

## The Parable of the Mustard Seed

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The previous parables we have examined in this series centered on the planting of grain. The next two parables we will look at are different. The first one is about a mustard seed that grows into a large tree. The second (which will be discussed in our next installment) is about leaven that leavens the entire three measures of meal. As we study into these parables, we will find that the Bible reveals that their meanings are far different from what most commentators and preachers assume. This means that what you have heard about these parables is probably not what the Bible teaches.

### The Parable of the Mustard Seed

The Parable of the Mustard Seed appears in the three synoptic Gospels. I will here quote them side-by-side.

<i>Matthew 13:31-32</i>	<i>Mark 4:30-32</i>	<i>Luke 13:18-19</i>
Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: 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.	And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? 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: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.	Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.

## Symbols and Explanation

Jesus does not directly explain the meaning of this parable. Nevertheless, we can understand what the symbols stand for by their use in other parables and in other parts of the Bible.

*I. The Kernel of Mustard:* The King James Version has an unnecessary redundancy in saying "grain of mustard seed." "Mustard seed" is translated from the Greek word *sinapi*. This simply means "mustard." The word "grain" is *kokkos*, and it means a "grain" or "kernel." Thus, the Bible really says, "kernel of mustard." There are only two other places in the entire Bible where mustard is ever referred to. In Matthew 17:20, we read Jesus' explanation for why the disciples were unable to cast out a demon: "And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." In other words, their faith was so little, it could not even be compared to a little grain of mustard. But with faith as much as a mustard seed, they would be able to move a mountain. Luke 17:6 is similar. In response to their asking Jesus to increase their faith, Jesus said, "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you." Thus, letting the Bible interpret itself, we see that the kernel of mustard represents a small quantity of faith that is able to do great works. Perhaps its power to do this is pictured by its being mustard seed. Bite into a mustard seed and you will know what I mean. Also, from the parable itself, we see that the mustard seed is the beginning of something that grows. So, we can say that the mustard seed is small but powerful faith that later becomes something else that is big.

Kernel of mustard=small, powerful faith that becomes something else
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*II. The Man:* In the parables we examined earlier, the man sowing the grain is identified as Jesus (e.g. Matthew 13:37). There is nothing in the Parable of the Mustard Seed to make us think any differently.

Man=Jesus
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*III. Field, Earth, Garden:* A different word is used in each of the Gospel accounts. Matthew's account says, "field." In explaining the Parable of the Tares, in Matthew 13:38 Jesus says the symbol of the field stands for the world (*kosmos*—the earth or the world system). Mark's account

says, "earth." This is from the Greek word *gē*. It means "soil" or "ground," "land," "region," "country," or the entire earth. We might have difficulty understanding how to apply the word here if it were not for the fact that in every other place in Mark 4 where this word is found, it means "soil" or "ground" (see verses 5, 8, 20, 26, and 28). So, we should take that as its meaning here. Luke uses the word, "garden." The Greek word is *kēpos*, and it means "garden." Notice that it says, "his garden," or an even better translation would be, "his own garden." I believe this is a reference to the specific land in which the mustard seed is sown, Israel. So, we see that the seed—the small beginning—was planted on the earth, in the land, and specifically, in Israel.

Field=the world
Earth=the land
Garden=Israel

*IV. Herb, Tree:* Mark says that the seed "groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs." "Herbs" is from the Greek word *lachanon*. It doesn't mean just culinary herbs for flavoring or medicinal herbs; it means vegetables. Luke says the seed "grew, and waxed a great tree." "Tree" is from the word *dendron*, which is from the word *drus*, an oak. This is talking about a woody tree, not a vegetable. The seeming discrepancy between these two accounts is explained by Matthew's report. The *World English Bible* makes Matthew's explanation clearer: "...whenever it is grown, it is greater than the garden vegetables and becomes a tree." As this translation correctly shows, the King James Version is incorrect in saying "greatest among herbs." What Jesus was saying is that the seed doesn't just become a big vegetable; it becomes bigger than the vegetables. It becomes a tree. Notice that Mark also says that the seed becomes "greater than all herbs." The word for "great" in Luke 13:19 is *mega*, and the words "greater" and "greatest" in Matthew and Mark are comparatives related to it. *Mega* means big. Today, we find it in such words as megachurch.

