



## [Mark 1:14-15](#)

(14) Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, (15) and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

*New King James Version*

Though many today conclude that the essence of Christianity is the forgiveness of sins or the wonder of God's love, a considered reading of the gospels reveals that Christ's message centered on the [Kingdom of God](#) (or the [Kingdom of Heaven](#)). His ministry began with preaching [repentance](#) and the good news of the Kingdom ([Matthew 4:17](#), 23; 9:35; [Luke 4:43](#); [9:11](#); [Acts 1:3](#)).

His forerunner, John the Baptist, preached the same basic message ([Matthew 3:1-2](#)), as did the apostles ([Matthew 10:7](#); [Luke 9:2](#), 60; [Acts 8:12](#)). The Kingdom theme accompanied Paul on his travels ([Acts 14:22](#); [19:8](#); [20:25](#); [28:23](#), 31) and lights up his epistles ([Romans 14:17](#); [I Corinthians 4:20](#); [6:9-10](#); [15:50](#); [Colossians 4:11](#); [I Thessalonians 2:12](#)). Though Christianity comprises many principles, the essence of Christ's message is the Kingdom of [God](#). Grasping God's purpose for humanity begins with comprehending the Kingdom.

The same Greek word for "kingdom," *basileia*, is used in all these references, and its basic meaning is "dominion." However, the Bible's writers do not always speak of the divine Kingdom in the same way, so understanding the Kingdom of God depends on recognizing its different applications.

- A common usage of *basileia* is future-oriented: The great [hope](#) of true Christians is Christ's return to bear rule over the earth ([Revelation 11:15](#); [Daniel 2:44](#)).
- The Kingdom of God is also a present spiritual reality, such that those God calls in this age are figuratively translated into that Kingdom ([Ephesians 2:6](#); [Colossians 1:13](#)), even as they live out their lives in, but not of, [the world](#). God has dominion over the church, making it a component—though not the fullness—of the Kingdom of God now.
- A third usage of *basileia* refers to Christ Himself as the King of His Kingdom, such as when He told the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God was in their midst (see [Luke 17:21](#)).

*Basileia* is used in yet another, often-overlooked way that is necessary to understand a large measure of Christ's ministry. This disregarded usage appears most clearly in the [Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers](#) ([Matthew 21:33-44](#)). At the end of the parable, [Jesus](#) says, “Therefore I say to you, the *kingdom of God will be taken from you* and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (verse 43; emphasis ours). This refers not to the future establishment of Christ's [Kingdom on earth](#), but to a dominion then in existence.

Jesus considered the chief priests, the elders, and the Pharisees part of God's Kingdom, and also certified that they would have the Kingdom taken from them. They, like tenant-farmers, had a measure of responsibility over that national Kingdom because of their leadership positions within it. They wielded religious power that Jesus acknowledged ([Matthew 23:2-3](#)), which had its source in God ([Romans 13:1](#)).

In the Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers, the vineyard is the Kingdom of God, and the vinedressers are those tasked with attending to it. Jesus prophesied that [stewardship](#) would be transferred because the original caretakers had proven themselves unfaithful. [Psalm 80:8-19](#) also represents the Kingdom of Israel as a vineyard (as does [Isaiah 5:1-7](#)), and the shared symbol confirms that the Kingdom of Israel *was* the Kingdom of God at that

time, though not in its fullness. This fourth usage of *basileia* is found in a number of Christ's least understood [parables](#), particularly those in Matthew 13.

— David C. Grabbe

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**[God's Kingdom in the Parables \(Part One\)](#)**

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