

ENVIRONMENTALISM AND RENEWABILITY REVISITED:
GOD’S NEW COVENANT AND “SEED” (*KOKKOS*)¹

The Christian writings about God’s New Covenant (NC) with the *kosmos*, commonly called the New Testament, use three Greek words that are translated “seed”—*sperma*, *sporos*, and *kokkos*.² *Sperma* and its derivatives occur frequently in NC literature and connote: (1) “source of propagation, seed” such as of plants or humans; and (2) the “product of propagation” such as “ancestral continuity or lineage, seed, posterity” with emphasis “on a specific descendant, seed, descendant” or emphasis “on production of divine characteristics through God’s own seed.”³ *Sporos* and its derivatives occur less frequently in NC literature and indicate the “grain of a plant used for sowing, seed.”⁴ *Kokkos* occurs seven times in NC literature at Matthew 13.31 and 17.20; Mark 4.31; Luke 13.19 and 17.6; John 12.24; and 1 Corinthians 15.37. Danker defines

¹The idea for this topic came to me during Holy or Passion Week on April 16, 2025, after our last *Stone-Campbell Journal* Conference. Joe Floied and his expert team of tree cutters were removing five mature black walnut trees from my property in Coffee County, Tennessee. I have culled out trees before, but this was a major effort, and I had a little bit of angst because these trees lined the driveway and were original to the property. But my apprehension was short-lived, because I still had thirteen mature black walnut trees on the property, and this removal meant much less work from limbs, leaves, and walnuts to pick up in the Fall. As I walked my property and assessed Floied’s work in the evening, I noticed the seed—everywhere—from all the other trees—everything. After all, it is Spring! What came to me was that God abundantly is active in Creation. There has to be millions of seed on this property alone.

²For my definitions of environmentalism, renewability, New Covenant, and *kosmos*, see Fletcher (2025). For “seed” in English translations of NC literature, see Bible Gateway Online (2024) and Bible Hub Online (2025).

³Danker (2009), 325; cf. Beetham (2021), 850-852; Moulton and Geden (1978), 899-901. For the Hebrew *zera* ‘ (“seed” or “offspring, descendant”), see Holladay (1971), 92-93. See also Larry G. Herr, “Seed,” ISBE, Volume Four, 380; Siegfried Schulz and Gottfried Quell, “*sperma*, *speiro*, *spora*, *sporos*, *sporimos*,” TDNT, Volume VII, 536-547. For overview and text of Seder Zeraim or “Order of Seeds” in the Mishnah, see Jacobs (2025) and Marvin (2024).

⁴Danker (2009), 326; cf. Moulton and Geden (1978), 901. Beetham (2021), 850, lists *sporos*, *spora*, and *sporimos* with the *sperma* word group.

kokkos simply as “seed, grain” and notes that its etymology is unknown.⁵ It is used with reference to the mustard seed sayings of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, the grain of wheat saying of Jesus in the Gospel of John, and the allusion to the grain of wheat by Paul in his resurrection discourse in 1 Corinthians. This brief paper will explore these occurrences of *kokkos* in NC literature in order to glean broader meaning for God’s work toward renewing his *kosmos* and our response to this ongoing dynamic by way of belief and practice.

A Beginning Point—An Axiom About Seed from Jesus

In the first parable of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels, typically called the Parable of the Sower,⁶ Luke alone reports that Jesus, in his interpretation of the parable for his disciples, says, “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God” (Greek, *estin de haute he parabole ho sporos estin ho logos tou theou*; Luke 8.11).⁷ Luke makes the connection between seed and Word of God explicit.⁸ The order for Luke may be important. He does not record, “The Word of

⁵Danker (2009), 204. But see O. Michel, “*kokkos*,” in Bromiley (1985), 450, who says, “Outside the NT *kokkos* also denotes the scarlet berry and the color scarlet (cf. 1 Clement 8.3).” Compare Arndt and Gingrich (1979), 440, who define *kokkos* as seed or grain: (1) “of various plants” such as mustard or wheat; and (2) “of the scarlet ‘berry’.” Abbott-Smith (1937), 252, defines *kokkos* as “grain” and cites LXX (Septuagint) in certain manuscripts for the Hebrew *tola’* (“scarlet”; see Harris [1980], Volume 2, 971-972) in Lamentations 4.5 and Sirach 45.11. Compare Otto Michel, “*kokkos, kokkinos*,” TDNT, Volume III, 810-814. On similar uses of *kokkos* and the adjective *kokkinos* (“scarlet”) in the papyri, see Moulton and Milligan (1980), 352.

⁶See Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8; cf. 2 Esdras 8.41-45.

⁷Scripture quotations unless indicated otherwise are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

⁸In Matthew and Mark, the connection between seed and the phrase “Word of God” is implied but not explicit. Mark 4.14 says, “The sower sows the word.” Matthew 13.19 says, “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom.” All three writers, however, use “the word” several times in the explanation given by Jesus.

God is the seed.”⁹ Rather, he writes, “The seed is the Word of God.” While a metaphorical use of “seed” (*sporos* in Luke 8.11) definitely is intended, a plain meaning cannot be ruled out.

Seed inherently contains what is necessary for new life. Modern scientific understanding of seed germination fascinates, but the question of why seed germinates and grows can be raised at every point in the seed’s development. And the beginning or initial point of life from what appears to be inanimate matter cannot be fully explained scientifically.¹⁰ It is a mystery. It is God’s work, and it is work designed to renew the old *kosmos* and eventually bring about a new *kosmos*. This is true whether it is seed, or Word of God, for plants, for animals, for humans, or for spiritual life in Christ.¹¹ Seed is Word of God, and Word of God will not fail,¹² the haphazard falling of seed on various types of soil notwithstanding.¹³ So this keynote parable from Jesus

⁹This might be saying too much for seed, because not all Word of God is seed. In other words, there is more to Word of God than just seed. We understand this when we say that Scripture or the Bible is Word of God (cf. 2 Timothy 3.16; 2 Peter 1.20-21). Scripture belongs to that category called Word of God, but there is more to Word of God than just the Bible. Similarly, seed belongs to the category of Word of God, for in every seed there is the creative breath or spirit of the living God, or Word of God, and the potential for new life. While we would not want to push this analogy too far, it does have implications for how we envision the ongoing work of God in the *kosmos* (i.e., renewability).

