**Mark 1:14-15**

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/mark/mark-1/mark-114-15/>

Mark’s terse statement, “Jesus came,” is in effect a first-century press release with three points: the time is fulfilled; the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe. Jews needed to repent from believing Jesus was an illegitimate son of a carpenter from a backwater town, to believing He was the Messiah foretold by the prophets and announced by John the Baptizer. Gentiles needed to repent from believing Jesus was an erudite eccentric Jewish philosopher from a backwater country, to believing He was the savior of the world.

The parallel gospel accounts for this passage are Matthew 4:12-17; Luke 4:14-15.

Mark starts by telling us (almost as a side note) that John had been taken into custody. This gives us insight into the sequence of events—but no information about the context of John’s arrest.

It appears John the Baptist was arrested twice. We are not told which arrest is being referred to. Matthew and Mark say John was taken into custody during Jesus’s forty days in the wilderness, while the Gospel writer John says that the Baptizer was arrested sometime later after Jesus’s ministry was in full swing, sometime after Jesus’s secret meeting with Nicodemus. At that time Jesus began baptizing people in Judea while John was baptizing people in Aenon near Salim (John 3:22-23). (Aenon and Salim are located on the Jordan River approximately fifty miles north of the Dead Sea and forty miles south of Galilee.)

The first time John was arrested was likely by the religious leaders who did not like being called a “brood of vipers” by John (Matthew 3:7). These religious leaders probably took John into custody, interrogated him, and then let him go, a pattern observed in other biblical stories. John for his part moved further north out of Judea (and closer to Herod Antipas’s jurisdiction in Galilee) where he continued to preach repentance and of God’s coming kingdom. John the Baptizer would later be arrested a second time, this time by Herod Antipas who would reluctantly have him executed. Given that Mark is describing Jesus’s initial choice for His ministry headquarters, it seems more likely he is referring to John’s first arrest. We learn the details of the second arrest in Matthew 14:3-12 and Mark 6:17-29.

Neither Mark nor Matthew (Matthew 4:12) tell us who arrested John, only that as a result of John’s imprisonment, Jesus withdrew into Galilee to conduct His early ministry away from the lion’s den of the Sadducees in Judea.

Mark uses Now indicating that what happened next occurred sometime after Jesus’s temptation by the devil in the wilderness and His being ministered to by angels (Mark 1:12-13). This is similar to Matthew’s use of “Now when” (Matthew 4:12) to signal a break in the narrative. The events captured by the Gospel writer John in John 2:13–4:45 suggest Jesus had a ministry in Judea during the narrative break in Matthew and Mark’s gospels. It seems that there was little known fruit from His time in Judea. It may be that the one disciple from the twelve that Jesus picked up from His early Judean ministry was Judas Iscariot. Iscariot means “of Kerioth.” Keirioth was a town located in the far south of Judea, approximately 25 miles south of Jerusalem and 10 miles west of the Dead Sea. (See Map).

According to Matthew, Jesus came and settled in Capernaum, a small fishing village on the northern shoreline by the sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:12-3). This region is in the ancient tribal lands of Zebulun and Naphtali among the northern borders of Israel.

Matthew provides additional insight not included by Mark by citing an Old Testament scripture and explaining how it is a direct fulfillment of Messianic prophecy (Matthew 4:14-16).

Matthew quotes from the prophet Isaiah,

“But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

The people who walk in darkness
Will see a great light;
Those who live in a dark land,
The light will shine on them.”
(Isaiah 9:1-2)

Isaiah’s prophecy was given to the Kingdom of Judah, foretelling the Assyrian invasion of Israel and Judah from the north. The border regions of Zebulun and Naphtali would take the brunt of this invading force. The “gloom,” “anguish,” “contempt,” and “darkness” from this invasion was fulfilled within the prophet’s lifetime. But the “later on” dawning glory and great light is the future presence of the Messiah who would begin and base His ministry in these same regions.

