

When the Gospel was dangerous

Why the Gospel was once a cause for Roman persecution.

Persecution



- For Christ's sake, Matt. 5:11; **Luke 21:12**
- During Limited Commission, Matt. 10:23
- Prediction of Jews persecuting Christians, Matt. 23:34
- Those who hate Christ & His disciples, John 15:20

Christianity challenged all authority.



- Herod tried to murder Christ as a child, Matt. 2:1-20
- The New Testament represents an end to:
 - The **Mosaic Law** (Gal. 3:24-25; Gal. 5:3-4; Eph. 2:14-15; Col. 2:14-17; Heb. 8:7-13);
 - The **Levite Priesthood** (Heb. 7:11-8:5); and
 - **Paganism** (Acts 15:29) & pagan trade guilds (Acts 16:16-24, 19:23-41).

Did the Gospel call for uprisings against Rome?

Christians have respect for civil authority:

- Rom. 13:1-7 (written during Nero's reign) subject to gov. authorities
- 1 Peter 2:13-17 – submit to ordinances
- Titus 3:1-2 – subject to rulers & auth.



Did Christianity call for uprisings against Rome?

Strangers to Christ heard stories about:

- A new Kingdom, Lord & King
- Words that the Caesars associated with themselves: Gospel, Peace, Son of God, & Savior
- Prophecies of a conquering King,
Rev. 19:11-16



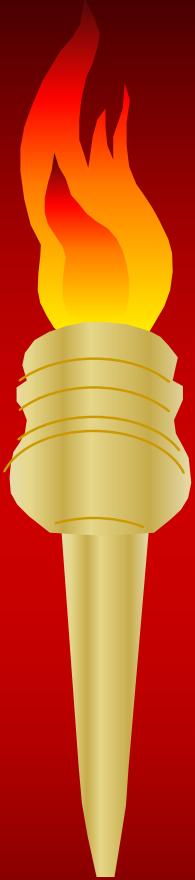


Mark 1:1 – Dangerous Words?

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ,
the Son of God.”

The Gospel of Mark was written to a **Roman**
audience.

Meaning of “Gospel” in the First Century



- “the celebration of the accession (the attainment of dignity or rank), or birth, of a king or emperor.”
- “In Paul’s world the main ‘gospel’ was the news of or celebration of Caesar.”

- N.T. Wright, The Center for
Theological Inquiry

The Gospel of Caesar



- Augustus' birthday was considered the beginning of the gospel in the Roman world.
- “the birthday of the god [Augustus] was for the world the beginning of tidings of joy....” (cf. **Lk. 2:8-11**)

Calendar Inscription from Priene
(c. 9 BC; line 40)

Compare the Gospels

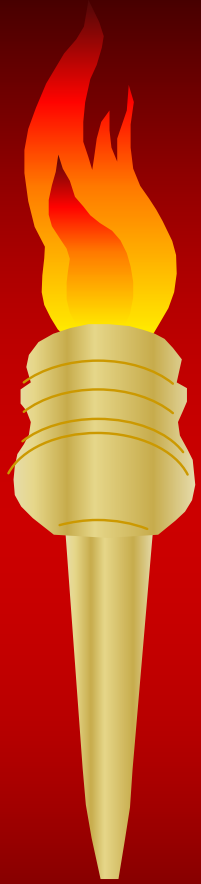


“*The beginning of the gospel* of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” (Mark 1:1)

“... I bring you *good tidings of great joy* which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day ... a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11)

“the birthday of the god [Augustus] was for the world *the beginning of tidings of joy*”

Calendar Inscription from Priene (c. 9 BC; line 40)



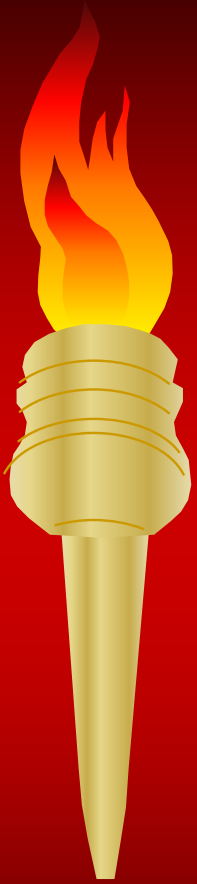
When First Century Roman citizens heard “gospel,” they thought “Rome” or “Caesar,” and when they heard “peace,” they thought of war.

