

The Father

Author's Note: *This can be used as an introductory skit for the Parable of the Prodigal Son as recorded in the Gospel of Luke 15:11-32. This is to be performed by a male. The actor should be attired in robes and a tunic similar to those worn by Jews in Palestine at the time of Christ. Whitening of hair and facial hair may be desired to give a better effect. Also, another actor (preferably male) could take the place of the "friend" mentioned by the father and ad-lib lines where Eli responds to questions.*

Oh, yes, hello. These are all my lands. They're working on the barley harvest over there. It's definitely been a good year. You must be new here. I'm Eli. No, they say that I am the largest land holder around here. I'm not sure. It's not important anyway. Family is what's important to me.

Children? Oh yes, four daughters. The most beautiful you can imagine, especially my little Atarah. She's the delight of my old age. Oh, there she is now, helping her mother. She's lived twelve summers now, you know. Her head is full of thoughts of marriage. But to find a suitable man. Ah, that is trouble. Too many of the young men around here don't have the care for her. Perhaps you know someone? I would want to get his credentials first. No one is going to take my little crown away from me.

Sons? Oh, yes! Two of them. There goes my eldest, Obed. He runs the farm now. What? Me still run the farm? No, no, no. I'm too old for that. After all I've lived a good sixty-seven winters and summers just this year. A man at this age can be cared for by his children. It gives me more time to meditate. And to do what I like best: to copy the Scriptures. Yes, that gives me much joy. I'm currently working on my second copy of *Debarim*, the farewell of Moshe. Besides, my grandchildren have been clamoring for my attention. Yes, I have fifteen of them. My daughters have been blessed. But Obed, he's too busy with his farm. Yes, it's almost completely *his* farm now. Most people still call it mine. Old Zechariah over on his farm says it's mine until I die. Perhaps he is right, but Obed is the one who does all the work. He is a fine young man. He'll be wedding in two months. And she is a fine young woman. Zechariah's daughter actually. I hope they'll be happy – but I don't know... You know, Obed's pride and joy is his work. All he talks about is the barley harvest and how much he's brought in. The fruit has come in more abundantly this year than in the five previous. God is blessing us, since we are going to have a Shabbat rest next year. You didn't know that, friend? Well, I suggest you get to harvesting yourself. He'll only give you what you need if you work for it.

Ah, my Obed, he really is my pride and joy. He's got the work ethic of his father and the looks of his mother. I'm surprised that more girls have not thrown themselves at his feet. But what have I said? All it is for him is work, work, work. Please father, please father, please father. He doesn't see how pleased I am with him and how much I'd like to sit down and talk with him – Father to Son, man to man. Ah, he does all these things for me – he built me an entire new house two years ago with a big porch – but he doesn't have time for me. Oh, Obed. *sigh*

What, my other son? *sigh* Yes, Perez. That is a sad story. It was five years ago. Five years, how long! No, he's gone. Dead? Heaven forbid! I pray not! I really am not sure what has become

of him. You see he's always been a hothead – very much like I was when I was his age. Always looking over the fence at the neighbor's farm.

“Father, look! Jerahmeel and Yahya are going up to town, why can't I go?”

“Father, I'm bored, can I go over to Nathan's house?” Let me tell you he was going to see young Haddassah. She's married to one of Ben-Shaphat's son's now. Well, there was trouble between him and her. They were young – hot-blooded, you know. Foolish. But I couldn't imagine what was brewing behind those dark eyes of his.

Five years ago he comes to me. I was keeping accounts under the tent – right over there where my Keren is preparing the meal. He comes to me and says, “Father, I want my share of your estate *now*, instead of waiting for you to die.” Of course I was shocked! I mean, he's telling me that I'm worth more to him dead than alive! Deny him? Friend, are you mad? He's my *son*, I cannot deny him something like that. He needed to *learn*!

I divided everything up. He wanted a third, but I put my foot down. I have four daughters and they are entitled to something! In the end I had to quarter it. One quarter for the girls, one quarter for Perez and two quarters for Obed. Perez said he only wanted what he could liquidate. So he got a good amount of sheep, some camels, the house and property that borders on Hoshea's land, and what gold and silver I had on hand. He sold it all – well, except for the camels. He and Hoshea bargained for that house for three months before Hoshea paid him twice what it was worth and that was only because Perez is my son and I interceded. *sigh*

No, he left then. I sent my servant Ishma after him. Last I heard he was living in a city called Samarkand. Heaven knows where *that* is! And that was two years ago. I haven't heard a word from him. Ishma told me that Perez has become quite the rich man. Wine flows like rivers at his parties – all day and all night. He goes through girls like my donkey will go through a armload of thistles – a new one every day. This is my *son*? Yes, this is my son. It is only by God's providence that I did not end up that way. I understand him better than you think, after all I was a hot-head, too. And, oh, I miss him.

Friend, are you *mad*? *Forget* him? Can a man forget his right hand? Can a man gouge out his right eye and forget what it was like to have it? He is my son! He is a *part* of me! I have stood out here every day since he left, waiting for him to return. At first I did my accounts out here under that tent. And then Obed built the house with that nice porch. It was too much for me to work on the accounts any more and Obed took over – good son that he is. Ah, he is a delight! But Perez! Zechariah says that Aharon the cloth-merchant in Ain Karem says I've gone mad. And not just him, most of the people in the gate think that. But I must be here when my son returns!

Give up hope? Never. *Never!* Until the day I hear of his death. My son might be dead to me now, but he will come again. I *know* it.

I spend my days out here. Mad old Eli waiting for his lost son.

Do? What I'll do if he comes back? What do you think I'll do? I can't reproach him. Not in any case. I am the one to be reproached, after all I gave him the means to go. I – I – I'll give a banquet for him! I'll bring him back into the family. He won't receive an inheritance anymore, but he is part of my family – *forever!* And they *will* accept it, because I'll accept him.

Ah, the road, the long road. Oh, there's my Keren, calling me to lunch. I'm coming Ishahi!

Wait! Friend, do you see what I see? Who *is* that? Is it...? But, no so ragged! But the gait, the gait! It *must* be! Perez! Perez! My son! [runs off to meet his son]

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