

Mark 4:31

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth:

Analysis

Jesus answers His question: 'It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth.' The mustard seed (σίναπι, sinapi) was proverbially small—'less than all seeds' (μικρότερον...πάντων τῶν σπερμάτων) is hyperbolic but makes the point: exceptionally small beginning. This represents kingdom's humble origins—crucified carpenter, twelve unimpressive disciples, small Palestinian sect. The emphasis on 'when it is sown' indicates mustard seed's potential isn't inherent but realized when planted in soil. Similarly, kingdom grows through gospel sown in hearts. Small beginnings don't limit great outcomes when God's power works.

Historical Context

Black mustard (*Brassica nigra* or *Sinapis nigra*) produces tiny seeds (1-2mm diameter) yet grows into large shrub (8-12 feet). Palestinian farmers knew this dramatic transformation. Jesus uses proverbial smallness to emphasize contrast: tiny seed → large plant. Kingdom history vindicates parable: crucified Christ → worldwide church; twelve apostles → millions of believers; Jerusalem sect → global faith. Early church was tiny, despised minority; now Christianity is world's largest religion. This encourages faithful witness despite small, unpromising beginnings.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does mustard seed imagery encourage you when kingdom work seems small or insignificant?
2. What 'small seeds' is God calling you to plant faithfully, trusting Him for growth?
3. How does kingdom history—small beginning to global reach—demonstrate God's faithful power?

Interlinear Text

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|------------|------------|-----------------|-------|-----------|------------|-------|-------|
| ὥς | κόκκῳ | σινάπεως | ὃς | ὅταν | σπαρῇ | ἐπὶ | τῆς |
| It is like | a grain | of mustard seed | which | when | it is sown | in | G3588 |
| G5613 | G2848 | G4615 | G3739 | G3752 | G4687 | G1909 | |
| γῆς | μικρότερος | πάντων | τῶν | σπερμάτων | ἐστὶν | τῶν | |
| the earth | is less | than all | G3588 | the seeds | that be | G3588 | |
| G1093 | G3398 | G3956 | | G4690 | G2076 | | |
| ἐπὶ | τῆς | γῆς | | | | | |
| in | G3588 | the earth | | | | | |
| G1909 | | G1093 | | | | | |

Additional Cross-References

Acts 19:20 (Parallel theme): So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

Malachi 1:11 (Parallel theme): For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.