

Mark 4.26-34 Translation Notes (mgvhoffman)

4.26

Καὶ ἔλεγεν· οὕτως ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ὡς ἄνθρωπος βάλῃ τὸν σπόρον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς

NASB And He was saying, “The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil;

KJV And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground;

DRA And he said: So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the earth,

ESV And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.

NRS He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground,

NET He also said, “The kingdom of God is like someone who spreads seed on the ground.

NIV He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground.

NJB He also said, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the land.

CEB Then Jesus said, “This is what God's kingdom is like. It's as though someone scatters seed on the ground,

NLT Jesus also said, “The Kingdom of God is like a farmer who scatters seed on the ground.

CEV Again Jesus said: God's kingdom is like what happens when a farmer scatters seed in a field.

MSG Then Jesus said, “God's kingdom is like seed thrown on a field by a man

MGVH And [Jesus] used to say, “The dominion of God is like this: like someone who would throw seed upon the ground,

- What is the tense of ἔλεγεν? **Imperfect**
How can you express that in your translation? **Past ongoing** > “was saying” or **past customary** > “used to say”
- What’s the best way to translate ἄνθρωπος? **The word is not referring to a male person/man (though it’s likely that it would be a man doing the sowing). Reference here is to a person which more broadly indicates “someone.”**
- What is the *mood* of βάλῃ? **Subjunctive** What is the *tense* of βάλῃ? **aorist**
How do you want to express this mood and tense in your translation? // **would / should / could / should happen to // throw...**
- Is the person “planting” seeds? **No, the picture here is of broadcast sowing, throwing, spreading**
- Highlight in light blue how each version renders γῆς. **Any of the translations is possible (though “field” is saying more than the word itself means)**

4.27

καὶ καθεύδῃ καὶ ἐγείρηται νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν, καὶ ὁ σπόρος βλαστᾷ καὶ μηκύνηται ὥς οὐκ οἶδεν αὐτός.

NASB and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows-- how, he himself does not know.

KJV And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.

ESV He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.

NRS and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.

NET He goes to sleep and gets up, night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.

NIV Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.

NJB Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know.

CEB then sleeps and wakes night and day. The seed sprouts and grows, but the farmer doesn't know how.

NLT Night and day, while he's asleep or awake, the seed sprouts and grows, but he does not understand how it happens.

CEV The farmer sleeps at night and is up and around during the day. Yet the seeds keep sprouting and growing, and he doesn't understand how.

MSG who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The seed sprouts and grows-- he has no idea how it happens.

MGVH and then they'd go to sleep and get up, day in and day out. And the seed, it would sprout and keeps on growing... how it happens, they don't know.

- What is the *mood* of καθεύδῃ, ἐγείρηται, βλαστᾷ, and μηκύνηται? **Subjunctive** What is the *tense* of all of them? How do you want to express this mood and tense in your translation? // **would / should / could / should happen to //** **The present tense (in contrast to the aorist in v26) pictures these actions as ongoing >> keeps on sleeping and rising... begins sprouting... keeps on growing...**
- What is the *case* νύκτα of and ἡμέραν? **accusative** What is the sense of this case when used with time references? >> **through the day / night; daylong, nightlong**
- Note how each version tries to deal with ὥς οὐκ οἶδεν αὐτός. Highlight in light blue each version's rendering. Consider how you might render this if you were informally speaking it rather than trying to get it into good literary English.
- What is αὐτός doing in this sentence? **It's trying to indicate attention to the subject** What is it's antecedent?! (Consider: Is it the nearest word that has the same Gender, Number, Case?) **The nearest MascSingNom antecedent is σπόρος, the seed which would mean >> the seed doesn't know how it sprouts and grows (which is an interesting possibility worth thinking about!); but context suggests that it goes back to the ἄνθρωπος in the previous verse.**

4.28

αὐτομάτη ἡ γῆ καρποφορεῖ, πρῶτον χόρτον εἶτα στάχυν εἶτα πλήρη[ς] σῖτον ἐν τῷ στάχυϊ.

NASB “The soil produces crops **by itself**; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head.

KJV For the earth bringeth forth fruit **of herself**; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

ESV The earth produces **by itself**, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.

NRS The earth produces **of itself**, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.

NET **By itself** the soil produces a crop, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.

NIV **All by itself** the soil produces grain-- first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.

NJB **Of its own accord** the land produces first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.

CEB The earth produces crops **all by itself**, first the stalk, then the head, then the full head of grain.

NLT The earth produces the crops **on its own**. First a leaf blade pushes through, then the heads of wheat are formed, and finally the grain ripens.

CEV **It is** the ground that makes the seeds sprout and grow into plants that produce grain.

MSG The earth does it all **without his help**: first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain.

MGVH The ground keeps on producing the crop **all by itself**: first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.

- Highlight in light blue how each version renders αὐτομάτη = *automatē*
- What is the *mood* of καρποφορεῖ? **Indicative** What is the *tense* of καρποφορεῖ? **Present**
 >> draws attention to the ongoing aspect

4.29

ὅταν δὲ παραδοῖ ὁ καρπός, εὐθὺς ἀποστέλλει τὸ δρέπανον, ὅτι παρέστηκεν ὁ θερισμός.

NASB “But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

KJV But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

ESV But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”

NRS But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

NET And when the grain is ripe, he sends in the sickle because the harvest has come.”

NIV As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

NJB And when the crop is ready, at once he starts to reap because the harvest has come.’

CEB Whenever the crop is ready, the farmer goes out to cut the grain because it's harvesttime.”

NLT And as soon as the grain is ready, the farmer comes and harvests it with a sickle, for the harvest time has come.”

CEV Then when harvest season comes and the grain is ripe, the farmer cuts it with a sickle.

MSG When the grain is fully formed, he reaps-- harvest time!

MGVH But when the crop is ready, right away they're sending out the sickle, because now the harvest has come.

- What *mood* verb will you look for following ὅταν? **Subjunctive >> timing is vague**
- What is the lemma of παραδοῖ? **παραδίδομι** What does the lexicon suggest as a translation? **deliver, hand over, arrest (it is the same word used for the arrest of John the Baptizer and the arrest / betrayal of Jesus)**
- Highlight in light blue how each version renders παραδοῖ ὁ καρπός.
- What exactly is a δρέπανον? **A sickle for harvesting**
Where else in the Bible does it occur? **Mark 4.29; Rev 14.14-19**
Is a δρέπανον a positive image (happy harvesting!) or a threatening one? **It is threatening in Revelation**
- What *tense* is παρέστηκεν? **Perfect > has come, has arrived**

4.30

Καὶ ἔλεγεν· πῶς ὁμοιώσωμεν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ ἐν τίνι αὐτὴν παραβολῇ θῶμεν;

^{NASB} And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it?"

^{KJV} And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?

^{ESV} And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it?"

^{NRS} He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?"

^{NET} He also asked, "To what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use to present it?"

^{NIV} Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?"

^{NJB} He also said, 'What can we say that the kingdom is like? What parable can we find for it?'

^{CEB} He continued, "What's a good image for God's kingdom? What parable can I use to explain it?"

^{NLT} Jesus said, "How can I describe the Kingdom of God? What story should I use to illustrate it?"

^{CEV} Finally, Jesus said: What is God's kingdom like? What story can I use to explain it?

^{MSG} "How can we picture God's kingdom? What kind of story can we use?"

^{MGVH} And [Jesus] used to say, "How should we liken the dominion of God? Or with what parable should we present it?"

