The Kingdom of Heaven is Like..

[Matthew 13:31-33](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+13%3A31-33&version=ESV)

Key Verse 31: “He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.”

Note that there are 2 common interpretations to these parables:

**Interpretation 1**

* The parables are describing the kingdom of heaven *on earth*.
* These 2 parables are in the same context as the weeds parable covered in Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43 and follow a similar pattern.
  + i.e. Wheat is sown and is good > Weeds are introduced by an enemy and hidden > the resting state of the field afterwards is that there is a mixture of weeds and wheat, and it is not until the end that the 2 will be separated.
  + In these 2 parables the mustard seed/tree and the 3 measures of flour are good > birds and leaven are both foreign agents and a negative > the resting state afterwards is that there is a mixture of 2 things: the kingdom of heaven and another thing that is not of the kingdom of heaven.
  + Recommended reading: [Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+13%3A24-30%2C+36-43&version=ESV)

**Interpretation 2**

* The parables are describing the kingdom of heaven.
* These 2 parables are not in context with the parable of the weeds or the other parables of the chapter but are isolated. Though the 2 parables: the mustard seed and the leaven are connected to each other.
* The focus of these 2 parables is the growth and transformative effect of the kingdom of heaven. The mustard seed, though small, grows into such a large tree that it can house birds in its branches (The birds coming to the branches is a good thing). The leaven is the kingdom of heaven which is mixed into the 3 measures of flour which could be the church, or a person’s heart and causes the flour to be transformed into the kingdom of heaven until it is all leavened.

**Summary of Interpretation 2**

Jesus shares two more parables that teach us about the Kingdom of heaven.

**In the first parable**, Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. Similar to the previous parables we see that a man is sowing a seed. What is unique about this parable is that the size of the seed is emphasized. A mustard seed is very small compared to other seeds, but when it has grown it has become larger than all the other garden plants and even becomes so large that it becomes a tree. The emphasis here is that a mustard seed (The kingdom of heaven) has great growing power despite its possibly small starting point.

**In the second parable**, Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like leaven. The leaven has a unique property that when a woman mixes the leaven into the flour, it can change or transform the whole batch of dough, causing it to rise and grow. Leaven represents the transforming influence of the kingdom of heaven to change a person, a community, or even a nation from within.

How can we better understand the kingdom of heaven through these parables? What can we learn from this?

**Additional information on interpretation 2**

Disclaimer: The questions and notes below are based on the understanding of the 1st interpretation.

For more information on the 2nd interpretation please view the following Wikipedia articles.   
See 'Interpretation', and 'Commentary from the Church Fathers'.

Mustard seed

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parable_of_the_Mustard_Seed>

Leaven

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parable_of_the_Leaven>

**Questions with Notes Based on Interpretation 1**

**Summary of Interpretation 1**

Jesus shares two more parables that build off of the previous weeds parable described in verses 24-30 and explained in 36-43 that teach about the origin, growth, and outcome of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

We see that in all 3 parables the origin starts out good and pure, but then as time goes on, an enemy comes and introduces a bad agent (Weeds, birds, leaven). This bad agent gets so intertwined with the original creation that it becomes impossible to remove or separate without ruining the original creation.

How can we better understand the kingdom of heaven on earth through these parables? What can we learn from this?