Some scholars distinguish “Word of God” (the Second Person of the Trinity or Jesus as Incarnate Word) from “word of God” (Scripture or the Bible, the book itself or its proclamation). See Schneiders (1999), 7. I make no such distinction here.

¹⁰Botanists debate whether seeds of plants in dormancy are dead or alive. For a simple and brief overview, see Farming Base Online (2025), “Are Seed Living or Nonliving Things?”

¹¹Paul states in Romans 4.17 that God “gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.” This is often and consistently done through seed. Compare 1 Peter 1.23, “You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.” Note too the important connection between Word of God and creation in Genesis 1.1ff.; Psalm 33.6; Hebrews 11.3; 2 Peter 3.5, 7.

¹²See Isaiah 55.11; cf. Matthew 24.35; Romans 9.6; Hebrews 4.12.

¹³According to the parable of Jesus, seeds “fell” (*pipto*) “on the path . . . on rocky ground . . . among thorns . . . on good soil” (Matthew 13.4ff.; cf. Mark 4.4ff.; Luke 8.5ff.). On use of this “broadcast technique” of sowing seed in Palestine (i.e., “flinging a handful at a time”), see Teringo (1985), 74-75.

could be called the Parable of Seeds and Soils, and it tells us what should be basic and axiomatic, “Seed is Word of God.”

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (Matthew 13.31-32).

He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; 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” (Mark 4.30-32).

He said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches” (Luke 13.18-19).

In these passages, the connection between “mustard” (*sinapi*) and “seed” (*kokkos*) is not apparent. In his comparison, why did Jesus specify the mustard plant, if he is alluding to the growth of kingdoms (as in Ezekiel 17.22-24; 31.3-9; cf. Daniel 4.10-12, 20-22), where the plant or tree is the cedar?¹⁴ There apparently are no exact parallels to *kokko sinapeos* (Matthew 13.31; Mark 4.31; Luke 13.19) in the Hellenistic extrabiblical literature or the Old Covenant writings.¹⁵ It could be, though, that the rabbis used the notion of a grain or seed (*kokkos*) of the common

¹⁴On Old Covenant allusions in the Parable of the Mustard Seed, see the informative and appropriate sections in Beale and Carson (2007), 48, 155-158, 334-335. See also reference to Seneca’s *Epistles*, “Letter to Lucilius” 4.38.2 in Boring, Berger, and Colpe (1995), 94.

¹⁵J. C. Trever, “Mustard,” *IDB*, Volume 3, 476, writes, “The word appears only in the sayings of Jesus, in his parable of the mustard seed . . . and in his simile concerning faith.” And Keener (2014), 80, notes, “Scholars still dispute what plant is meant by ‘mustard seed’.” Many, however, believe the type grown in Palestine to be black mustard (*brassica nigra* or *sinapis nigra*). Court (2007), 135, indicates that black mustard was cultivated in fields, rather than gardens, and was used widely “for savoury and medicinal purposes.” But “Mustard,” *EDB*, 930, says the plant was “cultivated in both gardens and fields for its seeds, ground for spice, and for the oil in the seeds.” Compare Claus-Hunno Hunzinger, “*sinapi*,” *TDNT*, Volume VII, 287-291. On ancient remedies of mustard, see Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Book XX, Chapter 87.

mustard plant to depict something very small and insignificant.¹⁶ If this is the case, then Jesus is reflecting the common wisdom of his day.

All three Synoptic Gospel writers identify this mustard seed saying of Jesus as one of his parables about the kingdom of heaven (in Matthew) or kingdom of God (in Mark and Luke). The main lesson of Jesus is clear based on the transformation of the mustard *kokkos*. In the language of the Gospel of Mark, God's reign or rule is compared to the agricultural progression of "the smallest of all the seeds on earth" into "the greatest of all shrubs." And the outcome of this germination¹⁷ of the mustard *kokkos* is that it "puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." The concluding words of the parable echo similar metaphors in Ezekiel and Daniel about the reestablishment of Israel or about Assyrian or Babylonian world dominion.¹⁸ The ancient symbol of the world tree¹⁹ shows that God's work is not only for Israel

¹⁶So R. K. Harrison, "Mustard," ISBE, Volume 3, 449. Compare the use by Jesus in Matthew 17.20 and Luke 17.6. Barclay (1999), 52, remarks that mustard seed was used proverbially for things infinitesimally small. "The Rabbis spoke of 'a spot or blemish as small as a mustard seed'." See also articles by Michel (TDNT, III, 810f.) and Hunzinger (TDNT, VII, 288), cited above.

¹⁷The seed is "sown" or "planted" (*speiro*, "to sow" or "to seed," Matthew 13.31 and Mark 4.31; *ballo*, "to throw" or "to cast," Luke 13.19) in a person's "field" (*agros*, in Matthew), upon the "ground" (*ge*, in Mark), or in a person's "garden" (*kepos*, in Luke). But the agent of sowing is left undefined by all three writers (e.g., generic *anthropos*, "a human being, person, someone, somebody" in Matthew and Luke, and no one mentioned in Mark). For definitions, see Danker (2009), 5, 33, 67, 79, 200, 325.

¹⁸See Beasley-Murray (1986), 123, and his critique of J. D. Crossan's view that Psalm 104.12, rather than the prophetic apocalyptic tradition, is reflected in this parable of Jesus. Blomberg (1990), 285, argues, however, that the allusion to the world tree in Ezekiel is the one central point of this "brief allegory" by Jesus. On the eschatological character of the tree (i.e., a "technical term for the incorporation of the Gentiles into the people of God"), see Jeremias (1972), 147. Compare also the critique of this view by Beare (1962), 114-115.

¹⁹"Tree" (*dendron*, "a tree of various species and varieties") in Matthew and Luke, but "shrub" (*lachanon*, "any plant used for food, garden herb, vegetable") in Mark 4.32. For the latter, compare Matthew 13.32; Luke 11.42; Romans 14.2. Danker (2009), 86, 213.

but for the whole world.²⁰ This highlights the work of God as involving the entire *kosmos*. But the reign of God begins at the most basic level of human existence and experience.

