

## Why is the Kingdom of God a secret?

Matthew records Jesus' parables about the kingdom of God as a series of 7 parables: the sower, weeds / tares, mustard seed, yeast, hidden treasure, pearl, and net / drag net (Matt 13:1-52). When the disciples ask why He was teaching in parables, Jesus responds with some enigmatic words:

His disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that,  
"though seeing, they may not see;  
though hearing, they may not understand.'" (Luke 8:9-10, NIV)

Why are the secrets of the knowledge of the kingdom of God hidden?

1. Here is an example of a secret about the kingdom of God - what do you observe? What appears to be confusing and seemingly hidden?

"When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. (Luke 10:8-12, NIV)

Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."

Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Matt 12:22-28, NIV)

Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst." (Luke 17:20-21, NIV)

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field."

He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear. (Matt 13:36-43, NIV)

2. How do you make sense of the above? What methods did you use to come to your conclusion?

3. When asked why Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God in parables, He responds with a chiasm and cites a prophecy in Isaiah (Isa 6:9-10) at its apex:

This is why I speak to them in parables:

- 1 "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.
- 2 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:
  - 3 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
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  - 5 For this people's heart has become calloused;
  - 6 they hardly hear with their ears,
  - 7 **and they have closed their eyes.**
  - 7' **Otherwise they might see with their eyes,**
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  - 4' But blessed are your eyes because they see,
  - 3' and your ears because they hear.
  - 2' For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people
  - 1' longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it. (Matt 13:13-17, NIV)

Note carefully the contrast between the first and second halves of the chiasm. What do you observe? How does this compare to your methodology of understanding a secret of the Kingdom of God? What does this tell you about the Jews of the first century?

## Why is the Kingdom of God a secret? Teacher Notes

Matthew records Jesus' parables about the kingdom of God as a series of 7 parables: the sower, weeds / tares, mustard seed, yeast, hidden treasure, pearl, and net / drag net (Matt 13:1-52). When the disciples ask why He was teaching in parables, Jesus responds with some enigmatic words:

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The student should be able to observe: the Kingdom of God has come **near**.

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The student should be able to observe: the Kingdom of God has come **upon you**.

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The student should be able to observe: the Kingdom of God is in the future when everything that causes sin and all who do evil are removed.

Encourage the student to consider how the Kingdom of God can be near, in your midst, upon you, and in the future. Where is Jesus in all of this?

It appears that the Kingdom of God is manifested in the person of Jesus Christ. As Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God near, already present, and in the future. This is one of the secrets and mystery of the Kingdom of God.

Have the student read John 3:1-5. With this perspective, associating the Kingdom of God with the person of Jesus Christ, passages like John 3:1-5 take on a deeper meaning.

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

"How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. (John 3:1-5, NIV)

2. How do you make sense of the above? What methods did you use to come to your conclusion?

The methodology you are teaching is:

a) Careful observation of God's word.

b) The more you observe, the less you need to interpret. Let the observable data drive your interpretations instead of letting your preconceived notions drive a selective observation of God's word.

3. When asked why Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God in parables, He responds with a chiasm and cites a prophecy in Isaiah (Isa 6:9-10) at its apex:

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Note carefully the contrast between the first and second halves of the chiasm. What do you observe? How does this compare to your methodology of understanding a secret of the Kingdom of God? What does this tell you about the Jews of the first century?

Inform or remind the student what a chiasm is.

A chiasm is a Hebrew literary device with an x-shaped literary structure. There are passages in the Bible that have similar words and idea with an inverted parallel pattern. The words / ideas of this structure take the following sequential form A-B-C-X-C-B-A. This intentional literary design draws attention to and emphasizes the center idea where the inflection or turning point has occurred.

Help the student carefully notice the pattern in Matthew 13:13-17. Ask the student: compare the people of the first half of the chiasm with the people of the second half – what do you observe?

Ask the student: If Jews of the first century, knowledgeable of the Old Testament and its prophecies of the Messiah, saw and hear Jesus - why didn't they understand the parables about the Kingdom of God?

Encourage the class to discuss the apex of the chiasm in light of the people of the first half and the people of the second half. How does their method of Bible study stack up to the chiasm's main point?

The first half of the chiasm is about disbelieving Jews in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isa 6:9-10). The second half of the chiasm is about Believers and what distinguishes them from disbelieving Jews.

As the first recipients of God's revelation, the Jews failed to know God's word and did not recognize that Jesus was the Messiah. Their preconceived notions of what the Messiah should look like colored their observations of Jesus, His fulfillment of Messianic prophecies, the testimony of John the Baptist, and His works of miracles. The apex of the chiasm emphasizes this failure and illustrates one's choice of faith:

AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES,

OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES,