

REDISCOVERING THE GOSPEL

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What does *gospel* mean?

Today the term *gospel* is virtually synonymous with a type of literature, specifically the canonical writing of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But when those men penned their inspired works in the first century AD, *gospel* as a literary genre did not exist.¹ Still, they used εὐαγγέλιον (“gospel” or “good news”) and its verb εὐαγγελίζω (“to bring good news”) 130 times in 120 verses in the New Testament. So what then did Mark and the other New Testament writers mean when they used the term *gospel*?

They could have created the term *ex nihilo*, making a word that was altogether new to their world and assigning it whatever definition they so chose. After all, the person and work of Jesus was altogether new to this world. And yet, *gospel* is oft used without an explicit definition, as though the authors assumed their audience would know the term’s definition and understand their allusion to it (cf. Matt 26:13; Mark 8:35; Luke 8:1; 9:6).

Alternatively, they could have adopted a word already in use in their cultural context, baptizing the ordinary term and imbuing it with extraordinary theological meaning. Or still, they could have taken a term already rich in meaning from their Greek Old Testament and bestowed upon it even greater gravitas in the Christian faith.

In the case of εὐαγγέλιον and εὐαγγελίζω, I believe that the New Testament authors came to their quills and scrolls and amanuenses armed with a vocabulary already informed by both their culture and their faith. Therefore, in order for 21st century readers and students of God’s Word to fully grasp the New Testament’s message, they need to understand the lexical

¹ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 112-13.

and theological weight preexistent in New Testament terminology and diction. I contend that the understanding the gospel as just the death and resurrection of Christ is incomplete. Εὐαγγέλιον and εὐαγγελίζω have a much more to them.

Hence, this paper will focus intensively on four patterns and contexts in the Septuagint where εὐαγγέλιον and εὐαγγελίζω are used. Then it will conclude with a brief discussion of further directions of study in order to better understand the gospel, to appreciate εὐαγγέλιον and εὐαγγελίζω in the New Testament.

Prolegomena

Before embarking on the journey to rediscover the Gospel, three disclaimers, three presuppositions, must be made—the fine print on the boarding pass, so to speak. First, I believe that there is one sovereign author behind the whole of Scripture. In an exhortation to his protégé Timothy, the Apostle Paul penned these words: “All Scripture is breathed out by God...” (2 Tim 3:16, ESV). ‘Breathed out by God’ is one word in the Greek (θεόπνευστος) that meant “inspired by God.”² Paul was impressing upon Timothy the unique nature and authority of the Apostolic and Prophetic writings, a nature and authority that stemmed from its single, divine source.

Peter described the process of inspiration as men speaking “from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21, ESV). The verb *carried* (φέρω) means “to cause to follow a certain course in direction or conduct.”³ Peter, here, used a figurative expression to communicate divine control in the composition process. Then in a letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “And we speak about these things [that is, understanding given freely by God], not with words taught us by human wisdom, but with those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people” (1 Cor 2:13, NET). In other words, the inspiration of Scripture was not just divine direction during the composition process, but also the express intention in the

² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 449-50.

³ *Ibid.*, 1051, s.v. 3b.

final product, in the words themselves. Hence this exploration is predicated upon the assumption that the words the Apostles and Prophets were not whimsically chosen. Rather, they were intentional. They were appointed by God to communicate His message.

Second, I believe that the *missio Dei*, the mission of God, is for people to know Him as the one true and sovereign God. Subsequently, if He specifically ordained the words that would communicate His message, then those words were chosen precisely because they would best accomplish His Self-revelation.

Now in order for words to accomplish His mission, He could 1) use existing words with their existing meaning, 2) use existing words in such a way as to extended their meaning, or 3) use existing words and create new meaning altogether. To minimize undesired misunderstandings, good communicators do not flood their message with unknown terms. Rather, they choose words that effectively build a bridge to their audience. They choose words that their audience knows so that their audience can comprehend the message. So when God elected εὐαγγέλιον and εὐαγγελίζω, I believe He did so fully cognizant of how that noun and how that verb were being used and the connotations they bore at that time.

The third presupposition, then, is that the Septuagint carries a special authority in understanding the vocabulary of the New Testament. The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament. The first portions of the Old Testament translated to Greek date to the third century BC, and the last, to the first century BC.⁴ The quality and nature of the translation from Hebrew to Greek varies from book to book in the Septuagint—some being more literal, others more paraphrastic.⁵ As a translation, the Septuagint is not under the umbrella of the doctrine of inspiration. Nor does it have authority over the original autographs of

⁴ Joyce Eisenberg and Ellen Scolnic, *Dictionary of Jewish Words* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2001), 143.

⁵ S. E. Porter, “Septuagint/Greek Old Testament,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), under sec., “4. Translation Technique and Relation to the Hebrew Text,” Logos Bible Software.