Of course, interpreters err when they try to decipher these words of Jesus according to modern concepts of botany.²¹ Rather, we should understand Jesus in light of what was known and observable by human eyes in the context of first century Palestinian agriculture.²² Gerhard Lohfink notes the brevity of this parable of Jesus, and writes:

It can be brief because it compares the reign of God to something familiar to Jesus' listeners, something that happens before their eyes every year. Jesus compares the reign of God with what happens when mustard seeds are scattered. . . .

But what is this parable about? The text is explicit: Jesus is speaking of the reign of God. Certainly he does not compare the reign of God directly with the mustard seed. God's rule does not simply correspond either to the mustard seed or to the mature bush; rather, it is represented by the whole process in which a seed the size of a pinhead becomes a great shrub. So it is clear that our parable does not speak of the reign of God in static terms but rather of its coming: more precisely, this is about the dynamics of the reign of God.

At present the reign of God is still tiny, unimpressive, easily overlooked, apparently ineffectual. But it is unfolding, growing, spreading, gaining more and more strength, and—another image—the birds of the air nest in its shade. . . .

What does it mean that, at the end of the parable, Jesus evokes the ancient symbol of the world tree in his miniature narrative? It shows, in the first place, that the reign of God needs a people. . . .

But the symbol of the world tree also indicates that this is not just about Israel: the whole world is involved. . . . We also have to keep the universal dimension of the world

²⁰See Lohfink (2021), 60.

²¹Various arguments against the botanical accuracy of Jesus (e.g., the seed of the black mustard plant is not the smallest of all seeds) fail to account for the fact that “the first compound microscopes date to 1590.” See online article by Wills (2018).

²²Beasley-Murray (1986), 123-124, cites N. A. Dahl and notes, “Recognizing the legitimacy of the concern that we should view the parables through the eyes of first-century Palestinians . . . Dahl calls attention to the fact that ‘the growth of the seed and the regularity of life have been known to peasants as long as the earth has been cultivated. To Jews and Christians organic growth was but the other side of what was essentially the creative work of God who alone gives growth.’” For general overviews of agriculture in Roman Palestine, see “Workers in the Field” in Daniel-Rops (1962), 231-236; “Fruit of the Fields” in Teringo (1985), 70-93; cf. “Food from the Earth” in Baly (1974), 77-90.

tree in mind when we read the parable of the mustard seed. It appears, in a small way, only at the end. But it is there.

In that case, however, our parable culminates in the statement: it may be that now, in this hour, the reign of God is as insignificant as a mustard seed and the true people of God but a tiny flock (cf. Luke 12.32), but from this obscure beginning the new thing, the utterly different thing, is already growing: an all-encompassing realm, a new world community. Indeed, all that is as certain to come about as that from a tiny mustard seed a giant shrub arises. . . .

Obviously the parable of the mustard seed is not simply about the world tree. That symbol appears only at the end, and very subtly, in the birds' nests. The parable itself is first situated in the real, down-to-earth world of fields and their borders or, more precisely, in a vegetable garden. A parable could not possibly begin in a more ordinary way. Jesus compares the reign of God to the cultivation of cabbages and other vegetables. Certainly it would have been more impressive to begin with the proud 'world tree,' but Jesus spoke unpretentiously—and therefore more effectively—about a garden plot.

Clearly that was no accident. Jesus was very deliberate in his choice of images. The unique character of the images corresponds to the uniqueness of the thing at issue. The reign of God takes place in the midst of the ordinary, everyday world familiar to his audience. It is not far away, nor does it wait in 'some time or other.' It most certainly does not appear with apocalyptic, world-shaking thunderstorms, but just the way a mustard seed grows into something great. It is already happening among his hearers. Those who see what is happening here through and around Jesus and view it in faith are already seeing the reign of God. 'Blessed the eyes that see what you see!' (Luke 10.23).²³

Lohfink's comments capture the vital principle of this parable of Jesus. While the work of God to renew and recreate the *kosmos* (i.e., to establish the reign or rule of God) brings about innumerable transformations that exceed human expectations, this work of God occurs primarily at the level of common, perhaps even mundane, human experience. It involves a field, the dirt from the earth, a garden. It depends on the planting of seed, the tiniest seed. It multiplies astronomically when compared to its original size. And the resulting growth produces shelter and shade for both humans (implied) and animals (stated). It would be a mistake to understand these words of Jesus in reference to lofty (i.e., spiritual) things only.²⁴ This word of Jesus about

²³Lohfink (2021), 57-61. Compare comments by Bailey (2008), 136, about "the bonding of matter and spirit" in the life and teachings of Jesus.

²⁴Contrast the interpretation of Thich Nhat Hanh, according to Gowler (2017), 250-251, who views the seed as individual enlightenment that leads to Buddhist nirvana.

God's *kosmos* relies on and is predicated on mundane (i.e., material) things that God originally created and set in motion in the beginning.

The seed—which is Word of God—renews and recreates the *kosmos* toward a *telos* or completion, that is, the full measure of God's rule and presence in the new heaven and the new earth (see Isaiah 65.17; 66.22; cf. 2 Peter 3.13; Revelation 21.1). There is a beauty and poetry to this description by Jesus of God's reclaiming the *kosmos* and that mirroring a common agricultural process. But after all, it is the agricultural process that existed first by virtue of God's creative power.²⁵ And Jesus certainly appreciates the created world or the *kosmos* that was spoken into existence by his heavenly Father.²⁶

The Mustard Seed and Faith

And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17.18-21).²⁷

²⁵See the emphasis on "seed" (Hebrew *zera* ' , LXX *sperma*) in God's original creation (Genesis 1.11, 12, 29). Compare the promise of "seedtime" (Hebrew *zera* ' , LXX *sperma*; Genesis 8.22) for God's covenant with Noah and his descendants after the flood. Note also the disruption between the woman's "seed" (NKJV; Hebrew *zera* ' , LXX *sperma*) and the "seed" of the serpent as a result of the Fall (Genesis 3.15), and Paul's play on the word "seed" (NKJV; Greek *sperma*) in Galatians 3.16 (cf. Genesis 17.8; 2 Samuel 7.12). From these scriptures, we might infer that the work of God to reclaim the *kosmos* after the Fall is foreshadowed by God's program for the *kosmos* before the Fall. In this continuity, the *kosmos* is established and recovered through seed. This has important implications for the ongoing work of God in the *kosmos* (i.e., renewability).

