

IN-DEPTH SUMMARY

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

The in-depth summary of each bible study differs from the small group bible study laid out before the leader and the students. The in-depth overview is designed to help the leader with comprehensive information, much more than in the text notes at the bottom of every bible page. The small group studies are intended to be interactive, provide a learning atmosphere for students, and have open discussions allowing for interpretations of what the gospels' witnessed. An exhaustive search was completed on each verse to help the leader answer questions that may come up during the study.

The parable of the mustard seed is described in three of the Synoptic Gospels: Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:30-32 and Luke 13:18-19. It is one of the shortest parables Jesus teaches. Jesus illustrates this parable to the growth of the Kingdom of Heaven. The mustard seed starts relatively tiny; it can grow to be one of the largest plants/trees in the garden. The parable is an individual's heart or a church that starts small, vulnerable, and insignificant; it then grows and spreads worldwide. **Read either Mark's or Luke's version of the parable of the mustard seed.**

Mark 4:30 and Luke 13:18 (Outlined in black). Mark and Luke's versions are very similar. Jesus asks two questions in this verse. He demonstrates a great deal of thoughtfulness and humility when asking these questions to his disciples. Jesus knows He needs to bring His instructional teachings to their level so they will comprehend the parable. Jesus could have just told the disciples the parable of the mustard seed. He did not have to ask the disciples.

(1) **Jesus asks, what is the kingdom of God like?** Ask this question of the group. Most people will describe the similar physical appearance of a kingdom such, as puffy white clouds, gold and pearly gates, people, angels, or spirits wearing white clothing, angels floating (some believe they have wings, some do not), gold as pavement, and it is immaculate. Jesus uses several different parables and methods to help illustrate His kingdom. In the following question, we will list some parables Jesus used to describe the Kingdom of Heaven.

(2) **Jesus asks, what parable shall we use to describe it?** Jesus has several parables He uses to describe the Kingdom of Heaven. The parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:1-15), the parable of the weeds (Matthew 13:24-30), the parable of the yeast (Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:20-21), and the parable of the heaven and of the pearl, (Matthew 13:44-46). **Why would Jesus ask the disciples what parable should be**

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used to describe the Kingdom of Heaven? If He asks the disciples which parable should be used, then Jesus must have already provided them with some parables to fit this answer.

Matthew 13:31, Mark 4:31a, and Luke 13:19a (Outlined in blue). **How did Jesus describe the Kingdom of Heaven?** In context, the Kingdom of Heaven is not the size of the mustard seed but the process of the kingdom's growth from a nominal size of a mustard seed to a bush large enough to have branches. **PARABLE: What does the seed represent?** The seed represents God's Word or the beginning of the church. **In Matthew and Luke, what happens to the mustard seed? Why?** The mustard seed is planted by a man in his field or his garden. Planting is the first significant step. A mustard seed must be planted into the ground to grow and develop. **PARABLE: Who is the man who plants the mustard seed?** Jesus represents the man planting the mustard seed. **PARABLE: What is the spiritual action of planting the mustard seed?** Jesus plants His word into the hearts of the church. Planting the Word is the beginning of faith in Jesus. Later an example of having faith will be provided in relevance to the size of a mustard seed. **PARABLE: When planting the seed in the field/garden, what or who represents the field/garden?** At the time, the field/garden represented the twelve disciples where the beginning of the church was created. Jesus planted his "seed" within them. It is also an interpretation of the world as the field. Jesus plants the seed in people's hearts. It is up to that individual to allow it to grow and mature.

Matthew 13:32a, and Mark 4:31b (Outlined in green). **Are the mustard seeds the smallest of all seeds?** In today's technology, we know several plants have much smaller seeds than mustard seeds. The jewel orchid, for example, measures 0.05 mm in length. Many critics over the years have referred to Jesus' parable of the mustard seed as an opportunity to prove the bible is of false doctrine. However, the critics miss the true teachings of the parable. **How do Christians defend Jesus' statement?** The first-century farmer in that part of the world would identify the black mustard seed as the smallest seed he had ever sowed. Jesus used the mustard seed to teach a spiritual concept, not a scientific one.