Matthew’s citation slightly modifies the Isaiah text, “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali” (Matthew 4:15a) refer to the territory around Galilee. Zebulun and Naphtali are two of the twelve tribes of Israel, and had specific borders appointed during the time of Joshua (Joshua 19:10-16; 32-39). “By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee” (Matthew 4:15b) echoes this reference. “Beyond the Jordan” here moreso implies “above” or “north” of the Jordan rather than our more common usage which means “across.” The phrase of “the Gentiles” is added to signal the occupying invaders. “The people who were sitting in darkness” (Matthew 4:16a) refers to those living in or from that invaded region. The Messiah’s public ministry in this region is captured by the fact that “they saw a great Light” (Matthew 4:16a). This theme is repeated: “And those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, Upon them a Light dawned” (Matthew 4:16b). An extra nuance is added by “Upon them a Light dawned.” The use of “dawned” hints that the Messiah’s public ministry will begin here. The town where Matthew tells us that Jesus begins His public ministry is Capernaum. It was a Jewish fishing village located in the Galilee region Isaiah foretold seven centuries earlier.

Mark continues by reporting that Jesus returns to Galilee (away from unbelieving Jerusalem) and begins His public preaching ministry in Galilee, which will last for about a year and a half. Jesus was preaching the gospel of God. The Greek word [εὐαγγέλιον](https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/inflections.cfm?strongs=G2098&t=KJV&ot=TR&word=εὐαγγέλιον) (g2098 - pronounced: “yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on”) is translated as gospel. It means “good news.” In Jesus’s time, to His immediately present Jewish audience, the Good News was the arrival of God's reign. For Mark's later Gentile audience, the Good News was Jesus’s death, resurrection, ascension, and promised return (Mark 15:1-16:8). The important idea to grasp is all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, need God's forgiveness through faith in Jesus.

Mark’s terse statement, Jesus came, is in effect a first-century press release with three bullet points:

1. The time is fulfilled

     2. The kingdom of God is at hand

1. Repent and believe

**The Time Is Fulfilled**

Jesus announces the time is fulfilled. He is proclaiming that the One John said would come (Mark 1:7) has now appeared! The time is a decisive and critical moment in history.

This time refers to that moment the prophets foretold when the Messiah would appear and inaugurate the kingdom of God. Here are two examples of many that foretold this:

“And it will be said in that day,
‘Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.’”
(Isaiah 25:9)

“One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.
And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
Might serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed.”
(Daniel 7:13-14)

“And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.”
(Zechariah 14:9)

This is the “fullness of time” referred to by the Apostle Paul when writing to the Galatians:

“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”
(Galatians 4:4-5)

When Jesus first came, He came to offer this kingdom to the Jews. This is what He meant when He said, the kingdom of God is at hand. And it seems He would have done so, had they received Him as their Messiah. But they rejected Him (Matthew 27:22; John 1:11) and His kingdom (John 19:14-15).

Jesus will come again, and when He does, He will establish His kingdom then.

**The Kingdom of God is at Hand**

Jesus explained what He meant when He was saying: “The time is fulfilled” with the next expression: “and the kingdom of God is at hand.” The time was fulfilled because the kingdom of God was at hand. And the kingdom of God was at hand because the King (Jesus) had arrived.

When Jesus first came to earth as a man, He came to offer this long-prophesied kingdom of God to the Jews. It seems He would have inaugurated the kingdom of God, had they received Him as their Messiah. This was how the disciples understood Jesus’s message. Throughout Jesus’s ministry, up until His ascension into heaven, they believed that the kingdom’s coming was imminent (Luke 19:11; Acts 1:6).

Even after His ascension and the Holy Spirit’s coming at Pentecost, Peter called on the Jews to repent of their rejection of Jesus “in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you” (Acts 3:19-20). In other words, Peter made the claim that if the Jews of Jesus’s generation repented of their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, God would accept this and then immediately inaugurate the kingdom of God.

But they rejected Him (John 1:11) and His kingdom (John 19:14-15). They rejected Him both before He was resurrected, as well as after. Therefore, He ascended to heaven, and awaits until the “fullness of the Gentiles” has been completed (Romans 11:25) at which time He will return to earth.

Jesus will return to earth again, this time as a conqueror (Revelation 19:11-17). And when He does, He will physically install the kingdom of God on the earth at that time (Matthew 25:31, 34).

**A Comparison of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven**

Observant readers of this passage and its Matthew parallel may notice that Mark (under the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit) records Jesus using the phrase kingdom of God while Matthew (under the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit) used the phrase: “kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 4:17).

It follows that these terms are functionally synonymous. Both expressions refer to the divine and Messianic authority of Jesus that was foretold by the prophets. The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God each share the core promise that the Lord will establish a physical, political government upon the earth with Himself and/or His Messiah as its King. This kingdom will eternally prosper under His administration of divine laws.