²⁶See, for instance, Matthew 5.45, 48; 6.26; 10.29; 11.25; 15.13; 18.10, 14. For the role of Jesus in creation, see John 1.3, 10; 1 Corinthians 8.6; Colossians 1.16.

²⁷Some ancient manuscripts add verse 22, "But this kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting." See Metzger (1994), 35, who says, "It appears that most manuscripts [of Matthew] have been assimilated to the parallel in Mark 9.29." About the type of faith Jesus calls for, Allen (1912), 189, notes, "The Talmudic writers use 'uprooter of mountains' as a term of praise for a skillful expositor of the law who removed difficulties of interpretation." But this puts the saying of Jesus in a different context than that of the Gospel of Matthew.

The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you (Luke 17.5-6).

A second mustard seed saying of Jesus, preserved by Matthew and Luke but not by Mark,²⁸ speaks to whether or not we will follow God’s leading in the renewing of the *kosmos*. In our fallen world, there are considerable obstacles to this visionary work of God. Disease among plants, animals, and humans is one obstacle. The presence of thorns, thistles, and weeds—that is, disruption to steady growth of seed that eventually will choke it out—is another obstacle. The context of this mustard seed saying in Matthew’s gospel highlights the obstacle of disease, namely, an epileptic boy who “suffers terribly” and “often falls into the fire and often into the water” (Matthew 17.15). In the context of Luke’s gospel, which highlights “occasions of stumbling” as an obstacle (Luke 17.1ff.), the setting is not apparent except for the mention by Jesus of “this mulberry tree” and “the sea” (Luke 17.6).²⁹ In each case, the assessment of Jesus

²⁸Mark (9.14-29) and Luke (9.37-43) parallel Matthew (17.14-21) in his narrative about Jesus healing a boy possessed with a spirit, but only Matthew reports that Jesus spoke about the mustard seed in this context. With Matthew 17.20 and Luke 17.5-6, compare Mark 11.23 and the comments in Manson (1949), 140-141, about what he calls “a complicated and confused tradition.”

²⁹Some interpreters make a comparison or distinction between Luke’s use of *sukaminos* (“mulberry tree”) with *suke* (“fig tree”; Luke 13.6, 7; 21.29) or *sukomoreo* (“fig-mulberry tree”; Luke 19.4). So Vincent (1989), Volume I, 401. For definitions, see Danker (2009), 333; cf. Arndt and Gingrich (1979), 776. J. C. Trever, “Sycamine,” IDB, Volume 4, 470, notes, “The Greek word [*sukaminos*] appears only here in the NT, but it is used to translate the Hebrew *sigma* (‘sycamore’) regularly in the LXX. . . . Since the context of Luke 17.6 gives no hint about the nature of the tree, it is possible that Luke did not intend to distinguish the trees of 17.6 and 19.4. Thus the sycamore fig may have been meant in both passages.” Claus-Hunno Hunzinger, “*sukaminos, sukomoreo*,” TDNT, Volume VIII, 758, concurs but says, “*he sukomoreo* in Luke 19.4 can denote only the sycamore fig, but *he sukaminos* in 17.6 is ambiguous.” Both types, the black mulberry and the sycamore fig, are known widely in Southwest Asia, are revered as sacred symbols in some religions, have important pharmacological properties, and have culinary and ecological benefits.

follows the proverb about the tiny mustard seed. Difficult, even seemingly impossible, tasks can be accomplished with just a minuscule or very tiny bit of faith.³⁰

This Word of God from Jesus comes to his disciples and to us in the form of a challenge: Abandon “little faith”³¹ and incorporate faith “the size of a mustard seed.”³² Look at the obstacles that are overcome by this tiniest of seeds in its growth to maturity. Emulate the hope and envision the possibilities of this unpretentious creation of the Lord of heaven and earth. Does God need to begin with some grandiose and preposterous starting point? Or will a speck of seed do? Is the ability of God to renew the *kosmos* limited by the most humble and quite unnoticeable point of origin? Or does God rather delight to display power and majesty through the infinitesimal and the impossible? Such growth from tiny to tremendous applies to God’s initiative and our belief or trust in God’s work to renew the *kosmos* and replace what is old and dying with what is vibrant (i.e., alive) and new. In our concerns for the environment and its renewability, will we believe and follow God? This means the casting forth of seed, something

³⁰I would assume that these things are true about the work of God’s kingdom, because they were true about the original work of seed in God’s *kosmos*. See footnote 25 above.

³¹Matthew 17.20 uses the compound word *oligopistia*, a hapax legomenon, which means “state of little confidence or trust, little faith.” Compare *oligopistos*, “having little confidence or trust, of little faith” in Matthew 6.30; 8.26; 14.31; 16.8; Luke 12.28. Danker (2009), 249.

³²Compare the words of Jesus, *kai me ginou apistos alla pistos*, to Thomas in John 20.27, translated: “and become not unbelieving, but believing” (Montgomery [1924], 306), or “and be not an unbeliever but a believer” (Lattimore [1996], 247). Note the comments by Manson (1949), 141, “The smallest quantity, provided that it is genuine, is capable of accomplishing the seemingly impossible. The grain of mustard seed is a common Jewish expression for a minute quantity. It should be noted that the idea of *planting* a tree in the sea is frankly absurd. It is a plain warning against taking the saying in a sense that was never intended. The saying is a paradox of the same kind as the camel passing through the eye of a needle. Neither the one nor the other is meant to be attempted in a literal sense. But by faith men can do things that seem to be as absurd and impossible as transplanting trees and making them grow in the sea. This word of Jesus does not invite Christians to become conjurers and magicians, but heroes like those whose exploits are celebrated in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews.”

tiny and perhaps insignificant by way of perception. Once we have done that with faith in the Creator, we wait for God to do the impossible (see Genesis 18.14; Matthew 19.26; Mark 14.36; Luke 1.37).

Planting of Seed and Dying—the Death of Jesus As Seed

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor” (John 12.20-26).

One of the last two occurrences of *kokkos* in NC literature is the saying of Jesus³³ about “a grain of wheat” (*ho kokkos tou sitou*) from the Gospel of John.³⁴ The background for this encounter of Jesus with “some Greeks” attending the Passover festival in Jerusalem is the death and resurrection of Lazarus, a close friend of Jesus and brother of Martha and Mary (chapter 11), the anointing of Jesus “for the day of his burial” by Mary (12.1-11), and the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem “on a donkey’s colt” (12.12-19). That Jesus speaks here about his own death and resurrection seems to be clear from the context (see 12.16-19, 27-36).³⁵ Jesus compares his death

³³Lohfink (2021), 189, calls this the best example of a “fragmentary parable” from Jesus.

