

Eight Parables of the Kingdom—Part 4
“The Parables of the Mustard Seed & the Leaven”
Matthew 13:31-33

I. **The Parable of the Mustard Seed** (vv. 31-32; cf. Mark 4:30–32; Luke 13:18–19)

- a. “*like*” = *homoios* (ὅμοιος) = “pertaining to being similar to something else in some respect” therefore it is a parable, NOT literal or allegorical
- b. **Practical Truth:** if you plant a small mustard seed it will produce a mustard bush large enough for birds to live in.
 - i. A mustard seed is 1-2 millimeters in diameter
- c. **Spiritual Truth:** the Kingdom of Heaven will also start out very small, but in the end, it will grow huge and even include the Gentiles.
 - i. “The number of Christians around the world has nearly quadrupled in the last 100 years, from about 600 million in 1910 to more than 2 billion in 2010.” (Pew Research Center)
- d. Sadly, some think this parable is negative, but I believe they are wrong.
- e. *is smaller than all other seeds* = *sperma* (σπέρμα) = “the kernel part of fruit—‘seed.’”
 - i. It was the smallest agricultural or *garden* seed in 1st century Palestine and was used proverbially to mean very small (cf. Matt. 17:20; Luke 17:6)
- f. *when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree*
 - i. A Palestinian mustard bush is up to 15 feet tall
- g. *so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches*
 - i. Jesus is referring to imagery from the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel (cf. Eze 17:23; 31:6; 31:6; Dan. 4:12–21; Ps. 104:12)

II. **The Parable of the Leaven** (v. 33; cf. Mark 4:33–34; Luke 13:20)

- a. **Practical Truth:** a small amount of leaven will cause a large amount of dough to rise.
 - i. *three pecks of flour* = a bushel, enough to feed an entire household (cf. Gen. 18:6; Judg. 6:19)
- b. Sadly, some also see this parable as negative, and I still believe they are wrong.
- c. 17 of the 19 times I found leaven used, at least tangentially in Scripture, it did refer to something bad (cf. Ex. 12:15–20; 13:7; 34:25; 23:18; Lev. 2:11; 6:17; 10:12; Deut. 16:4; Matt. 16:6, 11–12; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1; 13:21; 1 Cor. 5:6–8; Gal. 5:8-9)
 - i. But it is also used twice in Leviticus to refer to something good (cf. Lev. 23:17; 7:13–14; Amos 4:5)
 - ii. So, we should allow the context to determine the meaning
- d. **Spiritual Truth:** the Kingdom of Heaven is like *leaven* in that what starts out very small, will eventually grow until it permeates the world.
- e. The world is not getting better or Christianized, but when Jesus’ Kingdom of Heaven is properly preached and practiced...it is Christian Judeo principles that truly bless the world!
- f. And like *leaven*, the Kingdom of Heaven functions invisibly!