Matthew 13:32b, Mark 4:32, and Luke 13:19b (Outlined in red). **What does the mustard seed turn into after it is planted?** The seed starts minuscule in its beginning. If cultivated properly, some mustard seeds can grow to the size of a tree 8-12 feet high, the largest of all garden plants. Most mustard plants will grow to be as large as shrubs. **PARABLE: What does the matured growth of the mustard plant or bush represent?**

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The mustard plant and field grow in comparison to the size of the kingdom of God. **The Leader reads:** “The birds in the air do not represent Satan, the devil, or the wicked one like in the parable of the Sower. In the Old Testament, a tree that grew large enough to support nesting birds was considered healthy and prosperous. **PARABLE: What do the birds represent? They are not widely known:** The birds represent the people of God who find safe harbor in the Church of Christ.

The Leader reads: The Kingdom of heaven starts small like the mustard seed. Just as the mustard seed grows to be the largest plant in the garden, the kingdom will of heaven grows to a massive size. The Kingdom of Heaven began with the hearts of Jesus’ disciples. Though they were insignificant, what they witnessed and the Word they spread expanded the size of the Kingdom of Heaven.

How did the word or kingdom of God grow? 120 Disciples: Acts 1:15-26. Then Peter’s preaching on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2:14-41, Peter baptized 3,000. It is estimated that by 150 AD, the Way, or the Christian population, grew to 40,000. Then by 200 AD, the population grew to 218,000. By 1910 Christians grew to 600 million, and by 2010 it grew to an estimated 2 billion.

Why did Jesus not explain what the parable means? Because this was to train the disciples to interpret the parable for themselves. Remember, Jesus asked the disciples, “What parable shall we use to describe the Kingdom of God?”

The tiny mustard seeds start as the smallest seed farmers would plant and grow to become the most prominent plants or trees in the garden.

Leader: The kingdom of God starts small as God’s word or the beginning of the church. Jesus plants His word into the hearts of the disciples. Jesus plants the seed in people’s hearts. It is up to that individual to allow it to grow and mature. The field grows in comparison to the size of the kingdom of God. First to 120 Disciples, then Peter’s 3,000 at Pentecost. To an estimated 2 billion today.

Let us conclude with two passages where Jesus references the faith of a mustard seed:

Reference Matthew 17:20

Context: (Matthew 17:1) Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to the mountain while the other nine disciples remained behind. (Matthew 17:14-17) The nine disciples tried to cast out a demon from a boy suffering from seizures, but they could not accomplish this task. Jesus told the father to bring his son to him. Jesus rebuked the demon, and

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the boy was healed from that moment. After the boy was healed, the disciples wanted to understand why they were not able to heal the boy. They asked Jesus privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” Jesus’ reply is highlighted in Matthew 17:20 in purple.

What does Jesus mean when Jesus states, “If you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there...’”? Jesus compares someone with an infinitely small amount of faith, a size no more significant than the mustard seed, to be granted the ability to move mountains. Jesus reveals to the disciples that all they have to have is faith in Him, and nothing will be impossible.

Reference Luke 17:6

Context: In verse 17:5. The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.” Jesus responds in Luke 17:6. This is a similar example in Matthew 7:20, where having only a minuscule amount of faith in Jesus empowers the believer to do great things. Jesus chose the mulberry tree to be pulled up by the roots and moved. **What does Jesus mean when Jesus states, “you can tell this mulberry tree, ‘Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you”? Could the tree move on its own?** The mulberry tree is known for having a very thick and robust elaborate root system allowing the branches to have widespread arms from the tree trunk. It is this root system that makes the tree an invincible steadfast tree. Lightning or a tornado may be able to take out the tree, but the tree’s roots are extremely formidable. Jesus uses this tree as a lesson; by having a tiny amount of faith, the size of a mustard seed, they are empowered to move immovable objects.