Scripture. But the Septuagint does have chronological proximity to the composition to the Greek New Testament, and it also shares a theological kinship to those writings. As Peters rightly asserted, “the real value of LXX resides not so much in its function as a corrective to some Hebrew text of which we have a copy, but rather as a record of the way in which a group of Jews in the 3d [sic] century and for some time thereafter understood their traditions.”⁶

The Septuagint translators chose to use εὐαγγέλιον and εὐαγγελίζω 23 times in 19 verses. The translators thought these two terms communicated to Greek readers what they themselves had observed in the Hebrew Scriptures. They took ancient Hebrew and conceptually converted it to their contemporary currency, Koine Greek. By using the Greek to explain the Hebrew, the weight of sacred Hebrew Scripture and its theological concepts was added to the contemporary Greek words. Soderlund remarked, “The impact of the special translation-Greek vocabulary created by the LXX can be seen in the writings of Philo and Josephus, the Pseudepigrapha, and other Jewish-Greek historical, exegetical, poetic, and apologetic works.”⁷ The authors of the New Testament wrote in Koine Greek, and if Koine Greek was greatly influenced by the Septuagint and the Septuagint was a translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, then this exploration can infer important aspects of the Koine Greek meaning and connotation of εὐαγγέλιον and εὐαγγελίζω by seeking to understand the Hebrew contexts from which they were translated.

Moreover, the Septuagint was the Bible of the early church.⁸ It was the translation most readily accessible to the Greek-speaking audiences. New Testament writers frequently drew not only their quotations of the Old Testament from the Septuagint but also specific words and concepts. Again, Soderlund wrote, “The theological terms of the NT, such as ‘law,’

⁶ Melvin K. H. Peters, “Septuagint,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 5:1100.

⁷ S. K. Soderlund, “Septuagint,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed., vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 400.

⁸ Peters, “Septuagint,” 5:1102.

‘righteousness,’ ‘mercy,’ ‘truth,’ ‘propitiation,’ were taken over directly from the LXX and must be understood in the light of their use in that version.”⁹ Hence this exploration will consider the theological ramifications of how εὐαγγέλιον and εὐαγγελίζω in the Septuagint informed their usage in the New Testament.

Now, having said all that, let the lexical adventure begin.

Εὐαγγέλιον and Εὐαγγελίζω in the Greek Old Testament

As stated earlier, the noun εὐαγγέλιον appears only once in the Septuagint, and the verb εὐαγγελίζω appears 23 times in 19 verses in the canonical books. Of those 24 occurrences, 12 are found in the historical narratives, nine in the Prophets, and three in the Psalms. Four major themes appear in how the terms are used: a celebration of victory, the return of the king, restoration and justice, and deliverance.

A Celebration of Victory

In 2 Samuel 18, tensions were running high. Absalom wanted to be king over the descendants of Jacob, but there was problem: Israel already had king. Moreover, this king was King David, the anointed successor of Saul, the victor over Goliath, and Absalom’s father. In chapter 15, Absalom began scheming and politicking to overthrow David. By chapter 18, Absalom had David on the run. David had abandoned his capital, Jerusalem, and Absalom was in hot pursuit.

Then chapter 18 itself records the final battle between Absalom’s and David’s respective armies. The combat was intense. It raged across the countryside (2 Sam 18:8). Twenty thousand soldiers died in the fight (2 Sam 18:7). Only with the death of Absalom himself did the fighting stop (2 Sam 18:14-16). Finally David’s side emerged victorious.

⁹ Soderlund, “Septuagint,” 400.

This was great news, for the rightful king could return to his throne and peace could return to the land. The civil war had ended, and the nation could reunite under one God and one king. It was cause for jubilant celebration. After all, who is ever sad when they have just achieved a great victory? When was the last time a Super Bowl champion was grieved by winning the big game? Any tears from the victors are tears of overwhelming joy at their good fortune.

With such a momentous win, one of the soldiers, Ahimaaz, readily stepped forward to run and tell David the good news (2 Sam 18:19). Ahimaaz's enthusiasm is understandable. This victory truly was good news begging to be shared and celebrated. Besides, everyone likes the guys with good things to say, and this king evidently rewarded the bearers of glad tidings (2 Sam 18:22). Yet there is a prominent tension in the narrative. Joab, David's general, had killed Absalom against David's explicit instructions (cf. 2 Sam 18:5, 14-15). The grievous loss to David of his son overshadowed the news of victory. The good news was bad news to David, and Joab knew it (2 Sam 18:20). Further, Joab feared the same fate would befall Ahimaaz as had befallen other men who boasted to David of killing royalty.¹⁰ Only after sending out another, a sacrificial lamb, did Joab relent and allow Ahimaaz to go tell David the news (2 Sam 18:21-23).

Ahimaaz outran the other messenger, and when David was told of Ahimaaz's arrival, the Hebrew says David expected *בְּשׂוֹרָה טוֹבָה* ("good news") from him (2 Sam 18:27). Ahimaaz told the king of the victory, and when asked about Absalom's fate, Ahimaaz lied and said he did not know what became of the king's son (2 Sam 18:28-29). The other messenger, the Cushite, arrived, declaring the same good news (2 Sam 18:31). However, he continued his celebratory tone when David asked about Absalom, saying " 'May the enemies of my lord the king and all who have plotted against you be like that young man!' " (2 Sam 18:32, ESV). At that, the king's demeanor shifted (2 Sam 18:33). David's celebration of victory was defeated by sadness and

¹⁰ Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, The New American Commentary 7 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 423.

mourning over the death of his eldest son. Bad news conquered good news—and not just for David, but for his people as well (2 Sam 19:2).