- Note *tense* of ἔλεγεν. **Imperfect >> past ongoing or customary**
- Note *mood* of ὁμοιώσωμεν and θῶμεν. **Subjunctive** How should those be translated? // would / should / could / should happen to // liken... > **point here is that Jesus is asking a question in order to generate reflection and interaction (He is not asking for someone to give him an answer.)**

4.31

ὡς κόκκῳ σινάπεως, ὃς ὅταν σπαρῆ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, μικρότερον ὄν πάντων τῶν σπερμάτων τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,

^{NASB} “It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil,

^{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:

^{ESV} It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth,

^{NRS} It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth;

^{NET} It is like a mustard seed that when sown in the ground, even though it is the smallest of all the seeds in the ground—

^{NIV} It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth.

^{NJB} It is like a mustard seed which, at the time of its sowing, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth.

^{CEB} Consider a mustard seed. When scattered on the ground, it's the smallest of all the seeds on the earth;

^{NLT} It is like a mustard seed planted in the ground. It is the smallest of all seeds,

^{CEV} It is like what happens when a mustard seed is planted in the ground. It is the smallest seed in all the world.

^{MSG} It's like a pine nut. When it lands on the ground it is quite small as seeds go,

^{MGVH} ... As a mustard seed! Which, when it's sown on the earth—though it is smallest of all the seeds that are on the earth—

- Note that there is not a complete sentence here. How might you express that in an oral-oriented translation?
English versions tend to smooth out the translation and render it in literary English. The Greek is jumbled, but it sounds quite natural when spoken aloud. (My MGVH translation attempts to reflect that)
- *The Message* takes considerable (and in this case, unfortunate and unhelpful) liberty in changing the mustard into a pine
The problem is that Jesus is using the image of a spindly plant that is basically a weed. The Message pictures it as a large and imposing tree. Jesus is using an image of weakness / scandal to depict the dominion of God, not one of power.

4.32

καὶ ὅταν σπαρῆ, ἀναβαίνει καὶ γίνεται μείζον πάντων τῶν λαχάνων καὶ ποιεῖ κλάδους μεγάλους, ὥστε δύνασθαι ὑπὸ τὴν σκιάν αὐτοῦ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατασκηνοῦν.

NASB yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR can NEST UNDER ITS SHADE.”

KJV 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.

ESV yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

NRS yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

NET when it is sown, it grows up, becomes the greatest of all garden plants, and grows large branches so that the wild birds can nest in its shade.”

NIV Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

NJB Yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all and puts out big branches so that the birds of the air can shelter in its shade.’

CEB but when it's planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all vegetable plants. It produces such large branches that the birds in the sky are able to nest in its shade.”

NLT but it becomes the largest of all garden plants; it grows long branches, and birds can make nests in its shade.”

CEV But once it is planted, it grows larger than any garden plant. It even puts out branches that are big enough for birds to nest in its shade.

MSG yet once it is planted it grows into a huge pine tree with thick branches. Eagles nest in it.”

MGVH and when it's sown, it sprouts up and becomes greatest of all the ... shrubs and forms great branches, so that under its shade the birds of heaven are able to nest/dwell.

- Note the *tense* of ἀναβαίνει and γίνεται and ποιεῖ. Present > some sense of the ongoing action
- Highlight in light blue how each version renders λαχάνων. How do you want to translate it?
- Why are the words capitalized in the NASB version? It's indicating that Scripture is being cited; a footnote points to Ezek. 17:23; Ps. 104:12; Ezek. 31:6; Dan. 4:12
- Highlight in yellow how each version renders τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. How do you want to translate it?
- My argument is that Jesus is alluding to the mighty cedars of the biblical passages cited and intentionally making a point that the dominion of God is unlike them. Rather than an oppressive symbol of power from above, the mustard plant is a symbol of pervasiveness and weakness from below. (When I discuss this parable, I point out that the only “tree” more scandalous than a mustard shrub is the cross.

4.33

Καὶ τοιαύταις παραβολαῖς πολλαῖς ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς τὸν λόγον καθὼς ἠδύναντο ἀκούειν·

^{NASB} With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it;

^{KJV} And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it.