Most commentators say that this parable is simply an illustration of the fact that the kingdom of God starts off small and grows big. They say that Jesus simply meant that the mustard seed grows into a big mustard plant. They explain that some varieties of mustard are pretty big. But Jesus' words cut through such confusion. He said the mustard seed grows into something bigger than all vegetables. That includes mustard itself. In other words, the mustard seed grows into something beyond mustard. In fact, Jesus said it grows into a big tree. Notice that it is not a shrub, as some commentators say. It is not even a

small tree. It is a big tree, a megatree. Even the biggest mustard plants are dwarfed by a big tree.

The fact that in this parable a mustard seed becomes bigger than all herbs or vegetables and, in fact, becomes a big tree should cause us to be suspicious of the simplistic explanations given by most commentators. In the previous parables, grain seeds grew into grain, tare seeds grew into tares. But in this parable, a mustard seed becomes a tree. Surely, this has meaning. If we ignore it, we will not understand this parable.

What we see, then, is that the mustard seed—the small but powerful faith that was planted on the earth in Israel—grows into something else entirely.

Tree=something much bigger than and different from what one would expect from the mustard seed
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*V. Branches:* Something we see in all three Gospel accounts is that the tree has branches; Mark says, it "shooteth out great branches." Branches are divisions that stem from a main trunk. If you search a concordance, you will find that this natural explanation is found throughout the Bible. Whatever the tree is, we must expect that it will have divisions or branches.

Branches=divisions of whatever the tree is
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*VI. Birds:* Matthew and Luke say that the fowls or birds (both translated from the same Greek word) of the air "lodge in the branches" of the tree. Mark says that they "lodge under the shadow of it." This is not a discrepancy as lodging in the branches of a large tree could very well be to lodge in its shadow. The word "lodge" is from *kataskēnoō*. It literally means to "camp down." Letting the Bible interpret itself, the birds are easy to identify. In Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Sower, He said that the fowls of the air were the "wicked one" (Matthew 13:19). This is Satan the devil. Since the birds are plural, perhaps we should see them as Satan's agents, the instruments through which he acts, doing his bidding. So now we see that things are certainly not as simple as most commentators teach. There is something evil going on here.

Birds=Satan's agents
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*VII. Shadow:* Mark's account says that the birds "lodge under the shadow of" the tree. The word "shadow" is *skia*. It means shadow or shade. In Matthew 4:16 and Luke 1:79, it is used in reference to those who were sitting in the shadow of death being given the light of Jesus. In Colossians 2:17, Hebrews 8:5, and 10:1, it is used of Old Testament laws which were a shadow of things to come. In other words, this word is used in these verses to refer to the relative spiritual darkness that the Jews were sitting in under the law, as opposed to the light of the Gospel of Jesus. The law was only a shadowy type of the glory that came under the New Covenant. So we should be interested in the fact that this tree casts a shadow and that the birds, which we have seen are the agents of Satan, prefer lodging in the shadow.

Shadow=spiritual darkness

### **The Least of All Seeds**

Before continuing, I want to address what many see as a problem with this parable. Jesus calls the mustard seed "the least of all seeds." Now, mustard seeds are small, but the reality is that they are not the smallest of all seeds. I believe that Jesus wants to convey to us, not a botanical fact about mustard seeds, but a truth about what the mustard seed represents. He wants us to see that the faith represented by the mustard seed is not only a small amount of faith, it is also considered the least important thing on the earth. Mark specifically records Jesus as saying that the "mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth." Anyone reading of Jesus' ministry would have to agree that the powers that be despised Him and scorned His message. Of His followers, 1 Corinthians 1:27-28, tells us, "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." The faith, the message and ministry of Jesus and His followers, is what I believe is represented by the mustard seed. And this message and ministry that Jesus brought, compared to what people in high positions of government and religion in the world and in Israel considered important, was the least important thing.

### **Nebuchadnezzar's Dream**

In Daniel 4, we read that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream about "a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: 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" (verses 10-12). Notice that this is a dream about 1) a tree of great height, 2) beasts that have shadow under it, and 3) fowls of heaven that dwell in the branches. The similarity to Jesus' parable is striking. In verse 22, Daniel explains that the tree is Nebuchadnezzar. Now, what can this have to do with Jesus' parable?

