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The Parable of the Persistent Widow

Luke 18: 1-8

The parable of the persistent widow DIG: In the parable of the persistent widow, what was the attitude of the judge? What chance did she have of shaming him into doing the right thing? What means did this poor widow get a hearing and have the case settled in her favor? What caused Him to cave in and grant her request? Why was Jesus telling this parable to His apostles? How is YHWH like and unlike this judge?

REFLECT: Through prayer, when have you allowed ADONAI to turn your hopeless situation into His glorious achievement. As for prayer, are you more likely to give up or hang tough? Why? Does this story mean I should keep praying to win the lottery or to see the coming of God's Kingdom? Why? Why not?

The one main point to this parable is that persistent prayer conquers fear.

What is your view of **God**? Do you think of **Him** as an **unjust Judge**? Do you think you need to sweet-talk **Him** into caring for you? How easy is it to misunderstand the way **Ha'Shem** works! How quickly we develop false perceptions based on the way we interpret the events in our lives. Yet, the truth still stands out that **ADONAI** is loving and just. We need not fear, we can count on **Him** to provide **us** with all that we need.¹¹⁵⁹

Then . . . Jesus told His apostles a parable to show them that they should always pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1). The word **then** indicates that **the Lord's** teaching here grew out of the previous instruction (**to see link click If - For the Son of Man in His Day Will Be Like Lightning**), concerning the postponement of the Messianic Kingdom and the delay in the fulfillment of that for which **the talmidim** had been waiting.¹¹⁶⁰

The Shameless Judge: He said: In a small town there was a judge who neither feared God, nor respected what people thought (Luke 18:2). Jehoshaphat, the godly king who brought the people back to God, appointed judges throughout the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, and instructed the judges, and instructed them, saying: Think about what you are doing; you are not dispensing justice by

merely human standards but on behalf of ADONAI; He is with you when you deliver a verdict. Therefore, let the fear of ADONAI be upon you; be careful what you do; for ADONAI our God does not allow dishonesty, partiality or bribe-taking (Second Chronicles 19:5-7 CJB). Such warnings are always needed in every society, and the righteous of the TaNaKh tried to keep justice at the gate. Amos in particular was upset over the corruption of the judges (Amos 2:6-7, 5:10-13).

But the same problem surfaced in the B'rit Chadashah. The judges in Jerusalem were traditionally so corrupt that they were called *Dayyaney Gezeloth* (Robber Judges) rather than *Dayyaney Gezeroth* (Judges of Punishments), which was their real title. The Talmud speaks of village judges who were willing to pervert justice for a dish of meat (B. T. Baba Kamma 114a).¹¹⁶¹ In the perversion of Jehoshaphat's command, this judge has no respect for neither people nor for God. The word often translated respect (Greek: *entripo*) can also mean *being humbled*. The active of the verb is to *make ashamed*, and the passive is either *be put to shame* or *have respect for*. The common vernacular in the Near East would be, "He is not *ashamed* before the people." This very important aspect of the description of the unjust judge is thereby overlooked by other translations. The point is that Near Eastern traditional culture is a shame-pride culture to a significant degree. That is, appealing to shame encourages a particular pattern of social behavior. The parent does not tell the child, "That is wrong, Maria" (with an appeal to an abstract standard of right and wrong) but "This is shameful, Maria" (with an appeal to that which stimulates feelings of shame or feelings of pride). In such a society the vocabulary that surrounds the concept of shame is very important.¹¹⁶² One of the sharpest criticisms possible of an adult in the Near East is "he or she does not feel shame."

In this regard, ancient attitudes are reflected. Jeremiah had the same problem. We are told the wise men are put to shame (Jer 8:9), but in regard to the prophets and the priests he writes: They should be ashamed of their deeds, but they are not ashamed at all, they don't even know how to blush (Jeremiah 8:12). The Hebrew uses two strong words for shame (*bwsh*, *klm*) and speaks precisely to the problem faced with the unjust judge. Nothing shamed him. There is no spark of honor left in his soul to which anyone can appeal.