³⁴The word *sitos* occurs only once in John’s Gospel. Danker (2009), 321, says the origin of the word is uncertain, and it can signify “grain of any kind [although] in NT generally ‘wheat’ [but] also termed ‘corn’.” See other uses of *sitos* in Matthew 3.12; 13.25, 29, 30; Mark 4.28; Luke 3.17; 12.18; 16.7; 22.31; Acts 27.38; 1 Corinthians 15.57; Revelation 6.6; 18.13. See too Arndt and Gingrich (1979), 752; Moulton and Milligan (1980), 576.

³⁵See also the discussion in Lohfink (2021), 189-191. Compare comments by Macgregor (1928), 265, “The verse [12.24] states a general truth, but has of course special reference to Jesus’ own death. His earthly life is like a seed, buried for a time only to reappear in greater fulness. It is only by Jesus’ physical death that his spiritual powers can be released into the world and multiplied beyond measure (cf. 7.39; 16.7).”

and rising to new life (i.e., his resurrection) to the “death” (*apothnesko*, “to die”) of a kernel or grain of wheat with the subsequent production of considerably more kernels or grains of wheat.³⁶ Jesus can make this solemn assertion³⁷ about the climax of his mission on earth—his hour (*hora*) and his glorification (*doxadzo*)—due to the remarkable parallel with the ongoing work of his Father toward the renewal of the *kosmos*.³⁸ The regularity of the reproduction of wheat, used to make bread which has sustained human life for centuries (cf. John 6.35), provides the basis or foundation for the Christian kerygma in the historic work of Jesus on earth.³⁹ And this

³⁶NRSV perhaps over translates the Greek of verse 24, in order to clarify the meaning of Jesus. The word “grain” does not appear a second time in the Greek, as it does in the NRSV translation. The Greek text has *ean me ho kokkos tou sitou peson eis ten gen apothane, autos monos menei*, literally, “unless the grain of wheat having fallen into the ground dies, it remains alone.” Brown and Comfort (1990), 372. Compare the translation of verse 24 in the NIV: “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” The NIV translators render *kokkos* as “kernel” and insert “seed” (implied) after “single,” and then render *polun karpon* (“much fruit”) as “many seeds.” The less literal NIV translation, however, captures nicely the imagery of Jesus in the passage.

³⁷Jesus prefaces his grain of wheat saying with *amen amen lego humin*, “truly truly I say to you.” Brown and Comfort (1990), 372. Danker (2009), 20, defines *amen*, “strong affirmation in worshipful statement, so let it be . . . frequently used by Jesus in the formula *amen plus lego* [and] often with doubled *amen* in John. In Revelation 3.14 Jesus is termed the ultimate affirmation: *ho amen*.” For frequency of *amen* in the Gospels, see Moulton and Geden (1978), 51.

³⁸The immediate introduction to this similarity by Jesus is explicit, “Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified’” (verse 23). On the “hour” of Jesus in John, see 2.4; 7.30; 8.20; 12.23, 27; 13.1; 16.25, 32; 17.1. For other uses of *hora* in the Gospel of John, see Moulton and Geden (1978), 1025. Danker (2009), 101, defines *doxadzo*, “enhance esteem or reputation through word (of praise) or action, glorify.” Keener (2014), 286, notes, “‘Glorified,’ like ‘lifted up’ (verse 32), refers back to the Septuagint of Isaiah 52.13, which prefaces the death of the suffering servant (Isaiah 53), whom early Christians recognized as Jesus.” See too Beale and Carson (2007), 474ff. On glorification of Jesus in John, see 7.39; 8.54; 12.16, 23, 28; 13.31, 32; 14.13; 16.14; 17.1, 4, 5, 10; 21.19; cf. 11.4; 15.8.

³⁹“Kerygma” is from the Greek *kerugma* meaning “important public announcement, proclamation,” and in certain NC literature contexts, “of apostolic communication of God’s saving work in Jesus Christ” (Romans 16.25; 1 Corinthians 1.21; 2.4; 15.14; 2 Timothy 4.17; Titus 1.3). Danker (2009), 200. Early Christian proclamation about Jesus focused on his death by crucifixion and his resurrection from the dead.

regularity is based on a pattern of planting in the dirt, then death of the “outer shell” of the seed, and the response of the embryo to the call of God for the seed to bring forth new life. On this regularity, Dods aptly remarks:

The seed reaches its full and proper development by being sown in the ground and dying. It is this process, apparently destructive, and which calls for faith in the sower, which disengages the forces of the seed and allows it to multiply itself. To preserve the seed from this burial in the ground is to prevent it from attaining its best development and use. The law of the seed is the law of human life.⁴⁰

Hence, God’s renewing of the *kosmos* through the planting of seed is an important work, not only in and of itself in order to sustain physical life on the planet, but also for the initiation of spiritual life in anticipation of life to come in the new heaven and new earth.

Jesus draws from God’s work in renewing the *kosmos* to illustrate his most critical moment—his hour, his death. The pattern of God’s orderly work and its progression is clear. Just as when a grain of wheat multiplies after the shell of the kernel, or the seed, perishes and gives way to new life, so will the death (i.e., by the planting of the seed, the body) of the Son of Man break forth into new life and will multiply abundantly.⁴¹ This process—the planting of seed, its growth to maturity, the production of more seed—seems to be God’s way of thwarting the effects of the Fall that consigned humanity and the *kosmos* to this life/death cycle (see Genesis, chapter 3; cf. Romans 5.12ff.; 8.18ff.). In light of this dynamic, the paradoxical saying of Jesus (verses

⁴⁰Marcus Dods, “The Gospel of St. John,” in Nicoll (1979), Volume I, 809. Compare Lohfink (2021), 191, “Jesus reflects on a process known to every one of his listeners, something they have before their eyes again and again: the sowing of the grain, the sinking of the seed into the earth, and the rich yield of the field afterward. The parable owes its persuasive power to its everydayness, and that is just what is typical of Jesus’ ‘parables of growth’.”