Certainly, Jesus did not intend that we understand the tree in the Parable of the Mustard Seed to be Nebuchadnezzar, who had been dead for centuries. But the correspondence between Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Jesus' parable is too close to be ignored. I believe that Jesus must have intended that we understand His parable by understanding Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

The tree in the dream represented Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was the head of an empire that dominated the then-known world. As can be seen in Daniel 3, the empire was a church-state; Nebuchadnezzar not only held secular power, but he also controlled worship. Through his empire, Nebuchadnezzar gave shelter to many people, the beasts and fowls of his dream. But these people lived in shadow. On a hot day, we may consider shade a good thing, and Nebuchadnezzar's people may have considered themselves fortunate to be under the protection of his strong empire. But the fact remains that shade exists where light has been blocked out. The Bible says that God is light (1 John 1:5). As I already pointed out, the Bible also depicts being in shadow as being in spiritual darkness. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar, through the false worship he promoted, kept his people in spiritual darkness.

The Israelites of the Old Testament were a type of true Christians under the New Covenant. But Nebuchadnezzar was not an Israelite; he was a Gentile. Therefore, neither he nor the tree that represented him, were Old Testament types of a true Christian. Nevertheless, Nebuchadnezzar came to know something about God and made a sort of confession of his faith or, at least, an acknowledgment of God's existence and power:

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

Daniel 4:34-37

Within Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, there were Israelites who were Old Testament types of Christians. They had been captured and held in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. Some of them, such as Daniel and his friends, even held responsible positions in that Babylonian captivity.

Let's summarize these points about Nebuchadnezzar's tree: 1) The tree protects, 2) the tree creates shade, which is a type of spiritual darkness, 3) the tree (that is, Nebuchadnezzar) has a form of godliness, but not true godliness, 4) the tree is not Israel and thus its counterpart in the parable cannot be a type of true Christianity, 5) the tree has captured Israel, and Israel was a type of God's people under the New Covenant.

### **The Identity of the Parable's Tree**

If we apply this information from Nebuchadnezzar's tree to the tree in Jesus' parable, we can see the following: 1) The tree protects, thus, the birds find shelter there, 2) the tree, by promoting a false religion, creates shade, which is a type of spiritual darkness, 3) the tree has a form of godliness, but it is not the true religion, 4) the tree does not represent true Christianity, 5) the tree has captured true Christians. We must add to this the fact that Jesus says that birds, when used as a typological element in His parables, represent the "wicked one," Satan the devil. Thus, the tree lodges Satan.

What Jesus planted in the earth, represented by the mustard seed, was the small but powerful faith in Him. The planting took place in a far-flung corner of the Roman Empire. Jesus was a small-town carpenter in a back-woods district known as Galilee. It was "the least of all seeds." But something grew from that seed that was like Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian Empire. Compared to the natural growth from a mustard seed, it was an unnatural grotesque.

What, precisely, is the tree? The tree grows from the seed, so it certainly is something that is in some way related to the original faith. The tree in the parable is an allusion to the tree in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The tree in Nebuchadnezzar's dream was Nebuchadnezzar—a person.

I don't believe that we are to take the tree in the parable as a specific person only. But there is someone who fits the bill and may be seen as the first appearance of the tree. He was connected to the faith represented by the mustard seed. Like Nebuchadnezzar, he even made a profession of faith. Yet, I do not believe that he fit the description of a true Christian. He provided protection, yet at the cost of spiritual darkness. His corrupt religion attracted the agents of the "wicked one," who became involved in his politics and religion. He "captured" Christians, putting some even into responsible positions. This person is Constantine the Great, Roman Emperor from A.D. 306 to 337.

Before the time of Constantine, many Christians were persecuted and killed for their faith. They were harassed and shunned, but they continued and even grew in number. Then Constantine claimed Christianity, thereby connecting him to the original faith. Scholars are unsure whether Constantine adopted the Christianity of his mother, or whether he came to it gradually. But, in the course of his life, he often made professions of his faith. Constantine (along with Licinius) granted religious tolerance in the Edict of Milan and began to build church buildings, thus offering protection and shelter, and by doing this "captured" Christianity, which at first came to be the favored religion and eventually the state church of the Roman Empire. Those who sheltered with this church fell under its shade. All they believed came through the official channels of the church, filtered by the church. Constantine personally sent out letters threatening persecution for all who dissented from what he called "holy Catholic Law."



But I think we would be making a mistake if we assume that the typology of the tree ended with the death of

Constantine. Like the pagan emperors before him, Constantine held the religious office of Pontifex Maximus, which literally means "greatest bridge-builder" (between men and God). Gratian, who reigned from 375 to 383, seems to be the last emperor to have been called this. But it was then used by the bishops of Rome, the popes, and it continues to be used by them to this day.