Peace in the First Century

“To robbery, slaughter, plunder, they give the lying name of empire; and where they made destitution, they call it peace.”

Calgacus, chieftan of the Britons, in a speech before battle against Agricola,
in *Agricola* 30

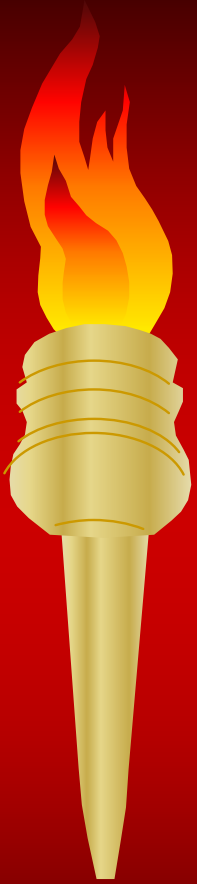




Peace in The First Century

- *Pax Romana*, the peace of Rome, was also called *Pax Augustus*, not because there was peace in the world, but there was an end to the civil wars in Rome.
- The Altar of Peace (*Ara Pacis*) stood on the Hill of Mars, the god of war.

Compare the Peace



- Rome brought peace through violence against others
- Rome crushed others
- Christ brought peace by suffering violence,
Col. 1:19-20
- Christ crushed Satan, Rom. 16:20



The Peace of Christ

The peace Christ brings (e.g., Rom. 5:1) is not equality with God, but the absence of hostility (**Eph. 2:14-18**) after we submit to Christ.

Son of God – Matt. 22:15-22



Front: “Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus”

Back (in Latin): “Greatest Priest.” (cf. Heb. 2:17, 3:1, 4:14, 5:9-10, 6:20, etc.)

Back (in Greek): “son of the god,” (cf. Mk. 1:1; Mt. 14:33; Mt. 27:43, **Mt. 27:54**)

Jesus, rival to Caesar?

- Convicted by the Sanhedrin for claiming to be the Son of God, **Matt. 26:63-66**
- Jesus admitted to being King, **Jn. 18:33-38**
- Jesus was crucified (in part) for allegedly speaking against Caesar, **Jn. 19:6-16**



Savior (“deliverer”, “liberator”)

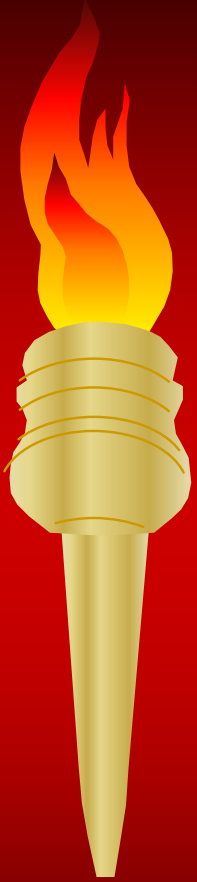
Julius Caesar, “savior of the citizens”

Augustus Caesar,
“savior of the world”
and “the savior of the
inhabited earth.”

Jn. 4:42; 1 Jn. 4:14-15



Christ's Gospel was perceived as a challenge to Roman authority.



- Apostles were accused of creating dissension (Acts 24:4-5) and violating Roman law (**Acts 16:21**)
- The Gospel had “turned the world upside down,” **Acts 17:6-7**
- History & Tradition says all Apostles martyred except John

The Gospel is no less challenging today



- Abortion
- Adultery
- Drinking
- Homosexuality
- Unscriptural Divorces & Marriages
- Abdul Rahman