⁴¹There may be a double meaning to the words used by Jesus in verse 24—“fall” (*pipto*, “to fall”) and “die” (*apothnesko*, “to die”). Keener (2014), 286, writes, “Grain images were naturally common in antiquity. Technically (from a botanical standpoint), an embryo is already growing in a seed of wheat when it falls; it usually breaks through the seed coating after two days in moist soil. The text uses the image in a way more directly intelligible, however, for the audiences of Jesus and John.”

25 and 26)⁴² speaks to those who will follow and serve Jesus, no matter how difficult that may be, and commit to this work of God toward revitalizing the *kosmos*.

Planting of Seed and Dying—the Death of Our Bodies As Seed

But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed, star differs from star in glory (1 Corinthians 15.35-41).

While the emphasis on seed’s dying and rising in John seems to be on quantity, the emphasis in Paul seems to be on quality, although the two end-results are not mutually exclusive. John compares the sacrifice of the Son of Man to the planting of seed, its death and new life, and the production of much fruit or many seeds. His focus is on the historic work of Jesus (i.e., his mission) and the initial outreach to the Greeks (non-Jews) attending Passover in Jerusalem.⁴³ Paul, however, is addressing misconceptions among believers in Jesus at Corinth about “resurrection of the dead” (*anastasis nekron*; verses 12, 13, 21, 42) and about the resurrection of

⁴²Compare Matthew 10.39; 16.35; Mark 8.35; Luke 9.24; 17.33.

⁴³Interestingly, “the author of the Fourth Gospel does not permit an encounter between these Greeks and Jesus because he wants it to be clear that the whole mission that will lead to the repentance of many in Israel and then make its way to the Gentiles has an unavoidable precondition: the death of Jesus, his surrender of his life. Therefore this text, which evidently dismisses the Greeks altogether, centers on Jesus’ words: ‘unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.’” Lohfink (2021), 190.

the body (*soma*; verses 35, 37, 38, 40, 44).⁴⁴ Paul's focus on the body is clear, as he is addressing hypothetical⁴⁵ or real questions: "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?'" In verses 42ff., the apostle pushes his argument toward the quality of the resurrected body, contrasted with the present body, that believers in Jesus will receive from God. The contrast follows the image of the planting of seed.⁴⁶ Note the consistent use of *speiro*, "to sow seed," and *egeiro*, "to rise, to raise," as Paul applies to the resurrection of the body the marvelous work of God in bringing seed to life.⁴⁷

What is sown is perishable,
what is raised is imperishable.
It is sown in dishonor,
it is raised in glory.
It is sown in weakness,
it is raised in power.
It is sown a physical body,
it is raised a spiritual body (verses 42-44a).

⁴⁴While the exact phrase "resurrection of the body" is not found in NC writings, the idea certainly is implied by Paul's excursus in the Corinthian correspondence, which emphasizes the raising of the body (verse 35, *pos egeirontai hoi nekroi; poio de somati erchontai*, "how are raised the dead? and with what kind of body do they come?"). Brown and Comfort (1990), 617. For the phrase "resurrection of the dead" (*anastasis nekron*), see Matthew 22.31; Luke 20.35; Acts 4.2; 17.32; 23.6; 24.21; Romans 1.4; 1 Corinthians 15.12, 13, 21, 42; Hebrews 6.2; cf. 1 Peter 1.3; Revelation 20.5. Danker (2009), 28, defines *anastasis*, "a bringing to a higher status, raising up, rising . . . a rising from the condition of being dead, resurrection (frequently with *nekron*)." See Moulton and Geden (1978), 62-63, for uses of *anastasis* in NC literature. On the question of the resurrection body in early Judaism, compare *Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch* 49.2 in Charles (1913), 508.

⁴⁵See comments by Keener (2014), 494, about "rhetorical objections from imaginary opponents."

⁴⁶Bynum (1995), 3, says, "The seed is the oldest Christian metaphor for the resurrection of the body. It is the dominant metaphor in that text which, more than any other, has determined discussion of resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15."

⁴⁷Keener (2014), 484, comments, "Paul's rhythm in 15.42-44 would stir rhetorically sensitive ancient hearers: he combines antithesis (contrasts) with fourfold *anaphora* here: 'it is sown . . . it is raised.'" Compare the comments by Fiorenza (1988), 1188, on Paul's "four antithetical parallelisms." For definitions of *speiro* and *egeiro*, see Danker (2009), 324, 106.

Paul continues the contrast from the same seed imagery, but instead of the seed itself he emphasizes the environment or medium of the planting of seed—the earth or “dust”—and alludes to the creation of the first human beings (i.e., Adam).

If there is a physical body,
there is also a spiritual body.
Thus it is written,
‘The first man, Adam, became a living being’;
the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.
But it is not the spiritual that is first,
but the physical, and then the spiritual.
The first man was from the earth, a man of dust;
the second man is from heaven.
As was the man of dust,
so are those who are of the dust;
and as is the man of heaven,
so are those who are of heaven.
Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust,
we will also bear the image of the man of heaven (verses 44b-49).

The repetition of *choikos*⁴⁸ by Paul, used four times in verses 47-49 and only here in NC literature, is instructive. Paul’s Greek is terse in this contrast of what he calls “a physical body” (*soma psuchikon*) and “a spiritual body” (*soma pneumatikon*).⁴⁹ This makes his argument from the allusion to Genesis 2.7 (i.e., “thus it is written,” Greek *houtos kai gegraptai*) complex for

⁴⁸Danker (2009), 383, suggests *choikos*, “made of earth or soil, earthy,” is derived from *chous* that means “soil that has been heaped up” or “fine bits of matter or dirt.” On the different words for “dust” and “earth” in Old Covenant and Hellenistic literature, see Eduard Schweizer, “*choikos*,” TDNT, Volume IX, 472-479.

