubilation and with dignity on behalf of another - the one who sends us, God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Good News”, “Great News”, “Sober News”, “Gospel”?

I have suggested that sometimes “good news” may be better replaced with “great news” or even “sober news”. Why not often replace it with the one word, “gospel”? There is some sense to that suggestion and many a translation will use the word, “gospel” freely as though it were a technical word. I have chosen to use it from time to time. Yet it needs to be recognised that “gospel” is simply an old English word, meaning “good news”.

None the less it seems that, “*euaggelion*” in the New Testament often seems to carry with it a technical connotation. It is the content of the message that is being proclaimed and this message is unique. As the New Testament emphasises, it is “**the** Good news”. And it is the dominant use of the definite article alongside of the noun that undoubtedly contributes to its technical character. Understandably therefore, “the gospel” which now by common usage has taken on technical overtones, conveys what the New Testament sees in some places as, that special that specific message, “the word” that comes from God and is about God (1 Thess 2: 13).

I have chosen largely to use the words, “good news” or “great news” even when dealing with the verb, in order to convey that essentially this message is indeed “good news” or perhaps even better, “great news” and even sometimes “sober news”. But “the gospel” is a very appropriate rendering, provided we understand what is being conveyed by that term in its varied contexts. Overall, it is “awesome news” to appeal to a modern idiomatic expression, an expression which captures both the wonderful and the very sober aspects of its nature.

Euaggelion and Euaggelizomai in Galatians

Before concluding one should not fail to recognise how dominant the words “*euaggelion*” and “*euaggelizomai*” are in the letter to the Galatians. Taken together, the noun and the verb occur 14 times. This absolute frequency of the noun and verb considered together is only exceeded in the book of Acts (17) and only equalled in 1 Corinthians (14). The only other book to reach double figures is Romans (12).

Galatians is that letter which offers no thanks to God for his work in the believers to whom the letter is addressed. It is written to counteract an alternative gospel, a gospel which demanded the observance of certain rituals, particularly circumcision. Having been at pains to establish his own apostolic credentials, Paul declares that “we know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ” (3: 16). Yet the Galatian problems went beyond their thoughts about circumcision. Paul writes: “You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I have laboured over you in vain” (4: 10, 11). But he continues: “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (5: 1). “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail but faith working through love” (5: 6). “You were called to freedom brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be slaves of one another” (5: 13). “Walk by the Spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh” (5:16). “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit” (5: 25). “Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation (6: 14, 15).

We do well to examine ourselves with regards to the possibility of a false gospel. Circumcision may not constitute a problem for us but what other “under the law” type of practices and beliefs do we have? What are we to make of our rituals, our observances, our demands on ourselves and others? Have they become mandatory, part of the requirements, we imagine in our foolishness, God demands of us over and above living by his Spirit, having been justified by faith in his Son, Christ crucified?

Concluding Comments

With respect to the noun, “*euaggelion*” and the verb, “*euaggelizomai*” the language of the New Testament and as found in the Greek literature external to the New Testament up until about the time of the New Testament, have much in common. It is essentially “good news” and the “good news” is announced or proclaimed.

However there are some differences. In the New Testament, unlike in the other Greek literature, the noun predominantly appears as “**the** good news” rather than simply “good news”. It is “the gospel”. In the New Testament, the news, perhaps better understood as the announcement, the proclamation or the declaration, is really very good, very great or even very sombre. Furthermore, in the Greek literature external to the New Testament, the “good news” almost always relates to a specific event, whereas the gospel of the New Testament, in its totality, relates to a large number of interwoven and weighty events or situations. There is one instance in the New Testament where what is referred to as “a gospel” seems to relate to a very specific gospel being delivered at a specific point in time, rather than “the gospel” which dominates the pages of the New Testament. There are a couple of other occurrences where reference is being made to a false gospel.

In both the New Testament and the Greek literature outside of the New Testament, the verb can often simply be translated without reference to “good news” or similar. However, depending on the actual verb used in the translation, in some texts something like “good news” also need to be mentioned. And while the verb in the Greek literature external to the New Testament can often be translated as “announcing” or proclaiming”, it lacks the context that would make sense of translating it as, “preaching”. Sometimes the context displayed in this literature is such that the words, “proclaiming”, “announcing” or “declaring” could be judged to be inappropriate if too much “grandeur” is read into their usage. Not so in almost all instances occurring in the New Testament. Furthermore, while in the Greek literature external to the New Testament, the verb translated as proclaiming or announcing always has the idea of “good news” behind it, in the New Testament, as with the noun, the proclaiming, announcing, or declaring is occasionally more “sombre” rather than “good”. There is one instance in the New Testament where the verb relates to some “giving of good news” that is simply related to human beings (though it does indeed concern their faith and love).

The message that is so great comes from God and is about his Son. We in the apostolic tradition have nothing to boast about in ourselves. Our boasting is in the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified for sinners, raised gloriously by the Father, appointed judge of all men and before whom all shall appear - some for glory some for condemnation.

We have received the message. We, as his messengers, have a message to tell. The gospel is the announcement, the declaration, the proclamation that the world must hear. If we do not declare, if we do not announce, if we do not proclaim, how shall they hear?

And we must live by the gospel, unashamedly demonstrating that in the great mercy of God, according to his great kindness Christ has set us free, free to love, free to serve, free to glorify the one who has done great things for us. Praise be to God! Honour and glory to his name!