

# Luke 8:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?

## Analysis

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**And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?**—The verb *epérōtōn* (ἐπηρώτων, imperfect tense, "were asking") indicates repeated or continued questioning, suggesting the disciples' persistent confusion. The phrase *tis hautē eiē hē parabolē* (τίς αὕτη εἴη ἡ παραβολή, "what this parable might be") uses the optative mood *eiē* (εἴη), expressing tentative inquiry—they're uncertain about the meaning. This contrasts with the crowds who heard but apparently didn't ask, revealing a crucial distinction: genuine disciples pursue understanding when confused, while casual hearers remain content with surface-level reception.

The disciples' question demonstrates appropriate response to difficult teaching—seeking explanation rather than abandoning the teacher or pretending to understand. Their private inquiry (Mark 4:10 specifies they asked "when he was alone") shows humility to admit confusion and persistence to gain clarity. This pattern establishes prayer and study as proper responses to biblical perplexity. Unlike the hardened religious leaders who criticized without seeking understanding, the disciples' teachability positioned them to receive kingdom mysteries (v. 10).

## Historical Context

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Rabbinic education encouraged students to ask questions, memorize teaching, and request clarification. The Talmud later formalized this: "An inquiring student is like a sealed fountain—everything remains inside." Jesus' disciples functioned as

traditional rabbinic students, accompanying their master and learning through observation and instruction. The private explanation pattern appears frequently in the Gospels (Mark 7:17, 9:28, 10:10)—Jesus taught publicly in parables but explained privately to disciples. This fulfilled dual purpose: public teaching invited response while protecting truth from mockers; private explanation rewarded genuine seekers. The disciples' confusion despite three years with Jesus demonstrates that spiritual understanding requires divine illumination, not merely prolonged exposure. This prepares for verse 10's revelation that understanding parables is divinely granted, not humanly achieved.

## Related Passages

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**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

**James 2:17** — Faith and works

## Study Questions

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1. How does the disciples' humble admission of confusion and persistent questioning model appropriate response when biblical teaching seems unclear or difficult?
2. What distinguishes the disciples who asked for explanation from the crowds who heard but didn't inquire, and how does this difference reveal genuine versus superficial interest in God's truth?
3. In what ways does Jesus' pattern of public parabolic teaching and private explanation challenge modern demands that all teaching be immediately and universally accessible?

## Interlinear Text

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Ἐπηρώτων δὲ αὐτοῦ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ λέγοντες, τίς  
asked And him G3588 disciples him saying What  
G1905 G1161 G846 G3101 G846 G3004 G5101

εἴη ἡ παραβολή αὕτη  
be parable this  
G1498 G3850 G3778

## Additional Cross-References

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**Mark 4:10** (Parallel theme): And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable.

**Matthew 13:10** (Parallel theme): And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?

**Matthew 13:18** (Parallel theme): Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

**Mark 4:34** (Parallel theme): But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.

**Matthew 15:15** (Parallel theme): Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.

**Matthew 13:36** (Parallel theme): Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

**John 15:15** (Parallel theme): Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

**Hosea 6:3** (Parallel theme): Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.