⁴⁹Both *psuchikos* (1 Corinthians 2.14; 15.44, 46; James 3.15; Jude 19) and *pneumatikos* (Romans 1.11; 7.14; 15.27; 1 Corinthians 2.13, 15; 3.1; 9.11; 10.3, 4; 12.1; 14.1, 37; 15.44, 46; Galatians 6.1; Ephesians 1.3; 5.19; 6.12; Colossians 1.9; 3.16; 1 Peter 2.5) are infrequent in non-Pauline NC literature. For definitions, see Danker (2009), 388, 289. Keener (2014), 495, says, “Both Paul’s ‘natural’ and ‘spiritual’ bodies might shock ancient hearers. A ‘natural’ or ‘physical’ body is literally a ‘soulish’ body, in contrast to a ‘spiritual’ body. Paul does not teach a future body made out of ‘spirit’ (although the Stoics taught that spirit was a material substance), any more than a present body made out of ‘soul.’ Rather, the present body is adapted for current natural existence, and the future body for the life even now ruled by God’s Spirit.”

interpreters, but that should not distract from his concluding point.⁵⁰ In verse 49, Paul says, “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.”⁵¹ The physical body is like the seed that is planted in the dirt. It will die. It is inevitable. This is because the physical body “bears” or “wears” (*phoreo*) the “image” or “likeness” (*eikon*) of “the first man” (*ho protos anthropos*) who was “from the earth, a man of dust” (*ek ges choikos*).⁵² And, “as was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust” (*hoios ho choikos, toioutoi kai hoi choikoi*).⁵³ Paul makes this point with brevity and sharpness, and he repeats it. He tells the Corinthians that they are living beings, like Adam. But like seed in the earth, they are *soma psuchikon* . . . from the earth . . . dust . . . like the one who is dust . . . wearing the likeness of the one who is dust. This reality is poignant, but the antithesis is just as piercing, yet in a hopeful way. Strikingly, Paul “calls the first man *choikos* on the basis of Genesis 2.7.” But “in contrast stands the second man from heaven, Christ. Each founds a race—the one race earthly, the other heavenly.”⁵⁴

As relief from earthy Adam, there is “the second man” (*ho deuterios anthropos*) “from heaven” (*ex ouranou*), “the last Adam” (*ho eschatos Adam*) who “became a life-giving spirit” (*eis*

⁵⁰Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, “1 Corinthians,” in Beale and Carson (2007), 746, write, “Although 1 Corinthians 15.45-49 is a difficult and controversial passage, its use of Scripture is relatively straightforward.”

⁵¹In verse 49, the English translations insert the word “man” twice, based presumably on *anthropos* used twice in verse 47. But Paul does not repeat *anthropos* in verse 49.

⁵²For definitions of *phoreo*, *eikon*, *protos*, and *ge*, see Danker (2009), 375, 110, 309, 79.

⁵³The English translations also insert the word “man” twice in verse 48, but Paul’s Greek is crisp and terse and does not use *anthropos*. It would be better to omit “man” in verses 48-49, render the Greek as it stands and not as an ellipsis, which would preserve the force and sharpness of Paul’s thinking here.

⁵⁴Eduard Schweizer, “*choikos*,” in Bromiley (1985), 1319.

pneuma zoopoion).⁵⁵ And, “as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven” (*kai hoios ho epouranios toioutoi kai hoi epouranioi*). Throughout the section, Paul counters his use of *choikos* with his corresponding use of *epouranios*.⁵⁶ So like seed that sprouts forth from the earth, Paul wants to make sure the Corinthians understand that *soma psuchikon* will result in *soma pneumatikon*. The continuity of image-bearing is sure: “just as we have put on [wear] the likeness of the earthy, we also will put on [wear] the likeness of the heavenly” (*kai kathos ephoresamen ten eikona tou choikou, phoresomen kai ten eikona tou epouraniou*).⁵⁷ But, just like a kernel of seed, the *pneumatikon* (“spiritual”) body is not first. The *psuchikon* (“physical”) body is first, then comes the *pneumatikon* or the spiritual body. A change or transformation must occur.⁵⁸

⁵⁵For definitions of *deuteros*, *ouranos*, *eschatos*, and *zoopoieo*, see Danker (2009), 88, 259, 150-151, 162. Danker says *zoopoieo* means “cause to be alive, make alive, give life to, in general with focus on existence transcending the merely physical.” See John 5.21; 6.63; Romans 4.17; 8.11; 1 Corinthians 15.22, 36, 45; 2 Corinthians 3.6; Galatians 3.21; 1 Peter 3.18. Hering (1962), 174, says, “The contrast between *zoopoiein* (‘make to live’) and *apothanein* (‘to die’) presupposes that the germination of the wheat is not thought of as a natural occurrence, but as an event requiring heavenly intervention.”

⁵⁶On *epouranios*, “heavenly, celestial,” see Danker (2009), 148. Compare Matthew 18.35; John 3.12; 1 Corinthians 15.40, 48, 49; Ephesians 1.3, 20; 2.6; 3.10; 6.12; Philippians 2.10; 2 Timothy 4.18; Hebrews 3.1; 6.4; 8.5; 9.23; 11.16; 12.22.

⁵⁷This is my English translation for verse 49, DWF.

⁵⁸Paul uses *allasso* in verses 51 and 52 which Danker (2009), 16, defines, “to cause something to be different, change, transform.” Other NC literature occurrences include Acts 6.14; Romans 1.23; Galatians 4.20; Hebrews 1.12. Moffatt (1928), 258, comments, “The body sown at birth is not the body that is to be ours in the resurrection; it is very different. What a contrast between what you sow . . . and what God gives later to the same spirit—as he does in vegetation, for example! There the vital germ is placed in a soil of being where inevitably it alters its form as it rises into the upper air. Only, Paul does not say that it alters; he makes God, as usual (1.21; 12.11, 18), the sovereign giver of the new form.” Fiorenza (1988), 1188, suggests, “Paul declares that a body different from our present one is necessary for the resurrection status. Such a qualitatively different body is no longer subject to the power of death.”

In defining this change, Paul crescendos his excursus on the resurrection body with the antithesis in verses 50ff. between what is “perishable” (i.e., “flesh and blood”) and what is “imperishable” (i.e., “kingdom of God”). The “perishable body must put on imperishability” and the “mortal body must put on immortality” (verse 53; cf. verse 54). Of course, just like the mystery of the planting of seed and its remarkable transformation and growth, this is a “mystery” (verse 51).⁵⁹ But Paul is determined to highlight the work of God through Jesus Christ in raising the dead in order to encourage those who believe, or have the faith of a tiny mustard seed, to “be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (verse 58).