^{ESV} With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it.

^{NRS} With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it;

^{NET} So with many parables like these, he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear.

^{TNIV} With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand.

^{NJB} Using many parables like these, he spoke the word to them, so far as they were capable of understanding it.

^{CEB} With many such parables he continued to give them the word, as much as they were able to hear.

^{NLT} Jesus used many similar stories and illustrations to teach the people as much as they could understand.

^{MSG} With many stories like these, he presented his message to them, fitting the stories to their experience and maturity.

^{MGVH} And with many such parables he was speaking the word to them, so far as they were capable of understanding it.

- ἐλάλει is **Imperfect tense**, which implies: **past ongoing or customary action**
- Note the other instances of “λόγος = word” in Mark, especially remembering that this chapter on parables began with the soils parable which was explained in 4.14-20 as describing the spreading of the “word.”
- καθὼς ἠδύναντο ἀκούειν: Note the various ways this phrase is translated. Two factors are involved:
 - Does καθὼς refer to a quantity? > as much as; for as long as
Or does it refer to extent? > as far as; insofar as
 - Does ἀκούειν refer to hearing or understanding? Cf. 4.12f. where “hearing,” “understanding,” “comprehending,” and “knowing” are contrasted. (ἀκούω, συνίημι, οἶδα, γινώσκω)

The sense could be that Jesus spoke “for as long as they were able to listen” (suggesting that the limit was based on the crowds available time or endurance), or “insofar as they were capable of understanding” (suggesting that Jesus was limiting his speech to match their ability to comprehend). Does Mark 4.10-12 suggest that the latter is more likely the sense? **In my translation, I have chosen the latter**

34

χωρίς δὲ παραβολῆς οὐκ ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς, κατ' ἰδίαν δὲ τοῖς ἰδίοις μαθηταῖς ἐπέλυεν πάντα.

^{NASB} and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.

^{KJV} But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.

^{ESV} He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

^{NRS} he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

^{NET} He did not speak to them without a parable. But privately he explained everything to his own disciples.

^{TNIV} He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

^{NJB} He would not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything to his disciples when they were by themselves.

^{CEB} He spoke to them only in parables, then explained everything to his disciples when he was alone with them.

^{NLT} In fact, in his public ministry he never taught without using parables; but afterward, when he was alone with his disciples, he explained everything to them.

^{MSG} He was never without a story when he spoke. When he was alone with his disciples, he went over everything, sorting out the tangles, untying the knots.

^{MGVH} Indeed, apart from a parable, he wasn't speaking to them, but privately to his own disciples he was explaining everything.

- Again the imperfect indicative ἐλάλει is used to indicate customary action in the past.
- Cf. Mark 4.13

Mark 4.26-34 mgvhoffman translation

Note that my translation is actually very close to the oral character of Mark's Greek. My rendering is not good literary English. It does work, however, as casual, spoken English.

²⁶ And [Jesus] used to say,

“The dominion of God is like this:

like someone who would throw seed upon the ground,

²⁷ and then they'd go to sleep and get up, day in and day out.

And the seed, it would sprout and keeps on growing...

how it happens, they don't know.

²⁸ The ground keeps on producing the crop all by itself:

first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.

²⁹ But when the crop is ready,

right away they're sending out the sickle,

because now the harvest has come.

³⁰ And [Jesus] used to say,

“How should we liken the dominion of God?

Or with what parable should we present it?

³¹ ... As a mustard seed!

Which, when it's sown on the earth—

though it is smallest of all the seeds that are on the earth—

³² and when it's sown,

it sprouts up and becomes greatest of all the ... shrubs

and forms great branches,

so that under its shade the birds of heaven are able to nest.

³³ And with many such parables he was speaking the word to them,
so far as they were capable of understanding it.

³⁴ Indeed, apart from a parable, he wasn't speaking to them,
but privately to his own disciples he was explaining everything.