But I think that we are to see the tree that started as Constantine as more than just Constantine and the popes. I think we are to see it as the entire religious system of state-sanctioned, institutional Christianity that Constantine began to bring about. The springing up of this corrupt church under Constantine has been termed the Constantinian Shift. It is the shift in emphasis from simple, personal faith to an institution with rulers, clergy-laity distinction, religious formalism, legalism, and relations with the state powers. An extreme of this is Caesaropapism, a merging of the authority of church and state, such as the Roman Catholic Church exercised in the Middle Ages, many Protestant states had during the Reformation, and Henry VIII took to himself when he made himself head of the Church of England. As Wikipedia puts it, with the Constantinian Shift, "Christianity became a religious justification for the exercise of power and a tool in the expansion and maintenance of empire, a Christian empire, also known as Christendom" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantinian\\_shift](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantinian_shift)). Wikipedia also states, "American theologian Stanley Hauerwas names the shift as the foundation for the expression of Christianity in the United States today that is closely associated with patriotism and civil religion." I heartily agree. These ideas are completely out of line with the teachings of Jesus.

It is this Christendom, the visible Christianity we see around us from the Vatican to the church on the corner, that is the tree of the parable. I say this because that system also fits the description of the tree. 1) It has a connection by name and a similarity of some teachings to the original, mustard seed faith, 2) through its clerical system and church laws and rules, it gives a sort of protection and security, 3) it creates shade, blocking the light of the Gospel and replacing it with spiritual darkness, 4) it has a form of godliness, but it is not the true religion, the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3), 5) it has "captured" and holds true Christians among its ranks, 6) it harbors the "wicked one," Satan the devil, and his agents in its clergy (these were around even in Paul's day—see 2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Yes, the Roman Catholic Church certainly fits this description. But, as the branches of the tree show, it goes beyond that one church. I believe that the basic meaning of the Parable of the Mustard Seed is that the original faith that Jesus planted was to be transformed into a giant, man-made system that Satan's agents would use to keep people in darkness while making them think that the institution they belonged to was the Christian church to which they could entrust their salvation. It is, in fact, the Christendom that we see around us. It is the immense and influential church that is visible in the world today with its trunk and many denominational branches of Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. It is Satan's master stroke, his application of the proverb, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em" with the intent of subverting them to your way. And he has succeeded in deceiving millions upon millions of people. And let's remember that tree in the parable is based on the tree in the dream that was Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon.

### **The Fate of the Tree**

The fact that Jesus used a figure in His parable that was used in the Old Testament to represent Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Babylonian Empire, has far-reaching implications. This is especially so when we realize that the tree of Jesus' parable is the corrupt and grotesque Christendom we see today. Babylon is mentioned six times prophetically in Revelation. In Revelation 17, Babylon is depicted as a harlot riding a scarlet-colored beast. Scarlet is the color of the robe that the Roman soldiers put on Jesus when they were mocking Him (Matthew 27:28). It is a symbol of worldly authority. In Revelation 14, 16, and 18, we read of the fall of Babylon. I simply do not have the space here to go into detail about these prophecies. But I will quote three verses. Revelation 18:4 says, "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." This shows that God does have His people in Babylon. Revelation 18:23 says, "And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived." I have quoted this to show that the "sorceries" or false doctrines and practices of Babylon have led the nations astray. And Revelation 18:24 says, "And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth." With this, I want to show that Babylon has, through persecutions, murdered many of the true saints of God.

## **The Lesson of the Parable of the Mustard Seed**

The parable shows us that we ought to know and expect that the institutional church system in this world—Christendom—is not the *ekklesia* of Christ and it is not genuine Christianity. Certainly, there are Christians in it. But it would save them much frustration and heartache in trying to deal with that system if they would just come out of it. They would also better understand the Scriptures through their own study without hearing them distorted week-after-week by a "fowl of the air." I'm not saying that all speakers in institutional churches have evil intent. They may be elect Christians who need to come out of Babylon as much as the Christians sitting in the pews. But even God's elect can teach false doctrine because it is what is taught to them in seminaries and what they hear from other preachers. This "lodging in the shadow" blinds them and their hearers to the truth.

So, the lesson of the parable is to not be fooled by the impressive big church or the cute country church or the promise of fellowship or the interesting seminars or the silver-tongued speaker or the Th.D. or the media personality or the warm handshake or the contemporary music or the traditional music. The Bible is clear: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

### **Application of the Parable to Our Lives**

What are we to learn from this parable?