In this case the unjust judge is hurting a destitute widow. He should feel shame. But the whole world could cry "Shame on you!" and it will make no impression on him at all. He feels no shame before anyone. Consequently, the picture we have of the unjust judge is a very difficult man. He has no fear of God; the cry, "For God's sake," will do no good. He also has no inner sense of what is right and what is shameful to which one could

appeal. Therefore, the cry, “For the sake of this destitute **widow**,” will likewise fall on deaf ears. Obviously the only way to influence such **a man** is through bribery. To such **a one** comes **the widow**.¹¹⁶³



The Helpless Widow: And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, “Grant me justice against my adversary” (Luke 18:3). The widow in the TaNaKh is a typical symbol of the innocent, powerless, and oppressed (Exodus 22:22-23; Deuteronomy 10:18, 24:17, 27:19; Job 22:9, 24:3 and 21; Psalm 68:5; Isaiah 10:2). Isaiah 1:17 called on the rulers and the people to **learn to do right and seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless and plead the case of the widow**, and continuing in 1:23, **Isaiah** tells us that **they all love bribes . . . but the widow’s case does not come before them**. Therefore, the Jewish legal tradition required that on the basis of **Isaiah 1:17 . . . the suit of an orphan must always be heard first and next that of the widow**.¹¹⁶⁴ This **woman** had legal rights that were being violated. The issue here is clearly money because, **according to the Talmud, a qualified scholar could decide money cases sitting alone (B. T. Sanhedrin 4b, Soncino 15)**. **She** had neither a protector to compel **the judge** to give **her** justice, nor money to bribe **him**. **Her** cry, however, was a call for justice and protection – not vengeance.

Yet there is another important element. The Near East was, and is, a man’s world and women are generally powerless. But at the same time, they are respected and honored. For example, men can be mistreated in public, but not women. Women can scream at a public figure and nothing will happen to them. The men could not say the same things and stay alive. This same background is reflected in the rest of the parable.¹¹⁶⁵

The Reluctant Judge: For some time he refused to respond. But finally he said to himself, “Despite the fact that I don’t fear God or care what people think” (Luke 18:4), I’m going to have to do something about this incessant **woman** because **I** can’t

continue on like this.”

The Widow Receiving Justice: Yet because this woman is wearing me out, I’m going to see that she gets justice, least she give me a headache with her constant requests (Luke 18:5 NLT)! The Greek word translated **wearing me out** is a boxing term for a blow under the eye (**First Corinthians 9:27**). **She** obviously wasn’t going to assault **him** physically, but it does mean that **she** was shouting all kinds of insults at **him**. This exaggeration on the part of **the unjust judge** indicates the extent to which **her** persistence had irritated **him**. The Greek *eis telos* translated **constant** is in the imperfect tense, which expresses continuous action and implies **her** determination to go on forever. So in this war of attrition between the two of them, **the unjust judge** was convinced that **the woman** will *never* give up.

The parable is a clear case of the rabbinic principle of “from the light to the heavy.” **The woman** was apparently in a hopeless situation. **She** was **a woman** in a man’s world, **a widow** without money or powerful friends. **The judge** was **unjust** and could not be appealed to on the basis of duty to **God**, and no one could shame **him** into doing the right thing. Yet, this **woman** not only gets a hearing but has the case settled in her favor. So clearly, the thrust of the parable is persistence in prayer.

The near historical application: So as **Jesus** marched toward Yerushalayim and **His** destiny with death, **He** knew the situation **His talmidim** would face not only after **His** death, but also after **His** ascension. If this **woman’s** needs are met, how much more the needs of the faithful who pray not to **a harsh judge** but to a loving **Father**? However discouraged and hopeless **their** situation may seem, it will not be as bad as that of this **widow**. **They** can rest assured that **their** prayers are heard and acted upon. When fear grips the heart, believers are challenged to pray, and to pray **constantly** in the face of all discouragements with full confidence that **ADONAI** will act in **their** best interests.¹¹⁶⁶ Therefore, **listen to what the unjust judge says** about the persistence of prayer (**Luke 18:6**).

