

Matthew 13:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

Analysis

Which indeed is the least of all seeds (μικρότερον, mikroteron)—the mustard seed was proverbially the smallest seed used in Palestinian agriculture, though not botanically the world's smallest. Jesus uses hyperbole from common experience to illustrate kingdom growth. **Becometh a tree** (γίνεται δένδρον, ginetai dendron)—the black mustard plant could reach 10-15 feet, large enough for **birds of the air** to lodge in its branches.

The imagery echoes Daniel 4:12, 21 and Ezekiel 31:6, where great trees represent world empires. Christ's kingdom begins imperceptibly small but grows to provide shelter for all nations. Some interpret the birds negatively (cf. 13:4, 19), suggesting external corruption in Christendom's growth, though the primary emphasis is kingdom expansion from insignificant beginnings to universal scope.

Historical Context

Written around AD 30-33 during Jesus's Galilean ministry. Matthew 13 contains seven kingdom parables delivered from a boat to crowds on the shore. The mustard seed was familiar to Jesus's agricultural audience—black mustard (*Brassica nigra*) grew abundantly in Galilee.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the 'mustard seed principle' challenge your impatience with seemingly small beginnings in God's work?
2. Where do you see evidence of kingdom growth from small seeds—in church history, missions, or your own spiritual life?
3. Does the inclusion of 'birds' (potentially representing Gentiles or even false professors) affect your understanding of visible church growth?

Interlinear Text

ὅ	μικρότερον	μέν	ἐστὶν	πάντων	τῶν	σπερμάτων	
Which	the least	indeed	is	of all	G3588	seeds	
G3739	G3398	G3303	G2076	G3956		G4690	
ὅταν	δὲ	αὐξηθῆ	μεῖζον	τῶν	λαχάνων	ἐστὶν	καὶ
when	but	it is grown	G3173	G3588	among herbs	is	and
G3752	G1161	G837			G3001	G2076	G2532
γίνεται	δένδρον	ὅστε	ἐλθεῖν	τὰ	πετεινὰ	τοῦ	οὐρανοῦ
becometh	a tree	so that	come	G3588	the birds	G3588	of the air
G1096	G1186	G5620	G2064		G4071		G3772
καὶ	κατασκηνοῦν	ἐν	τοῖς	κλάδοις	αὐτοῦ		
and	lodge	in	G3588	the branches	thereof		
G2532	G2681	G1722		G2798		G846	

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 31:6 (Parallel theme): All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young, and under his shadow dwelt all great nations.

Daniel 4:12 (Parallel theme): The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it.

Acts 21:20 (Parallel theme): And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:

Zechariah 4:10 (Parallel theme): For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.

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