Six times in 2 Samuel 18, the act of telling King David about the military victory was translated in the Septuagint with εὐαγγελίζω. These are not the only instances involving the news of an opponent's defeat. In 1 Samuel 31:9 and 1 Chronicles 10:9, the term appears in context of a Philistine victory. The Philistines showcased the remains of their enemy Saul to their people as a celebration of their military victory over Israel's king at Mount Gilboa. "They had won a major victory over the Israelites, decimated Israel's dynastic family, and gained control of the most strategic portion of the Via Maris in Palestine," observed Bergen.¹¹ They severed Saul's head and proceeded to parade his body, head, and armor through their towns and showcase them at temples and fortresses (1 Sam 31:10; 1 Chron 10:10). The remains were trophies,¹² and this win was good news to both the people of Philistia and to their gods (1 Sam 31:9, ESV; cf. 1 Chron 10:9). Hence, this act of εὐαγγελίζω was more than the celebration of victory. It was worship. According to Baldwin, the Philistines "made capital out of their victory by congratulating their gods, and by dedicating Saul's armour to become a trophy in *the temple of Ashtaroth*... The foreign deity had triumphed, and the decapitated body of Israel's anointed king was hung, exposed, on the city wall..."¹³

On the other hand, when David found out that Saul and Saul's son Jonathan, one of David's closest friends, had died in battle, he mourned. In 2 Samuel 1:20, he lamented over their deaths. David prayed that the news of Saul's and Jonathan's would not be celebrated in the streets and cities of Philistia. Anderson commented that David asked for the impossible "in order to express a fervent wish ... namely, that Israel's humiliation should not be magnified in

¹¹ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 283.

¹² Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 2:555.

¹³ Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 8 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 182.

Philistia”¹⁴ News of their deaths was not good news to David. Nevertheless, the Septuagint recognized that the Philistine’s actions, their proclamation and celebration of victory, were a form of εὐαγγελίζω. The victory was bitter news to David, but it was indeed good news to the victors.

The only use of εὐαγγέλιον is found in the Septuagint’s translation of 2 Samuel 4:10. Two men had just assassinated Ish-bosheth, the biological heir to Saul’s throne (2 Sam 4:5-7). Samuel had long ago anointed David to succeed Saul, but Ish-bosheth was Saul’s own flesh and blood. Because of that lineage, part of the nation had rejected David and embraced Ish-bosheth as their king (2 Sam 2:8-10). But when these two men betrayed Ish-bosheth, struck him down in broad daylight, and came running to tell David their good news—that they had killed David’s rival for the throne—David met them with an unexpected response.

David began to tell these glorified brigands of the time when another man came running to David to tell him news of a great victory. The man’s good news was the death of King Saul, for which the messenger proudly claimed personal responsibility. According to David, this man thought his εὐαγγέλιον, his news of victory over Saul, would be received as good news for David too. Saul had hunted and persecuted David almost relentlessly since David’s anointing by Samuel. Furthermore, with Saul out of the way, David could ascend to the throne that was rightfully his. Surely Saul’s would be good news to the heir apparent. Boy, was he wrong. David told these marauders that he executed Saul’s killer for striking down the Lord’s anointed, and then ordered the same for two men who killed Ish-bosheth (2 Sam 4:10, 12). Baldwin commented, “If these two were after a reward, they should know that David rewarded with death the one who carried the news that Saul was dead, and their cold-blooded murder deserved at least the same sentence.”¹⁵

¹⁴ A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary 11 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1998), 17.

¹⁵ Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 207.

In total, 11 of the 12 occurrences of the εὐαγγέλιον-εὐαγγελίζω family of words in the historical narratives referred to celebratory news, news of a victory, of a conquest, of a defeat of one's enemy. This backdrop could set a powerful tone for the New Testament occurrences.

Time and again, Jesus was depicted as proclaiming the good news of God and His kingdom (cf. Matt 4:23; 9:35; Luke 4:43; 8:1). Jesus was talking to Jews who had known little other than oppression and subjugation since the Babylonian sacking of Jerusalem in 586 BC. A message of YHWH's great victory would have been very attractive to a people who had been beat down and defeated over and over again. Obviously the miracles would have drawn a crowd, but so too would a message of hope such as a victorious YHWH.