Moreover, many of the teachings and parables Matthew records Jesus saying about the kingdom of heaven are also said by Jesus about the kingdom of God in Mark and Luke’s narratives. This verse is one example (Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:15). A few other examples where “kingdom of heaven” is used in Matthew while Mark uses kingdom of God follow:

* The Disciples were granted to understand Mysteries of the kingdom (Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11, and Luke 8:10)
* Jesus explained the kingdom in the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:24; Mark 4:26)
* Jesus explained the kingdom in the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31; Mark 4:30, and Luke 13:18)
* The kingdom of heaven belongs to children (Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:15, and Luke 18:17)
* Entering the kingdom as a child (Matthew 19:23; Mark 10:25, and Luke 18:24)

But even though these passages functionally describe the same prophetic reality, have similar usages, and share the same core meaning, the kingdom of God had different cultural connotations from “the kingdom of heaven.” These different cultural connotations are subtle but important. The respective terms were most likely chosen and implemented based upon the author’s intended audience.

Matthew, whose primary readers were Jews, chose the term “kingdom of heaven” because it was more appealing to the Jewish sensibilities. Mark, Luke, (and even John) may have used the term kingdom of God because it was more relatable to the Gentiles, who were their primary readers.

There are three ways each term conveyed the same core meaning, but did so more effectively to each culture.

The first reason for the cultural difference relates to how Jews and Gentiles speak of God. Jews revere God’s name and are not inclined to speak directly of God. The term “kingdom of heaven” is less direct than kingdom of God, and is therefore more agreeable to Jewish sensibilities. Gentiles expected to speak directly of God.

An additional reason kingdom of God may have been more appealing than “kingdom of heaven” to Mark’s Roman and Luke’s Greek audiences is because in Greek and Roman minds, the term, God, was a more familiar, and more specific term than heaven. The Gentiles had many gods. This phrase the kingdom of God (singular) reflected a claim that God is the One True God, and was therefore over all other gods. The phrase “kingdom of heaven” could have been heard by Gentiles to include the many pagan gods that dwelt in the heaven of the Greco-Roman pantheon.

Additionally, in the Greco-Roman pantheon, heaven was accessible to humans. By using the term kingdom of God, the message being communicated to the Gentile audience is that Jesus’s ministry and salvation extends down from heaven and onto earth. It extends beyond the Jewish nation to everyone!

The third and related cultural difference between the phrase “kingdom of heaven” (Matthew) and kingdom of God (Mark) seems to be the lens with which the dominion of the kingdom is viewed.

The “kingdom of heaven” focuses on God’s rule over the earth. We get a sense of this meaning in Jesus’s prayer to His Father in heaven, that:

“Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.”
(Matthew 6:10)

This phrase makes it clear that “heaven” is a place where God’s will is done. It is a prayer for God’s authority to become as apparent on earth as it is in heaven.

As a quick aside, the Gospels were written in the Greek language. Jesus most likely spoke to His Jewish audience in some form of Aramaic, which was the common tongue of Judea in the first century. Therefore, the Gospel writers would have translated Jesus’s words into Greek, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Although, it seems likely that Matthew’s gospel was originally written and circulated in Aramaic, and later translated to Greek.

The Spirit inspired Matthew to translate Jesus’s expression as “kingdom of heaven” and Mark and Luke to translate Jesus’s same expression as kingdom of God to their respective audiences.

To learn more about this, see the Bible Says article: “[The Four Languages of Jesus’s Judea](https://thebiblesays.com/tough-topics/the-four-languages-of-jesuss-judea/).”

**Repent and Believe**

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.

The message that Mark records Jesus saying is very similar to the message Matthew recorded both Jesus and John the Baptizer preaching in Matthew’s gospel (Matthew 3:2; Matthew 4:17).

The main difference between these two records is that Matthew’s gospel omits the command to believe in the gospel, while both accounts include the command to repent. Before we comment on this difference, we will first look at what it means to repent and to believe in the gospel.

Repent literally means to change your mind. It comes from the Greek word, μετανοέω (G3340 - pronounced: “met-an-o-eh'-o”). In the New Testament, that change of mind is always for the better. It means to change your old (false) perspective about reality to God’s (true) perspective of reality.

A change of mind is evidenced by a change of behavior.

