

Mustard and Agriculture in the New Testament

While teaching, Christ frequently referenced the mustard seed and the mustard plant and used them to highlight principles he sought to teach. Analyzing the mustard plant and the context of where it is referenced, enables us to apply Christ's teachings to ourselves.

Mustard Facts

Black Mustard (*Brassica nigra*) is the plant commonly believed to be the one Christ refers to in his New Testament teachings¹ and it was most likely eaten as a vegetable similar to other plants of the same family such as broccoli, turnips, and cabbage.²

In a personal experiment, we found that growing mustard using traditional methods is difficult.³ Though we originally predicted the traditional seeds to produce a greater yield than the modern variants, the opposite turned out to be the case. Using modern methods, we created a yield of over 30 times the biomass of traditionally grown mustard. However, growing any sort of mustard plant takes a level of effort on the part of the gardener.

Mustard and Agriculture References

The Bible contains five references to Christ teaching people using mustard as a metaphor. While teaching with mustard, Christ references both the seed and the mature plant. In Matthew 17:20, and Luke 17:5-6, Jesus teaches that with "faith as a grain of mustard seed" believers are capable of moving mountains and removing deep-rooted trees.⁴ Mustard as a plant is referenced in Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:30-32, and Luke 13:18-19, as Christ uses mustard as an example of the Kingdom of God.⁵

In the law of Moses, the commandment is given to "not sow thy field with mingled seed."⁶ Doing so results in "the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, [being] defiled."⁷ The one exception to this rule is the scenario where wheat and tares are allowed to grow together until the harvest comes. Common people in the time of Christ were still living by this law and, as agriculture

¹ Ewing, S. (1999, January 13). Black mustard (*brassica nigra*). Retrieved December 6, 2021, from <https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1421&context=ebl>.

² Medema, H. P., & Musselman, L. (2018). Bible Plants (dissertation). St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Canton, OH.

³ Personal Study, 2021

⁴ Matt. 17:20, Luke 17:5-6 (The King James Version)

⁵ Matt. 13:31-32, Mark 4:30-32, Luke 13:18-19 (The King James Version)

⁶ Lev. 19:19 (The King James Version)

⁷ Deut. 22:9 (The King James Version)

was important to the culture. Therefore, these analogies were more easily grasped by the present audience than the modern audience.⁸

Lessons to Learn

Some plants sprout faster than others. Just as mustard plants vary in their sprouting times and growing speeds, each of us learn and grow spiritually at a different rate. God loves us and wants us to find joy as we progress at our own pace, and not despair as we compare ourselves to others.

Upon sprouting, mustard seeds don't just passively receive the light. Instead, it actively bends and reaches towards it. Similarly, we must occasionally bend and reach toward the light in order to receive it. Not only that, but different plants take in light in different ways. What is most important is that we are active in our searching and learn how we most commonly receive this light of revelation.

Plants are rooted in the soil, but they collect a great deal of what they need (carbon, sunlight) from the heavens. This is particularly reminiscent of the phrase stemming from Christ's intercessory prayer; "be in the world but not of the world."

Upon reaching maturity, mustard plants are dramatically greater in size than the seeds they produce. Christ used this principle to teach the expansion his church would soon see. When the gospel was restored by Joseph Smith, fewer than 20 missionaries were called. Less than 200 years later, over 50,000 active missionaries are serving across the world, teaching the gospel — now a mature tree — to all who are wanting to learn.

God has permitted that there be a mixture in His church. It is only after they show their fruits that they shall be judged. And that judgment only comes from God or those appointed by him. Only they have the revelation to know when the fruits are ripe.

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⁸ Medema, H. P., & Musselman, L.

Additional Findings from Mustard Growth

	Traditional in sun	Traditional in growlight	Microgreens in soil and sun	Microgreens in soil and growlight	Microgreens in hydroponic and sun	Microgreens in hydroponic and growlight
Final Biomass	1.2g	1.7g	15.2g	21.3g	27.15g	36.2g