

# The Parables: The Mustard Seed

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*According to the Greek and Hebrew definitions, a parable is "a placing of one thing beside another, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, sentences with ethical wisdom and a comparison of one thing to another."<sup>i</sup> God uses parables to teach those who are truly interested in following after Him. It is my prayer that you will be blessed by these truths.*

Every once in a while I get a craving for a good juicy hotdog with a slathering of mustard! What would a hotdog be without mustard? Americans use more mustard than any other nation on Earth.

According to Vivi's Mustard Fun Facts, "mustard is one of the world's most ancient spices and oldest known



condiments. Mustard is also reported to relieve muscle pain, cure toothaches, stimulate the appetite, aid in digestion, clear the sinuses and increase circulation! If you wish to prevent frostbite, sprinkle a little mustard flour in your socks before venturing out in the cold. Pope John Paul XXII loved mustard so much that in the

early 1300's he created a new Vatican position of mustard-maker to the pope - grand moutardier du pape."<sup>ii</sup> I bet he used Grey Poupon! While mustard is mentioned in medical journals and cookbooks, did you know that it is also referred to in the Bible?

Before we find out what the Bible has to say about mustard, please take a moment to quiet yourself before the Lord and ask Him to open your heart to the teaching of His Word. Please read Matthew 13:31-32.

## **What did Jesus say that the kingdom of heaven is like?**

Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like a "mustard seed." When I think of mustard, I think of the tangy yellow stuff that Americans put on hamburgers, hot dogs and pretzels. Because of what I know about American mustard, I assumed that a mustard tree must produce some type of sap or resin from which mustard is made. However, as I researched for this Bible study, I discovered that the mustard tree of the Middle East is very different from what I imagined. Please read the following:

"A mustard tree is a small tree or bush that grows in the Middle East and Africa. The tree can also grow in the United States in dry, hot

climates. The mustard tree does not produce mustard seeds used to make mustard products, but rather produces a fleshy fruit that is very sweet.

The mustard tree is not a tree at all but is classified as an evergreen shrub. The tree grows to about 20 feet high and has an irregular shape. It is nearly as wide as it is tall. The branches start to grow very low to the ground. The mustard tree leaves are oval and can be light or dark green depending on their age. Mustard tree flowers are green or yellow and grow in long tendrils. Fruit for the mustard tree is purple, with pink and purple seeds.

Mustard tree branches are used as toothbrushes in some rural communities, as the branches contain ingredients that resist bacteria and plaque. The fruit is edible and contains many nutrients. The seeds are also edible. The tree is used for shade, and because of its low growth height the mustard tree makes an ideal landscaping tree. The tree shoots are also edible and feed people and animals.”<sup>iii</sup> Just as we might use the phrase, *no bigger than a minute*, the rabbis of Biblical times used the phrase “a grain of mustard” to describe anything that was very small.

Now please go back to our text and answer the following questions:

**Describe the mustard seed when it was first planted.**

**Describe the mustard seed after it was grown.**

The seed of the mustard tree is a very small seed. Comparatively, at full growth, it is much larger than many other plants of the Middle East that grow from bigger seeds.

According to the International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (ISBE) the mustard tree is not an evergreen but an annual plant, which means it dies off and must be replanted every growing season. The ISBE states that, “Several varieties of mustard (Arabic, khardal) have notably small seed, and under favorable conditions grow in a few months into very tall herbs—10 to 12 ft. The rapid growth of an annual herb to such a height must always be a striking fact.” (Whether the plant

Jesus is speaking of is an annual or an evergreen it still bears studying.)

**Have you ever witnessed a season of rapid growth in your spiritual life?**

**What led to this season of rapid growth?**

In the Bible, we read of times when the Kingdom of Heaven experienced seasons of rapid growth, such as in the Book of Acts.

**What method did God use to plant His kingdom when Jesus walked the earth?**

**How is the Kingdom of Heaven planted today?**

God, by the power of His Holy Spirit, uses Christians to plant the seeds of His kingdom throughout the world today. You may feel that you are one very insignificant seed planter, but by His power He can use you to grow His kingdom if you are willing.

**How are you involved in planting the Kingdom of Heaven?**

While writing this study a question came to my mind, "Why would Jesus compare the Kingdom of Heaven to a mustard seed?" Why didn't He say that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a mighty castle on a hill or a powerful king with his army? Why did He purposefully describe the kingdom of heaven as a tiny insignificant seed?

**What do you think?**

It is my opinion that Jesus used the example of a mustard seed to describe His kingdom because that is how the world views His kingdom, small and insignificant, not realizing what it will become at

the end of the Age. Like the mustard seed, the Kingdom of Heaven had a very humble beginning; a tiny baby born to a poor couple in a stable. But this tiny helpless baby will one day be crowned as the King of Kings; infinitely more powerful than any other ruler who has ever lived.

The mustard seed is also used to describe another very important facet of Christianity. Please read Matthew 17:20.

**To what did Jesus compare a mustard seed to in this passage?**

**Again, how big is a mustard seed?**

The Bible says we've all been given a measure of faith (Ephesians 2:8). According to Matthew 17:20, how much faith does it take to move a mountain? Did the Bible say that it takes a truckload of faith to move a mountain? A bucketful? No—only a seedful. If you have a grain of faith (and you do) you have enough faith to move that mountain of a problem that stands in your way this day

**What do you need Jesus to move out of your life today?**

**Look up a Scripture that applies to the issue you just listed above and write the reference in the space provided:**

Now, in the name of Jesus, quote the scripture you just listed above and in the Name of Jesus and tell that problem, sin or bad habit to move out of your way! Sow scripture into your challenging issues as often as needed throughout the days and weeks ahead. Because God's Word never returns to Him empty, you will see progress if you persevere.

Read verse 20 again please.

According to verse 20, what problem is impossible to move? No problem. Perhaps you believe that your faith is too small and weak to take on the mountains that stand in your path. You are forgetting that your faith does not rest in the power of your faith; your faith rests in

the power of Christ. One drop of His blood was all it took to conquer sin, death and the power of darkness. He is more than able to conquer the mountains in your life.

As we come to the end of our Bible study for today, we need to apply what we have learned to our lives.

### **What are some parallels we can draw between a mustard seed and our walk with Christ?**

- **A Mustard seed is sown on purpose.** Valuable crops do not naturally spring up in our gardens of their own volition. They must be planted and carefully tended in order to produce a bountiful harvest. The only thing that effortlessly and vigorously grows in our lawns and gardens is weeds. Like valuable seed, our faith also needs careful cultivation and care or it will not grow, let alone produce a crop of nourishing fruit.

- **God has commissioned us to be seed sowers.** God has left the responsibility of planting His kingdom with His people. We all have seed to sow.

- **Others will benefit from what we plant.** Just as the birds of the air found shelter and shade in the branches of the mustard tree, others will benefit greatly as we share our faith in Jesus.

- **Mountains will be moved only by "faith like a mustard seed."** It is only by faith in Jesus that the mountain of sin will be removed from our lives. It is only by faith that mountainous obstacles will be moved from our paths. Choose to walk by faith.

- **Can you think of any other applications?**

Go forth and do what you can today to plant a few seeds of the Kingdom in the world, in your heart and in the hearts of your loved ones.

Have a blessed day!

*"So the Lord said, 'If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.'"*

By Mary Kane

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i Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *parabole*<sup>Ⓜ</sup> (*Strong's 3850*)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2010. 16 Aug 2010. < [http://](http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G3850&t=KJV)

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ii <http://www.vivisoriginalsauce.com/Mustard%20Facts.html> iii <http://www.gardenguides.com/124943-mustard-tree.html>