



— *Conference Papers* —

***Zelophehad Sisters***

1. Conception
2. Resistance
3. Outcome

***Conception***

Let's say that – several years ago – a group of women decided to visit a pastor's conference. Inspired by the story of Zelophehad's daughters, they wanted to present themselves to those with the power to vote for women's ordination. Like Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah, they hoped to present their story, to have their voices heard. This is their story.

Voice 1: We must speak before the Great Court of Israel – only they can change the law in our favour. Yet we have no representative in that mighty group of men, for we have no brothers. That is, indeed, the problem.

Voice 2: We could ask a sympathetic pastor to speak for us – yet it seems right to present ourselves, as Zelophehad's daughters did, to argue our own case. For there are no women in that group; if we did, there would be no need to speak.

V1: Because we have no brothers, our family will receive no land. Our father's name will be lost. He was a good man; he does not deserve this; we do not deserve this.

V2: They say change will come; due process must be followed. But what of the women who could preach, and cannot? Think of the untapped talent: those who have been called yet can't serve; those who are stifled; those who find some other unsatisfying role; those who leave in frustration. Why waste all this? Why should this be lost?

V1: I believe our case has merit. God gave us his Law – yet where does this leave us?

V2: We struggled to reconcile unchanging law with social change; we looked for a deeper understanding, and found it.

V1: Surely when the court sees how this affects us, they will reconsider? The law is good, but if it fails us... could it be better?

V2: Those opposed to our cause need to see real women, real people, presenting their case; not a theological quibble, but humanity, here, now.





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**Resistance**

V2: Before the conference, I heard a voice on the phone, crying:

Voice P:

Don't come to the conference  
It will only harm your cause  
After all, how could it help?  
Nobody likes confrontation.  
Hearts will be hardened.  
Trust me, I'm only trying to help  
After all, I'm completely impartial.  
If you submit a paper  
We can read it at leisure  
In comfort, in peace  
As an abstract theory.  
Don't come to the conference.

Don't come to the conference  
The agenda is fixed  
The speakers are vetted  
Don't mess with the mix  
What about a side room?  
For those who want to listen?  
We don't like surprises.  
For some older pastors  
A surprise could be fatal.  
Is that what you want?

Why come to the conference  
When we have a committee?  
A working group, really  
Developing a model  
For consensus in theory.  
Once the model is here  
We'll apply it freely:  
Gay rights will be sorted.  
The environment saved;  
The correct response

Will be known in a jiffy.  
And if a model can't be found,  
We'll form another group  
To develop a model  
For forming committees.  
Don't come to the conference.

There are rules in place:  
A mighty constitution.  
It defines our church,  
Protects us from  
The global confusion.  
Things are falling apart;  
The young people are leaving.  
To stand, unchanging,  
Is the only solution.  
To give way now  
Would hasten the slide.  
You'll just have to wait  
For a better time.

Don't come to the conference.  
Don't break the hierarchy.  
Your idea goes against  
All we hold dear.  
The pastor tells his congregation  
What we agree in consultation.  
To reverse this flow  
Would disrupt the functioning  
Of this finely tuned machine.  
When the next generation  
Take up their station  
It'll be sorted; you'll see.  
Don't come to the conference.





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**Outcome**

V1: When our turn came, it was terrifying to be called before the court; to be the centre of attention.

V2: We dutifully arrived when we were asked to, so as not to disturb them. We were ready to speak, nervous despite our prepared speech, yet even that was denied us – they were already filing out.

V1: We stated our case clearly. We cited the law, yet pointed out how it failed us, failed our family. We were heard.

V2: We stood at the doors and handed out leaflets. We talked to men we knew, men we didn't. It wasn't what we planned for – but we made real connections.

V1: The court argued, some in support, others opposed.

V2: The case has been made, again and again, yet somehow it's never quite enough. The arguments for and against are known, yet never seem to go anywhere new. It always seems easier not to change.

V1: In the end, Moses decided to bring it to God. We will abide by God's judgement.

V2: The curtain is torn; no longer the divide. There's no single conduit to God, no spokesperson who could proclaim his decision and be accepted. We are one body, with many voices.

V1: We had made our case, done all we could; now we hoped and prayed.

V2: We keep planting seeds, and hoping; the result is out of our hands.

