

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and Yeast
A Series on the Mysterious Nature of God's Kingdom: Part 6

1. In Jesus' first two parables about the kingdom of God, the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8) and the Parable of the Tares (Matt 13:24-30; 36-43), what did the seed represent?

In the Parable of the Sower, the seed represented the Good News of the kingdom of God.

In the Parable of the Tares, the seed represented two types of human beings, Believer or non-Believer, which was determined by the two antagonistic sowers.

2. What did Jesus compare the kingdom God to (Matt 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19)? What is the cultural context of this object?

The kingdom of God was compared to a mustard seed.

The mustard seed is among the smallest of seeds of the world (the orchid seed is smaller). The mustard plant (likely *brassica nigra*) is an annual that typically grows to a four foot shrub; however, it has been known to grow as much as fifteen feet near the Jordan River. Its leaves and shoots can be used as an herb and its seed as a spice.

In using the tree imagery with birds flocking to its branches, Jesus recalls the Old Testament image of a great kingdom (Ezek 17:22-24; 31:3-14; Dan 4:7-23).

There has been some question whether the mustard shrub could support nesting birds, because its full growth isn't achieved till well after the nesting season. While the Greek term does mean "nest," it is possible that it is with the context of "rest" or "lodge."

3. What is the meaning of the parable?

Jesus draws attention to two points about the mustard seed:

- 1) The seed to emphasize its very small size.
- 2) The mature end of the seed is the result of its rapid growth into a large "tree" and larger than any other plants of the garden.

Was Jesus making a point of the supernatural growth of the kingdom of God? If so, the mustard shrub would be a poor image of this supernatural growth. The parable is not about the growth of the tree nor a comparison between the seed and the tree.

The point of the parable places an emphasis in the power of the seed; its small size belies how big the plant will ultimately be. In like manner, the small and humble beginning of Jesus' ministry belies the future glory of the kingdom of God.

For the Jews, who were expecting a great Messianic kingdom as taught by the Old Testament, the analogy to the mustard seed symbolizing its obscure beginnings would have been puzzling to grasp.

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and Yeast
A Series on the Mysterious Nature of God's Kingdom: Part 6 (page 2)

4. In the Parable of the Yeast, what did Jesus compare the kingdom of God to (Matt 13:33; Luke 13:20-21)? What is the cultural context of the object here?

Jesus compares the kingdom of God to yeast.

In rural Galilee, presumably a small amount of yeast was used for dough; however, three pecks of flour is roughly a bushel which equates to 100 loaves of bread each weighing 1.5 pounds!!

5. What is the meaning of the kingdom of God's analogy to yeast?

Like the Parable of the Mustard Seed, the kingdom begins in a small way; however, unlike the mustard seed, yeast does not grow. Instead yeast transforms and changes the flour into dough.

With this analogy, Jesus teaches that the kingdom of God is a small living agent that, once initiated, cannot stop until it transforms and changes completely.

References:

1. Gaebelein F, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, & Luke*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1992).
2. Walvoord JF and Zuck RB, eds., *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Wheaton: Victor Books, (1985).
3. Keener CS, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary New Testament*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and Yeast

1. In Jesus' first two parables about the kingdom of God, the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8) and the Parable of the Tares (Matt 13:24-30; 36-43), what did the seed represent?

2. What did Jesus compare the kingdom God to (Matt 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19)? What is the cultural context of this object?

3. What is the meaning of the parable?

4. In the Parable of the Yeast, what did Jesus compare the kingdom of God to (Matt 13:33; Luke 13:20-21)? What is the cultural context of the object here?

5. What is the meaning of the kingdom of God's analogy to yeast?