–Save This Page as a PDF–

The Parable of the Mustard Seed
Matthew 13:31-32 and Mark 4:30-32

The parable of the mustard seed 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 grow abnormally.

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 **(Mt 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 a **narrow gate that leads to life**, and **the wide gate that leads to destruction** (**to see link click Dw – The Narrow and Wide Gates**). But 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, many are not. However, **the invisible universal Church**, **the Bride of Christ (John 3:29; Second 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.[698] **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; Niddah5.2; 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.**[699] 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 **(Ezeki'el 31:6** and **Dani'el 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 Ha'Kodesh**.

It grows so abnormally **large, with such big branches that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches for shade (Mattityahu 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. Therefore, 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.[700]