Believe means to accept something as true; or to trust it, and/or put faith in it. This word comes from the Greek word, πιστεύω (G4102—pronounced: “pist-yoo'-o”). The author of Hebrews defines πίστις (G4102—pronounced “pis'-tis”) the noun for faith/belief as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

To believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, is often cited in scripture as the sole requirement to accept the Gift of Eternal Life (John 1:12, 3:14-16; Ephesians 2:8-9). To believe in Jesus gains us salvation from the penalty of sin (Romans 5:9). When we believe, we are born of the Spirit, and placed into God’s family (John 3:5-8). When we believe, we receive the Gift of Eternal Life, a gift that can neither be earned nor lost (Romans 11:29).

But the Bible also persistently tells believers to continually trust God no matter the circumstance, and to have faith in His promises (Romans 1:17; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11:1-12:3; 1 Peter 1:6-7). Although we are saved from the penalty of sin, once and for all, when we believe, we need to continually walk in faith to be delivered from the adverse effects of the power of sin, in our daily lives (Galatians 6:8).

Jesus declares us righteous in the sight of God when we believe; we are justified before God solely as a matter of faith (Romans 4:2-4). But in order to walk in the experience of righteousness requires that we walk by faith in our daily lives (Romans 1:16-17).

Now that we’ve commented on what repent and believe respectively mean, we can return to our question: Why does Matthew only record Jesus as issuing the directive to repent, while Mark records Jesus as issuing two directives, both to: 1.) repent and 2.) believe the gospel?

The expression: to believe in the gospel can be viewed both as an invitation to believe the good news that Jesus is God and to receive the free gift of eternal life, as well as an invitation to embrace the good news that the kingdom has arrived, and to then live according to its life-giving principles. Why then does Matthew only include one of the two invitations?

One reason could be because Matthew’s gospel was written primarily to Jews. Likewise, Jesus’s message was primarily to Jews. The Jews, who were the audience for Matthew and Jesus, had already believed in God, accepted His word as true, and believed that God would send a Messiah to inaugurate the kingdom of God. They already believed. But their mindset, or perspective, did not line up with God’s.

Because Jews already believed in God and the Messiah, they only needed to repent of their ways and begin living according to the kingdom principles that Jesus the Messiah taught them (Matthew 5:1-7:29) in order to participate in the Messianic kingdom. They already believed, now they needed to see reality in truth, and align their thinking with the truth (John 8:31-32).

Baptism was a major way for Jews to show that they had repented and were now followers of Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 2:38). Matthew did not include Jesus’s directive to believe in the gospel because it was unnecessary for his Jewish audience who already believed in this gospel.

Mark, on the other hand, was writing to Gentiles, who needed first to believe in the gospel that God had come to earth as the man Jesus, to redeem and save the world. This would give them new life, and make them a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Then, in order to experience the life they had been given, they also needed to repent of their pagan ways of exploitation, and begin living according to Jesus’s teachings of love toward others. To love and serve others is to enter the kingdom.

Therefore, it is a reasonable postulation that Matthew did not include believe while Mark did include believe because Matthew’s audience group (the Jews) already believed in the gospel that God would send a Messiah, while Mark’s audience group (the Gentiles) had not yet believed in the gospel.

But both groups needed to repent. To repent is to adopt the same mindset as Jesus, and gain the same rewards that He gained (Philippians 2:5-11).

The reason the people of Israel needed to urgently repent was because a radically new political order, the kingdom of God, was about to be installed. The kingdom of God was at hand. The King had arrived. The values of this kingdom were going to be very different than the values of earthly kingdoms, such as Rome or the politics of Jewish factions. The Roman way was to gain power and authority in order to force coercive rule on others. Jesus’s kingdom elevated love and service to others.

When asked if He was King of the Jews, Jesus replied to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm” (John 18:36). The kingdom of God transcended all the kingdoms of men. The spiritual kingdom of God shines a light in the darkness of earth when His people live according to His precepts.

The Gentiles were not the main focus of Jesus’s earthly ministry (Matthew 15:24). However, the gospel was always intended to spread to and bless all the peoples of the earth (Genesis 12:3). Belief in Jesus granted them the Gift of eternal life, and this made them part of God’s eternal family (John 1:12; John 3:16). Repentance—changing their perspective and behavior to align with God’s teachings—granted them access to experience life in God’s kingdom (Matthew 7:21; 8:5-12).

**Biblical Text**

**14 Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”**