- 1) We are to learn that the faith that Jesus brought to and planted in this world was small, powerful, and simple.
- 2) The parables we have already examined in this series teach us that the simple application of God's Word brings forth the fruit that God has ordained. Additionally, the Parable of the Tares taught us Satan will also sow his seed that will result in false Christians who look very much like real Christians. They will invent false doctrine and establish their institutional Christian church with its branches to try to root out real Christianity. Thus, the Parable of the Mustard Seed pictures this false, institutional church. With this parable, Jesus was warning us of this so we could be prepared to expect the large, visible church (and its branches) to not be the church He established.
- 3) What should we do with this information? Many, who are not aware, fall under the shadow of the large tree and have the light of the Gospel

blocked from them. They come under the influence of the agents of the wicked one who are skilled in distorting the truth and keeping them under their thumb. But if we are aware, we should know to avoid the Christendom of this world, learning the simple truth directly from God's Word, and fellowshiping in the local *ekklēsia* (which the Bible always locates as being in the home—see "*Ekklēsia* or Church, Does It Matter?" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/ekkleisia.htm>).

After writing most of this article, I checked online to see if there was anyone else who taught this parable with basically the same understanding as I have here. I was surprised to find that the popular twentieth century Baptist preacher A. W. Pink explained the parable in much the same way I have. In fact, he has put it so well that I have decided to quote a section of his book, *The Redeemer's Return*, as a good summary and ending to this article:

This [Parable of the Mustard Seed] then looks forward to a later period and presents a prophetic picture which saw its materialization in the fourth century of our era. The growth of the little mustard-seed into a great tree represents the development of the Christian profession from an insignificant commencement into a system of imposing proportions. In the fourth century A. D., Christianity was popularized by Constantine who adopted it as the State religion and compelled more than a million of his subjects to be baptized at the point of the sword. The parable of the Tares shows us Christianity corrupted by the insidious introduction of the children of the Wicked One among the children of God: the parable of the mustard-seed forecasted the growth and spread of a corrupted Christianity. This assertion of ours may easily be verified by the details of the parable itself.

The mustard-seed developed into a great tree - an abnormal thing in itself, nay, a monstrosity - so the popularization of Christianity in the days of Constantine produced an unnatural and ungainly system which was foreign to its spirit and nature. Observe that the "fowls of the air" came and lodged in the branches of the great tree. In the first parable of the series the Lord Himself tells us that the birds of the air represent the emissaries of Satan. The great tree then, stands for a nominal and national Christianity, a monstrous, world-system, that which in our day is the aggregate of the so-called "Christian nations." In

a word, the great tree symbolizes Christendom which in Rev. 18 is said to be the "hold of every foul spirit and a cage for every hateful bird."

Further confirmation of our assertion above, that the great tree which issued from the mustard-seed represents the abnormal growth of a corrupted Christianity is furnished in Daniel 4 where we have recorded a dream which came to the first head of the Gentile powers. In this dream Nebuchadnezzar also saw a "great tree," and in the fate which it met with we learn the end which is appointed to the tree of our parable. To quote - "I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: 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. I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and a holy one came down from heaven; He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches" (Dan. 4:10-14).

To sum up our comments upon this parable. Instead of lending favor to the position of post-millennialism, its teaching - viewed in the light of Daniel 4 - absolutely shatters the foundation of that system. Instead of teaching that the professing Church shall conquer the world, it shows that the world has conquered the professing Church. The mustard-seed symbolizes the outward character of the Christian profession at the beginning of this dispensation, when its devotees were few in number, poor in this world's goods, and despised by the great ones of the earth. In the third century A. D., the professing Church was like unto a humble little seed, unpretentious in appearance and insignificant in its dimensions. But in the fourth century there was a dramatic change. Constantine became a nominal Christian and adopted Christianity as the State religion. Then it was that the "tree" grew and became strong in the earth, putting out its branches in all directions. But then it was, also, that the fowls of Satan

found shelter within its imposing boughs. However, great as the tree has become, its end is sure. Just as we learnt in the previous parable that the tares shall yet be consigned to the fire, so shall this great "tree" yet be cut down and brought to nought.

(As found here: <http://www.biblebelievers.com/Pink/return28.htm>. Quoting this section does not mean that I agree with all of what Pink says in this book.)

Before closing, I want to point out that nothing in the parable implies that all Christians will be captive to the tree/Christendom system. The very fact that God tells His people to come out of it implies that some will not be or remain in it. God always has His faithful remnant.

The next parable we will examine in this series will be the Parable of the Leaven.