Another instance where the idea of the victory of God might impact exegesis is Mark 1:1. Mark began his book with ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ,” Mark 1:1). The first evidence of εὐαγγέλιον as a technical term for this genre came from the heretic Marcion in the second century AD.¹⁶ So Carson and Moo were open to the possibility of this being a heading for the entire work, but they were more inclined to see the verbless clause as simply a heading for 1:1-13, the “preliminaries to the ministry.”¹⁷ Lane and Stein agreed that this was not a title for the book, though Stein felt this verse served as a theme verse for the Mark's work.¹⁸ On the other hand, France and Edwards concurred that this verse encapsulated the synopsis of Mark.¹⁹

Assuming that verse 1 is a summation of the whole of the book, then Mark juxtaposed two chronologically conflicting terms in the summary: ἀρχὴ and εὐαγγέλιον. Ἀρχὴ here means

¹⁶ Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 40.

¹⁷ Carson, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 169.

¹⁸ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 42; Stein, *Mark*, 40.

¹⁹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 52; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 23.

“the commencement of something as an action, process, or state of being.”²⁰ However, if εὐαγγέλιον is the good news of a victory, such news can only be known on the other side of the conflict. The fight must be over in order to declare a winner. Thus Mark’s message was a retelling of the beginning of “the end,” the start of what would be Jesus’s victorious campaign to retake God’s creation. The war would be won. Jesus would be the victor. Mark’s narrative told the only story worthy of immense celebration. It was the best good news the world had ever heard.

At the same time, Mark did not have the end of the good news to tell. Mark’s narrative followed Jesus through his teachings and miracles, through his passion and crucifixion, and up to the empty tomb. But according to this header, that was not the end. Mark left his readers hanging in chapter 16, wondering how the good news would end. Extrapolating theologically, the end of the good news is the personal, literal, visible return of Christ and with that, His victory over sin, death, and Satan. Any understanding of the gospel, of the good news of Christ’s victory, would therefore be incomplete without Christ’s Second Advent and final conquest of all that opposes God.

The Return of the King

The second most prolific context for εὐαγγελίζω in the Septuagint was in the mouths of the Prophets, especially Isaiah. Never short of vivid, soul-stirring imagery, the prophets painted beautiful, captivating word pictures. In doing so, they gave explicit content for the good news, for the gospel.

In Isaiah 40:9, the prophet wrote, “Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, ‘Behold your God!’ ” (ESV). The Septuagint translators readily picked

²⁰ Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 137, s.v. 1a.

up on the twice-repeated participle of בָּשַׂר, a verb literally meaning to “bear tidings.”²¹

Εὐαγγελίζω and בָּשַׂר do not always correspond, as בָּשַׂר was used also when announcing bad news (cf. 1 Sam 4:17), but in this instance, their meanings run parallel.²²

According to this verse, the people of the city of God will one day serve as metaphorical watchmen for the nation. They will direct their fellow countrymen’s attention to the return of their God in their capital. This news was so important that they are to shout it from the mountaintops. “The promise of his [God’s] presence and the revelation of his glory there reverse the centuries of struggle for Israel with the kingdoms and the peoples, and even with Jerusalem herself,” wrote Watts.²³ The news was so unbelievably good that Isaiah exhorted the heralds not to fear, not to waiver, not to doubt the news of God’s return.²⁴

Isaiah continued describing God’s return in verse 10: “Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him” (Isa 40:10a, ESV). *Might* (קִיּוֹן) “means ‘strong’ in the sense of ‘powerful’.”²⁵ Similarly, the *arm of God* was God’s power and authority, His “personal strength in action.”²⁶ According to Young, “The arm will rule for God’s benefit, bringing into subjection whatever stands in the way of His coming, or casting down all opposition.”²⁷ NET translated these two phrases as: “Look, the sovereign Lord comes as a victorious warrior; his

²¹ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles Augustus Briggs, *The Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 142.

²² J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), under Isa 40:9, Logos Bible Software.

²³ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, Word Biblical Commentary 25, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 613.

²⁴ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, under Isa 40:9.

²⁵ Carl Philip Weber, “636 קִיּוֹן,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 277.

²⁶ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, under Isa 40:10.

²⁷ Edward Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1972), 39.

military power establishes his rule.” The good news was that the rightful sovereign would come with the power to reclaim His throne and exercise dominion.

Yet this good news was not merely good for the Sovereign. Judah was not trading one tyrant or repressive regime for another. Isaiah continued, “behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him” (Isa 40:10b, ESV). *Reward* and *recompense* are synonymous.²⁸ They depict the spoils of war returning home with the victors, “booty and tribute carried home by triumphant warriors.”²⁹ God’s return, and the blessing this return brought, would benefit the cities and people of the nation.³⁰ “The Lord will bring with him the spoils of his victory, his wages as a soldier, and will distribute them among his people,” Oswalt commented.³¹ For God had promised His people material provision and blessing: “I will provide the priests with abundant provisions. My people will be filled to the full with the good things I provide” (Jer 31:14, NET). Later in Isaiah even, God promised Israel the wealth of the nations (Isa 61:6; 66:12).

The good news got better still. “Like a shepherd he tends his flock; he gathers up the lambs with his arm; he carries them close to his heart; he leads the ewes along” (Isa 40:12, NET). God would come as a shepherd, tenderly caring for His people as though they were helpless lambs. In contrast to arms concerned with authority and military might, in this verse they are preoccupied with the care and well being of His people.³² The Hebrew literally reads that God would carry them “in his bosom”—in other words, with great care and intimacy.³³ YHWH would rule with the love and concern, the tenderness and leadership of a shepherd. Smith concluded,

²⁸ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, under Isa 40:10.

