

# The Parable of the Mustard Seed

## Matthew 13:31-32 and Mark 4:30-32

**DIG:** What is abnormal about this growth? What religious movements, denominations or sects represent **the birds** today? Are most saved? Why or why not? What is the **invisible universal Church**? Are all saved? How do we know? How do **the parables** that we have seen so far develop into a basic flow of thought?

**REFLECT:** Why is it important to know the difference between **the visible church** and **the invisible universal Church**? Can you assume that just because someone is attending your church or messianic synagogue that he or she is a believer? Just because you sit in the garage, does that necessarily make you a car?

**The one main point to the parable of the mustard seed is that the visible church will assume abnormal outer growth.**

The second couplet is made up of **the parables of the Mustard Seed** (external) and **the Leaven** (internal), where we see the corruption of **the visible church**. Because the apostles would be commissioned to proclaim the message of **the Kingdom** to the ends of the earth (**Mattityahu 28:19-20**), it would be easy for them to feel that **the harvest** depended on their efforts. **The Lord of the harvest** wanted to make it clear that although **the visible church** would grow tremendously, false doctrine would enter the congregations of **God**. There is indeed a **narrow gate that leads to life**, and **the wide gate that leads to destruction** (see **Dw - The Narrow and Wide Gates**). However, they should not be surprised or discouraged because **Jesus** had forewarned them.

The next two **parables** deal with the same theme, and that has to do with **the visible church**. Thus, we need to examine the difference between **the visible church** and **invisible universal Church**. A false religious system will be introduced into **the visible church** and it will result in the corruption of **church** doctrine. It is a picture of "Christendom" (Baptists, Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Protestants, Seven-Day Adventists, and Mormons) that we can see with our own eyes. Some people in **the visible church** are saved but most are not. But, **the invisible universal Church**, the **Bride of Christ** (**John 3:29**; **2 Corinthians 11:2-3**; **Ephesians 5:25-27**; **Revelation 19:7-8** and **21:9-10**), is made up of true believers, or the **body of Messiah** (**First Corinthians 10:15-17** and **12:27**; **Ephesians 4:16**; **Colossians 1:18**), as we are placed in Him (see **Bw - What God Does for Us at the Moment of Faith**).

Again, He told them another parable: **What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field (Matthew 13:31a; Mark 4:30-31a).** This **plant** would have been very familiar to the Jews.

**Which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground (Matthew 13:31b; Mark 4:31).** The **mustard seed** was in fact **the smallest** of all **the garden seeds** known. Scientifically we know that there were smaller seeds; however, **the mustard seed** was **the smallest seed** **Yeshua's** audience was familiar with. **The black mustard seed** is smaller than a grain seed, a grape seed, or a cucumber seed. In fact, it is smaller than the period at the end of this sentence. Of all **the garden seeds**, **it is the smallest**, with the greatest growth potential.<sup>698</sup> **The mustard seed** normally reached six to eight feet in height, but **it** has been known to reach ten to twelve feet, and would blossom with yellow flowers. **It** is an herb and not a bush or a tree. The **seeds** were used to flavor meats or vegetables and were a favorite food of **birds**. **The birds** like linnets and finches, would not build **their** nests in **the mustard** plant, but would settle or rest upon **it** for a period of time.

In the time of **Christ**, **the mustard seed** was a proverbial saying illustrating something small (**Mishnah Toboroth 8.8; Niddah 5.2; B'rakhot 31a and Leviticus Rabbah 31:9**). **It was used by Rabbis to indicate the smallest amount, such as the least drop of blood, the least defilement, or the smallest remnant of sunglow in the sky.**<sup>699</sup> Later, when the talmidim could not drive a demon out from a man, they asked: **Why couldn't we drive it out? Yeshua replied: Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, "Move from here to there, and it will move, Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20).**

**Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants and while the mustard plant is always small, here it grows abnormally and becomes a tree (Matthew 13:32a; Mark 4:32a).** **Jesus' audience knew the simile of the large tree** whose wide-spreading **branches** afforded a perch for **birds**, was a familiar figure in Jewish Scriptures for a mighty kingdom that gave shelter to all nations (**Ez 31:6 and Dan 4:12**). The emphasis here is the greatness of **the visible church** when contrasted to its humble beginnings. In the Oriental mind-set this **parable** would be seen as showing a contrast, as opposed to progress. So our **Savior** taught that there would be an abnormal growth of **the mustard seed**, thus an abnormal growth of **the visible church** into many great organizations, big churches, and large programs, all produced by human energy and not by **the Ruach HaKodesh**.

**It grows so abnormally large, with such big branches that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches for shade (Matthew 13:32b).** There will be an abnormal

external growth until it becomes a monstrosity and a resting place for **birds**. **The seed** that becomes this enormous **mustard** plant is a picture of **the visible church**. **Jesus** said that understanding **the parable of the Soils** was the key in understanding all the other parables. So like **the birds** that **snatched away** the Gospel **seed** before it could be planted in the hearts of the lost in that first parable, here, **the birds** represent the agents of **the Adversary**. These **birds** represent unbelievers who sit in the congregations of **God**, various pseudo-Christian movements, various cults and other corruptions of the true Church.

We are going to look at nine parables that develop a basic flow of thought: (1) **The Parable of the Soils (Et)** teaches that there will be different responses to the scattering of the Gospel throughout the Church Age. (2) **The Parable of the Seed Growing By Itself (Eu)** teaches that Gospel seed will have an inner energy so that it will spring to life on its own. (3) **The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (Ev)** teaches that the true planting will be imitated by a false counter-planting. (4) **The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Ew)** teaches that the visible church will assume abnormal outer growth.<sup>700</sup>