1. V31-32. What is the kingdom of heaven being compared to in this parable?
   1. The kingdom of heaven is being compared to a mustard seed that grows into a tree. Birds are attracted to the tree and create nests in its branches.
2. What is unique about the mustard seed according to Jesus? What does the mustard seed represent? ([Matthew 17:19-20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+17%3A19-20&version=ESV))
   1. It is the smallest of seeds, but despite the seeds micro size, it eventually grows into a tree.
   2. In Matthew 17:19-20 Jesus compares faith to a mustard seed. This could imply that 1 small grain of faith can eventually grow into a large manifestation of the kingdom of heaven.
3. What does the mustard seed grow into? What does a tree represent? ([Daniel 4:20-22](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Daniel+4%3A20-22&version=ESV))
   1. Though the mustard seed is small at first, it grows into a tree large enough to even support birds. Trees can represent kingdoms: In Daniel 4 Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon are compared to a tree. In the description, the Kingdom/Tree is described as having leaves that were beautiful, abundant fruit that was food for all, and provided shade, respite, and homes for the beasts of the field and the birds of heaven. Similarly, the kingdom of heaven on earth provides all these things. Though it is important to make a distinction that the creatures that are attracted to the tree are not necessarily of the tree.
4. What do the birds do? What do the birds represent?([Matthew 13:4, 19](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+13%3A4%2C19&version=ESV), [Genesis 15:9-11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=genesis+15%3A9-11&version=ESV), and [Jeremiah 5:26-27](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah+5%3A26-27&version=ESV))
   1. Birds are not considered evil 100% of the time in the bible, but more often than not, they do allude to wickedness or the presence of the evil one. In the parable of the sower in Mt. 13, the bird that eats the seed sown on the path is explained to be the devil snatching away the words of the kingdom when they are sown in people’s hearts that do not understand the word.
   2. In Gen. 15 birds of prey come and try to devour the offering for the covenant that Abraham set up. Abraham drives the birds away.
   3. Birds can also represent evil spirits, sin, evil behavior etc. as mentioned in Jer. 5.
   4. Another thing to think about is that the birds make ‘nests’ in the tree. In [Matthew 8:19-20](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=matthew+8%3A19-20&version=ESV) it states: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Jesus says in [John 18:36](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+18%3A36&version=ESV) that his kingdom is not of this world. However, people may act as birds and try to make holes and nests in this world using the kingdom of heaven to this end, which is not aligned to the kingdom of heaven which is not of this world. An example of this would be that a person chooses to become a priest or a pastor to make money. This has been a common problem in church history, where people make nests for themselves using the kingdom of heaven.
5. How is this parable similar to the parable of the weeds? How is it different?
   1. It is similar in that a sower sows a seed and it grows up to create a wonderful new creation.
   2. It is also similar because we start with a pure creation that gets corrupted by a foreign agent: The tree (The field of wheat) becomes corrupted by the invasion of birds (weeds) that nest in its branches.
6. V33. What is the kingdom of heaven being compared to in this parable?
   1. The kingdom of heaven is being compared to 3 measures of flour. After a time, a woman comes and mixes and hides leaven in with the flour. The leaven then spreads throughout the flour until it is all leavened.
7. What do the 3 measures of flour represent? ([Matthew 13:3,8,23](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+13%3A3%2C8%2C23&version=ESV))
   1. Flour is made from wheat, which means that it would make sense to connect it to the previous sower and wheat parable at the beginning of Matthew 13. This would mean that the flour is the word of the kingdom of heaven and Jesus’ teaching.
8. What happens to the flour? What does leaven represent? Is leaven good or bad? ([Matthew 16:11-12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16%3A11-12&version=ESV), [1 Corinthians 5:6-8](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+5%3A6-8&version=ESV), [Galatians 5:7-12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=galations+5%3A7-12&version=ESV))
   1. The pure flour gets corrupted when an enemy (The woman) hides leaven/yeast in the flour. Once the leaven is mixed in, it eventually spreads throughout the flour until it is all leavened.
   2. Similar to birds, leaven can mean a few things, but most commonly it refers to twisted and corrupted teachings. Matthew 16:12 states that leaven is the corrupted teaching of the pharisees. In that example Jesus warns his disciples saying: “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”
   3. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul compares the church's tolerance of sexual immorality to the acceptance of the presence of leaven in the body and defines the old leaven as malice and evil, but calls the church to be unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 “6 Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.
   4. In Galatians 5 Paul addresses the false teaching that physical circumcision is a requirement to enter the kingdom of heaven. This was an old teaching that got mixed in with the true teaching and began to cause fighting and division. He says: “7 You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion is not from him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump”. Here he points out that this false teaching (the leaven) is not from him who calls you. He also instructed the Galatians to cut out and remove this teaching and warned that if it is tolerated, it will leaven the whole lump and corrupt the whole church.
9. How is this parable similar to the parable of the weeds? How is it different?
   1. It is similar in that a baker starts to create a wonderful new creation (bread) with the purpose of feeding and delighting others.
   2. It is also similar because we start with a pure creation that gets corrupted by a foreign agent: The measures of flour (The field of wheat) becomes corrupted by the introduction of leaven (weeds) that spread throughout the measures of flour.
10. What can we learn from these parables?
    1. The kingdom of heaven that is on this earth is not 100% pure or perfect in this age. The kingdom of heaven on earth won’t be pure until the end, when Jesus comes back and establishes the new creation, the new age, and the new Jerusalem. Only then, when all evil is separated out of the kingdom will the kingdom of heaven will be pure.
    2. The weeds were not sown by the sower, but by an enemy, the birds are not part of the tree, but make nests in it, the leaven was not intended to be mixed in with the flour but was mixed in by a woman. This passage is a warning to us, that we may encounter these foreign agents while in the earth kingdom of heaven environment, but they are not OF the kingdom of heaven. What do we do when we encounter these things? We need to pray for spiritual discernment and check all words, teachings, and behaviors against the word of God and Jesus’ truth.