²⁹ Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, 612.

³⁰ Michael A. Fishbane, *Haftarot*, The JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2002), 281.

³¹ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 55.

³² Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, The New American Commentary 15b (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 100.

³³ *NET Bible*, 1st ed., note on Isa 40:11 (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Logos Bible Software.

“He is the good shepherd (Ps 23:1; Ezek 34) who will take responsibility for his sheep, especially those that are vulnerable among the flock.”³⁴

Isaiah 40 marks the great turning point in Isaiah’s prophecy. No longer is the message one of gloom and destruction, but starting in chapter 40, Isaiah looks to the future, towards a coming day where everything is set right once again. Watts remarked, “Its optimistic, exuberant tone, contrasted with the dark pessimism of chap. 6, is prompted by the imminent coming of YHWH to Zion.”³⁵ The gospel of the return of God to Jerusalem, the good news that Zion will proclaim, will mark “a new day for Jerusalem without the continuing burden of her guilt... The world will once again know that God is in his temple and in his city.”³⁶

Building on this eschatological content of the good news, the Septuagint captured another dual appearance the root רָשַׁן with εὐαγγελίζω in Isaiah 52:7. “How delightful it is to see approaching over the mountains the feet of a messenger who announces peace, a messenger who brings good news, who announces deliverance, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’ ” (NIV84). The imagery of a lone messenger on foot bringing good news is that of a messenger returning from battle with news of victory (cf. 2 Sam 18:24-32).³⁷ Motyer asserted, “*How beautiful* they would reckon the sight of a lone runner—not a straggle of fugitives betokening defeat, but one messenger with a spring in his step!”³⁸ Furthermore, Oswalt noted the potential for irony in that feet, which would have been typically dusty, dirty, grimy, and generally thought of as unattractive, were ascribed beauty.³⁹ “If that is intended, the point would be that this news is so

³⁴ Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 100.

³⁵ Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 612.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 613.

³⁷ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, under Isa 52:7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 367-68.

wonderful that even the most common and ordinary means by which it arrives is touched by its splendor.”⁴⁰

The messenger, the proclaimer of good news, will declare news of 1) peace, 2) good, 3) deliverance, and 4) the sovereignty of Zion’s God. In the context of a purely military victory, this would mean 1) the cessation of conflict, 2) the absence of any detracting bad news, 3) the freedom for the oppressed, and 4) the enthronement of a new king.⁴¹ But the context was not a purely military victory. Isaiah was speaking theologically about God and His people, about salvation and eschatology.

Peace, שָׁלוֹם (“shalom”), in Isaiah’s prophetic writings extended beyond armies laying down their weapons to cessation of hostility between God and His people.⁴² The root verb of shalom, שָׁלַם, meant to “be finished” or “to make complete.”⁴³ While the etymology of shalom can cast a sense of completeness or wholeness on the nature of the peace in view here, Isaiah used shalom to depict a state of existence where sin and evil have been eradicated, where righteousness prevails (cf. Isa 32:17; 48:18; 54:13; 60:17).⁴⁴ Hence, the good news was the takeover of righteousness and elimination of sin and evil.

Good, טוֹב, “indicates a state or function appropriate to genre, purpose, or situation.”⁴⁵ For instance, טוב appears seven times in Genesis 1. It affirmed the rightness of what God had created. In Isaiah 52:7, scholars have contested the meaning of *good*. Motyer held that it meant “there is no bad news to mar the situation.”⁴⁶ Young thought *good* characterized the message

⁴⁰ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 367-68.

⁴¹ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, under Isa 52:7.

⁴² Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 330.

⁴³ Philip J. Nel, “שָׁלַם,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 4:130.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4:132.

⁴⁵ Robert P. Gordon, “טוֹב,” in VanGemeren, 2:353.

⁴⁶ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, under Isa 52:7.

itself, saying, “This message originates with God, and refers to the blessing that alone is good, the salvation of sinful mankind.”⁴⁷ Both Motyer’s anemic answer and Young’s overreaching answer are unsatisfactory. More in line with the fundamental meaning of טוב, Oswalt purported that *good* was “a condition where creation purposes are realized.”⁴⁸ So the good news was a declaration of the return to the way things ought to be.

Deliverance, יְשׁוּעָה, is theologically rich and often translated as *salvation*. Isaiah alone used various forms of its root word, יָשַׁע, 56 times. At its core, the verb meant “to help.”⁴⁹ The Jewish nation had long lived in the shadows of their powerful, intimidating, oppressive, and occupying neighbors, especially Assyria and Babylon. They pleaded for help from YHWH. Deliverance meant that freedom had finally come, that the people of God were no longer under the thumb of their godless neighbors.⁵⁰ Young rebutted this understanding as too small, saying “it is a salvation from all those things that bring God’s wrath upon men.”⁵¹ While sin—that is, that which brings wrath upon men—does oppress, so too do demons and weather, corporations and nations. Hence *gospel* should be understood to include a release from any force, intrinsic or extrinsic, material or immaterial, “that might harm, oppress, or attempt to overpower.”⁵²

Finally, the climax of the good news was the enthronement of YHWH. Observed Motyer, “*Your God reigns* echoes the familiar cultic cry of Psalms 93:1; 97:1; 99:1. In those days they sang the words ... in praise of a kingship acknowledged by faith. But Isaiah envisages a day when faith will pass into sight and the Victor himself will be seen face to face.”⁵³ Moreover,

⁴⁷ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 330.