All this, however, about the resurrection of the body follows Paul’s beginning point in his excursus, verses 35-41, where he lays the foundation for the work of God in raising the bodies of believers in Jesus from the dead. That foundation is God’s work of calling to life any kernel or seed that is put in the soil, and the resulting glory is that “God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body” (verse 38ff.).⁶⁰ This foundational principle is something that should be understood by all intelligent people, as Paul prefaces these remarks with the crisp

⁵⁹Danker (2009), 238, defines *musterion*, “that which awaits disclosure or interpretation, mystery, secret.” The use of *musterion* in NC literature predominantly is from Paul, but see Moulton and Geden (1978), 658-659. Morris (1985), 219, suggests, “Familiarity with the marvel of harvest has dulled our sense of wonder. But if we did not know, how would we ever guess that casting a seed into the ground and burying it is the way to produce a living plant? Why, in light of this, should we regard as incredible the transformation of a dead body?”

⁶⁰Murphy-O’Connor (1990), 813, comments, “The plant that emerges has a body different from the seed that was buried. The form of the plant body is determined by God, and no one could guess his intention from the form of the seed body, particularly since so many different plants come from seeds that look very much alike.”

insult, “Fool!”⁶¹ In the planting and germination of seed, death of the old precedes the resulting new life. Anyone should know that. And the point Paul is making is clear. The body of the seed that is planted or sown in the ground—the bare kernel (*gumnon kokkon*),⁶² whether of wheat or some other type of seed—is not what you get or what will be (*genesomenon*).⁶³ It is changed in a remarkable way, and it is changed by God who “gives it a body as he has chosen” (*ho de theos didosin auto soma kathos ethelesen*).⁶⁴ This principle of seed is true and applicable to all of God’s *kosmos* as is indicated by Paul’s comments in verses 39-41 about the “glory” (*doxa*) of “earthly bodies” (*somata epigeia*) or “flesh” (*sarx*) on earth (i.e., humans, animals, birds, fish)

⁶¹The Greek is *aphron*, defined by Danker (2009), 65, as “not making use of common sense or ordinary intelligence, characteristic of one who fails to take account of various aspects before drawing a conclusion or adopting a course of action, senseless, foolish.” Compare Luke 11.40; 12.20; Romans 2.20; 2 Corinthians 11.16, 19; 12.6, 11; Ephesians 5.17; 1 Peter 2.15. Keener (2014), 495, says, “‘Fool!’ (15.36) was a standard rhetorical insult, Jewish as well as Greek, for someone who raised an ignorant or immoral objection.” Hering (1962), 174, notes, “*Aphron* is almost a synonym for ‘godless’ as in Psalm 14.1.”

⁶²We should not expect Paul to be correct according to modern botanical concepts with his use of *gumnos* (“naked, bare,” [Danker (2009), 82]) with *kokkos* (“seed, grain”).

⁶³More precisely, the use of *ginomai* stresses, “what it [the naked kernel] will become,” that is, the change or transformation effected by God. Compare the use of *ginomai* in the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13.32; Mark 4.32; Luke 13.19). Hering (1962), 174, states, “The plant is not preformed in the seed. God could in principle make any plant to grow from it (*kathos ethelesen*), but in fact he regularly gives to each one the ‘desired’ body, in accordance with Genesis 1.11.” Fiorenza (1988), 1188, adds, “We sow ‘the bare kernel’ that dies, but it is made alive by God in its ‘new body,’ the fruit.”

⁶⁴G. G. Findlay, “The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians,” in Nicoll (1979), Volume II, 934, comments on Paul’s use of *thelo* [“wish to have, desire, want,” Danker (2009), 167], “‘But God gives it a body, according as He willed’ (*ethelesen*)—not ‘as He wills’ (according to His choice or liking), but in accordance with His past decree in creation, by which the propagation of life on the earth was determined from the beginning (Genesis 1.11f.; for the verb, cf. 12.18). To allege an impossibility in the case is to impugn the power and resources of the Creator (cf. Acts 26.8), manifested in this very way every spring-time. The Divine will is the efficient nexus between seed and plant (cf. 7.6).” Compare the comments by Robertson and Plummer (1914), 370. See also note in Deissmann (1901), 252.

and “heavenly bodies” (*somata epourania*) in the heavens (i.e., sun, moon, stars).⁶⁵ This principle of seed supports and undergirds God’s work of caring for the environment and the constant and incredible renewing, some predictable, some unpredictable, of the *kosmos*.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Seed as Word of God is a metaphor or parable but also involves primarily the work of God to bring forth abundant life in the *kosmos*. The priority of seed (i.e., before the Fall) and the reestablishment of seed (after the Fall) to fashion and shape the *kosmos* according to the will of God is indicated in the book of Genesis (1.11, 12, 29; 3.15; 8.22).

Seed is a small beginning that God transforms into a comprehensive and inclusive *telos* (i.e., end, completion). This is seen in the image of the world tree in the mustard seed parable.

Faith in God’s work through seed is confidence in God to renew and overcome the effects of disease and death in this fallen *kosmos* (see Matthew 17.14-21) and to renew and overcome the effects of brokenness or “occasions for stumbling” in this fallen *kosmos* (see Luke 17.1-6).

Seed portrays and indeed embodies the mystery of dying and rising again, a focus perhaps introduced in the *kosmos* as a result of the Fall (see Genesis 2.15-17; 3.19, 22-24), which is reversed by God’s work in planting the seed of Jesus the Messiah in the *kosmos*. The mystery of the seed of Jesus, his dying and rising again, is highlighted in John 12.20-25 (cf. Galatians 3.16). The mystery of the seed of God’s redeemed and justified ones in their bodily dying and rising again is highlighted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15.35ff.

⁶⁵Robertson and Plummer (1914), 371, comment, “Experience teaches that God finds a suitable body for every type of earthly life and every type of heavenly life. Experience cannot teach that there is a type of life for which no suitable body can be found.” For the types of “flesh” mentioned by Paul—humans, animals, birds, fish—compare Genesis 1.20-27, where the order is reversed.

To translate all this to the renewing of the *kosmos* in a more general sense, I suggest the following.

Renewal is inevitable. Renewal will come. Plant seed and wait for God to work.

Renewal begins small but ends large. God will use seed to reach a *telos* for the *kosmos*.

Be confident and trust in God's work through seed. Seed as Word of God and as the work of God will not fail.

Understand that God's seed in Jesus the Messiah overcame death, and God's seed of life through Jesus will resurrect our bodies to flourish and thrive in the new heaven and new earth.

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