The far eschatological application: **And** after a brief pause, **Jesus** said: **Will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones**, this can be translated **to rescue His people, the apple of His eye (Zechariah 2:8), who cry out constantly to Him day and night** from within the fortress of Bozrah? **Will He delay** any longer as the armies of the antichrist close the noose around their collective necks, **or keep putting them off (Luke 18:7)?**

I tell you, He will see that they get justice, and suddenly. Although the Second Coming has been delayed, when **Yeshua** acts **He** will act **suddenly** as **He** did at the Flood and at

Sodom. **However, when the Son of Man [returns], will He find faith on the earth (Luke 18:8)?** So it seems the most important question we can ask is this: What will be the situation when **the Son of Man returns?** It will be at the very end of the Great Tribulation. The majority of **the Jews** will be held up in Bozrah (some will be hiding in Jerusalem). The armies of the antichrist will be closing in to kill every last **Jew** on the face of the earth. Clearly fearing for **their** very existence, with no one else to turn to, the Jewish leadership at that time will finally call upon **Yeshua** to save **them**. The spiritual scales will fall from **their** eyes and **they** will realize that **He** was **their Messiah** all along and they will cry out for **Him** to **return** (see my commentary on **Revelation Ev - The Basis for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ**). At that moment **all Isra'el**, the small believing remnant still alive at the end of the Great Tribulation, **will be saved (Romans 11:26a)**. So **when the Son of Man returns** (see my commentary on **Isaiah Kg -The Second Coming of Jesus Christ to Bozrah**), **He will find faith** among the righteous of the TaNaKh, and **the sheep** Gentiles (see my commentary on **Revelation Fc - The Sheep and the Goats**).

In the gathering gloom of intensified opposition we need not fear. God has put His anger far away and He hears us. We must trust Him and be steadfast in prayer. We do not appeal to a disgruntled Judge, but to a loving heavenly Father who will vindicate His children and will do so quickly.¹¹⁶⁷

In 1915 Pastor William Barton started to publish a series articles. Using the archaic language of an ancient storyteller, he wrote his parables under the pen name of Safed the Sage. And for the next fifteen years he shared the wisdom of Safed and his enduring spouse Keturah. It was a genre he enjoyed. By the early 1920s, Safed was said to have a following of at least three million. Turning an ordinary event into an illustration of a spiritual truth was always a keynote of Barton's ministry.

There came unto me a man, who saluted me and sat down. And he was of a sorrowful countenance.

And he said, O Safed, thou great and wise man, live forever.

And I said, Eliminate that Stuff, and say what it is that devoureth thee: for I behold that thou art in trouble.

And he said, Thy servant is a Public Spirited Citizen in the town where he doth reside, and he is chairman of many Committees for the doing of what all agree ought to be done and none desireth to do. And behold, there is a great undertaking that hath been begun, and all interest in it hath slumped and our Great Cause is now a Forlorn Hope. And only a Miracle

can save it.

And I said, Then let there be a Miracle.

And he said, Thou speakest as if Miracles were Dead Easy.

And I answered, They are not easy, but they are sometimes necessary. And the most miraculous of Miracles is the resurrection of Forlorn Hopes; the Most Successful Achievements are of that sort.

And I said, Hast thou heard of the Pilgrims?

And he said, I have known of them all my life.

And I said, Six weeks before the Pilgrims left Holland their adventure was a Forlorn Hope. In the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty, and on the sixth month and the fourteenth day of the month, John Robinson, that man of **God**, wrote that there were none among the Pilgrims who would then put money into the Enterprise if he had back what already they had put in.

And he said, I never knew that. I suppose that all those Old Saints were sustained throughout by their Faith in **God**, and their visions of the Glorious Future.

And I said, It is the habit of **God** to get us committed to tasks greater than we can achieve and see whether we be cowardly or brave. For no one ever prayeth save when they find Something Bigger than they can do alone. But when people doth realize that they and **God** must see it through together, or else give up and quit, **then doth that person Pray Mightily and go Forward, and the sea doth open, or the Jordan divide, or mountains are removed and become a Highway.**

And I said, The statue erected some time ago to the memory of Lot's wife, standeth in Comparative Isolation; but it every person who had faltered and thought the cause a Forlorn Hope had given it up, then were there no Salt left in the Dead Sea.

And he said, I think I understand.

And I said, Go thou home, and seek the blessing of **God** anew, and add one more to the long list of Forlorn Hopes that became Glorious Achievements.¹¹⁶⁸