⁴⁸ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 368.

⁴⁹ F. Stolz, “יָשַׁע,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 584.

⁵⁰ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, under Isa 52:7.

⁵¹ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 330.

⁵² Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 423.

⁵³ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, under Isa 52:7.

shalom, good, deliverance characterize of the reign of YHWH.⁵⁴ They find their complete fulfillment only in the unadulterated rule of God. Consequently, the good news could very well boil down to this one statement: “Your God reigns!”

Restoration and Justice

One of the most memorable passages of Isaiah’s prophecy is Isaiah 61:1, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners” (NASB95). Again, the Septuagint translated the infinitive construct of *קָשַׁר* with an infinitive form of *εὐαγγελίζω*. However, whereas Isaiah 52:7 equated four messages—shalom, good, deliverance, and the enthronement of God—with the good news, this verse and the two that follow identified both words and deeds that accompany the proclamation of the good news.

Isaiah began by establishing the poor, the afflicted, as the intended recipient of the good news. *Afflicted* came from the Hebrew adjective *עָנָו*, meaning *bowed*.⁵⁵ The term connotes a person who bears the weight of heavy circumstances, who cannot stand upright, who has become humbled.⁵⁶ Coppes explained the term as emphasizing “the moral and spiritual condition” of a person associated with “a suffering life rather than with one of worldly happiness and abundance.”⁵⁷ The news for those whom life had beat down, those who needed help and relief. By inference then, the gospel was not a message that would further trod on the downtrodden. It was the help and relief and restoration for which the afflicted so desperately yearned.

⁵⁴ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 368.

⁵⁵ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, rev. Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm, trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson (New York, NY: E. J. Brill, 1999), 855.

⁵⁶ W. J. Dumbrell, “עָנָו, עָנָי,” in VanGemeren, 3:455.

⁵⁷ Leonard J. Coppes, “1652 עָנָו,” in Harris, 682.

By virtue of his grammar, Isaiah included four complementary descriptions that would explain what bringing good news looked like.⁵⁸ First, bringing good news, bringing a word of relief, was coupled with caring for the heart-broken. The term *binding* was used in a variety of contexts, one of which was medicinal. In Isaiah 1:6, the prophet portrayed Judah's spiritual state as a physical wound in desperate need of *binding* in the aftermath of God's oft-repeated discipline.⁵⁹ In 61:1, the ailment needing medical treatment was a *broken heart*, an affliction that Motyer believed "covers any and every human breakdown, from emotional prostration to conviction of sin."⁶⁰ Yet the context here in 61:1 does not lend itself to a sense of a universal cure-all for every emotional affliction. Instead, if the good news is about a victory, about the rule of YHWH, the context seems to suggest that the care is of those who had lost hope in God, in His goodness, and in His sovereignty.

Second, the good news was the declaration of liberty to captives. Five of the seven times *קָדַר* is used in the Old Testament to refer to liberty, the context was the release of slaves in the year of rest, the sabbatical year (cf. Lev 25:10; Jer 34:8, 15, 17).⁶¹ However, in this verse, the freedom was for captives, not slaves. The translation *captives* comes from the masculine plural passive participle of the verb *שָׁבַח*. This verb "chiefly conveys the idea of a military or para-military force subduing a foe and then taking into their possession the men, women, children, cattle, and wealth of the defeated party."⁶²

Isaiah wrote his prophecy in the same era when Assyria conquered the northern tribes, hauled off Judah's kinsmen, and established itself as the new authority in Palestine. Mighty Assyria also threatened the same fate for Judah, and one hundred fifty years later,

⁵⁸ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 565.

⁵⁹ T. Desmond Alexander, "הַבֵּיט," in VanGemeren, 2:19.

⁶⁰ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, under Isa 61:1.

⁶¹ Koehler, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 230-31.

⁶² Gary G. Cohen, "שָׁבַח 2311," in Harris, 895.

Babylon would ultimately make good on the threat and take Judah into subjugation. So the good news was the removal of the foreign tyrannical power. It was the dissolution of the oppressive alien regime.

Yet, while the language appears related to ancient Israel's place in history, it also allows for the undoing of an even greater foreign power, namely sin. "The captivity in which the true Israel of God lay was far deeper. The people were captives to sin and bound with the fetters of iniquity," commented Young.⁶³

With the freedom from foreign tyranny, Isaiah wrote, "and to the bound ones, opening" (וְלַאֲסוּרִים פְּקַח־קוֹחַ). Understanding this clause is particularly challenging. The term פְּקַח־קוֹחַ only appears once in Old Testament. The verb that forms the plural passive participle translated "bound ones" was used literally of penal confinement (Gen 39:20; Judg 16:21; 2 Sam 3:34; 2 Kings 17:4; Jer 39:7; 40:1) and metaphorically of making an oath, being tethered, being ensnared, or even beginning a battle (cf. Num 30:3, 4; 1 Sam 6:7; 1 Kings 20:14; Song 7:5-6).⁶⁴

The NET, ESV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV and even the NLT carried forward the language of captivity, translating the phrase something akin to "freeing the prisoners." However, the Septuagint renders the phrase as "and recovery of sight to the blind." The NIV appears to attempt to bridge the two with "and release from darkness for the prisoners." Moreover, Luke 4:18 records Jesus citing the Septuagint rendering, and Jesus used the blind receiving sight as an authentication of His Messiahship to John the Baptist (cf. Luke 7:22).

Jesus may have condescended to the common first century AD understanding of Isaiah 61:1. Or "the interchangeability of these ideas may support the interpretation of these infinitive clauses that use different metaphors to refer to the same reality: the reversal of the

⁶³ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 460.

⁶⁴ A. H. Konkel, "אָסַר," in VanGemeren, 473.

fortune of Israel.”⁶⁵ If that is the case, then the good news involved freedom from bondage and imprisonment by tangible or intangible realities.

Third, in 61:2, Isaiah bundled God’s blessing as well as His justice and wrath with the good news. By introducing these ideas with the same “to proclaim” as verse 1, Isaiah was continuing the content of the good news. Isaiah had already set the expectation of YHWH’s favor to come with the coming of the Servant (Isa 49:8). In 60:7 and 10, the prophet said Israel would witness God’s favor through the transformation of the nations, particularly the nations God had used to discipline Israel, into sources of encouragement and material blessing. Obviously divine favor was good news, especially to the poor.

On the other hand, divine wrath would not be good news to all. Like the year of favor, Isaiah had also already foretold of a day when God would mete out justice (Isa 34:8). The objects of His wrath would truly rue their choice to cross Him, to act unjustly, to persecute, to oppress. But for the poor and oppressed, justice would indeed be sweet music to their ears. “It is a great source of comfort to anyone who is oppressed to know that the source of the oppression will one day get exactly what it deserves, and that its power will be broken,” voiced Oswalt.⁶⁶

In addition, the differential between a day of justice and a year of favor was not a theological statement about God’s preference for favor over wrath. Rather the expressions were colloquialisms meaning “a time for favor” and “a time for vengeance.”⁶⁷ Moreover, they will both commence with the return of the Divine King, the Great Day of the Lord.⁶⁸

Lastly, Isaiah said the gospel served “to comfort all those who mourn” (Isa 61:2c, ESV). In the pi’el stem, נַחַם means “to comfort,” yet “the basic prerequisite of statements made

⁶⁵ David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Luke,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2007), 288.

⁶⁶ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 566.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 635.

with [נָחַם pi‘el] seems to be the personal willingness and presence of the one for the other.”⁶⁹ In other words, the gospel would not come as a billboard sign, a website, or a TV ad. It would come with a person, someone who would enter into the reality of the poor and afflicted. It would come with physical touch and a personal presence.

In addition, those who mourn were grieving over a calamity, not merely grieving in general or even grieving a death.⁷⁰ The people mourning were people who saw the state of Jerusalem and Israel for the travesty they were.⁷¹ These people recognized the great depths to which their city and nation had fallen as a result of their sin and disregard for YHWH and His subsequent discipline. So then, the good news included the return of the personal presence of God to His people, the removal of the wretchedness that led to the Divine judgment, and the restoration of His people, His city, and His nation.

In verse 3, Isaiah elaborated further on what the comfort in verse 2. He wrote, “to strengthen those who mourn in Zion, by giving them a turban, instead of ashes, oil symbolizing joy, instead of mourning, a garment symbolizing praise, instead of discouragement” (Isa 61:3a-d, NET). The thrust of this verse is a reversal of demeanor. Joy will replace sadness. People will walk upright rather than slumped over. New life and energy will refresh and refill the people. “The point is that mourning, which was so often a part of the nation’s history, will end and praise will begin. The head ornament (a positive symbol) will be used ‘instead of’ the ashes (a negative symbol) because a new era of salvation has arrived,” wrote Smith.⁷²

In summary, the good news that YHWH reigns was, as Oswalt said, for:

those who are so broken by life that they have no more heart to try; those who are so bound up in their various addictions that liberty and release are a cruel mirage; those who think that they will never again experience the favor of the Lord, or see his just

⁶⁹ H. J. Stoebe, “נָחַם,” in Jenni, 735.

⁷⁰ Brown, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 5.

⁷¹ Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 7:581.

⁷² Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 636.

vengeance meted out against those who have misused them; those who think that their lives hold nothing more than ashes, sackcloth, and the fainting heaviness of despair.⁷³

The gospel would replace sorrow with joy, oppression with justice, and doubt in God with confidence. It would come in flesh. It would bring freedom and comfort.

Deliverance

Integrated into each of the three previous discussions of the gospel's nature and content has been the notion of deliverance. In some cases, it was an undercurrent. In others, it was present on the very surface. As a result, any discussion of the gospel would be incomplete without probing this reoccurring theme further.

Returning to the historical narratives, twice the message of the good news was word of deliverance. Both Ahimaaz and the Cushite understood that the news of Absalom's defeat was news of deliverance for King David from his enemy (2 Kings 18:18, 31). Moreover, they saw King David's deliverance not as merely cosmic faith, but as an act of YHWH Himself. David's troops may have fought Absalom's army, but the victory was YHWH's. The verb of YHWH's action, *בָּרַחַ*, often conveyed action along the lines of *decide* or *judge*, but in this case, the surrounding syntax altered the meaning to *save* or *deliver* or *vindicate*.⁷⁴ Hence the good news was, as Keil and Delitzsch asserted, that "Jehovah had 'procured the king justice out of the hand of his enemies.'" ⁷⁵ Hence, the gospel included judicial deliverance.

Deliverance in Isaiah 52:7 was discussed in greater detail in the section "The Return of the King." There, a noun derived from *יָשַׁע*, not *בָּרַחַ*, was the content of the gospel. That deliverance, that salvation, revealed God's sovereignty. "Further salvation witnesses to the fact

⁷³ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 565.

⁷⁴ Koehler, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 1625.

⁷⁵ Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2:662.

that God cares about his people,” said Hartley, “Salvation flows from his love... Salvation is thus God’s love in action.”⁷⁶ Thus Isaiah’s gospel was God’s love for man.

The psalmist too spoke of God’s deliverance in Psalm 96:2. The good news the psalm instructs its readers to proclaim is the same יְשׁוּעָה as Isaiah 52:7. The psalmist paralleled this salvation with God’s glory and His wondrous deeds in verse 3. All three constitute the good news for all times and nations and peoples.⁷⁷ All three should beckon people to worship YHWH. Goldingay noted, “Yhwh’s deliverance is usually something benefiting Israel, though this deliverance can have positive significance for all the world; but there is no reference to Israel in this psalm, and the expression may rather suggest directly that Yhwh is the world’s deliverer as well as Israel’s.”⁷⁸ So the psalmist’s gospel was God’s salvation for all mankind.

An Opportunity for Further Study

Akin to the Septuagint, the writings of the Apostolic Fathers also possess a special voice in understanding New Testament terminology. They are neither inspired nor authoritative over the canonical books. Yet they offer a unique vantage point on the New Testament. These writings are “the earliest extant Christian writings outside the New Testament,” dating roughly between AD 70 and 135.⁷⁹ More importantly, their authors were men with direct interaction with the Apostles themselves.⁸⁰ According to Hagner,

Rather than being creators they [the Apostolic Fathers] are supreme adapters of the theology they received. These writings, in short, throw light upon the church of the late first century to the middle of the second, a church faced with a variety of difficult problems. These they address by means of the frequent quotation of OT Scripture, the

⁷⁶ John E. Hartley, “929 יְשׁוּעָה ,” in Harris, 416.

⁷⁷ John Goldingay, *Psalms*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. Tremper Longman, III, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 103.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Michael William Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, updated ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 1.

⁸⁰ William R. Schoedel, “Apostolic Fathers,” in Freedman, 1:313.

sayings of Jesus and the tradition of the apostles. Using these materials and others, they consolidate the faith and practice of the church in an era of increasing challenges. In so doing they remain remarkably faithful to what they had received.⁸¹

These writers were not merely citing the primary sources for the tradition of the faith. They had lived in the midst of those sources. They were striving to preserve, protect, and pass along the faith as they had received it.

In relation to εὐαγγέλιον and εὐαγγελίζω, the Apostolic Fathers provide the best reflection of the Apostles' understanding of these terms—second only to what the Apostles themselves wrote. In addition, the Fathers could clarify these terms and further synthesize any oral tradition that had also passed from their apostolic mentors. By studying the Father's works and their use of εὐαγγέλιον and εὐαγγελίζω, more can be learned about how their teachers understood the gospel.

Conclusion

When the New Testament authors spoke of the gospel or of proclaiming good news, they did so using a family of terms loaded with theological significance. The meaning of εὐαγγέλιον and εὐαγγελίζω was informed by its usage in the Septuagint. In the historical narrative, the good news was that of a victory over an enemy. For Isaiah, the gospel was the return of God as the rightful king. With the King's return came restoration and justice, a reinstatement of the proper and good order of creation. Undergirding each of these aspects of the gospel was deliverance and salvation. The good news was that God would act out of His love and vindicate His people, and such news was cause for worldwide rejoicing and worship. In the substitutionary death and resurrection of Christ, the good news of victory, of the returning King, of restoration and justice, and of deliverance all begin to come to fruition.

⁸¹ D. A. Hagner, "Apostolic Fathers," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997) under sec., "7. The Significance of the Apostolic Fathers," Logos Bible Software.

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