THE QUESTION

# What did the early church teach about the widow's two mites (Luke 21:1–4)?

*Asked by a THF member on October 20, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 8 numbered quotations · the 10 early Christian passages and 129 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.*

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/what-did-the-early-church-teach-about-the-widows-two-mites-luke-21-1-4

## The short answer *From the text: says what the passages say*

Jesus praised the poor widow because she gave all she had, even though it was only two small coins. Early Christian writers said God measures a gift by the giver's heart and sacrifice, not by its size. They held her up as a model of joyful, generous giving and as a rebuke to rich people who give little.

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POINT 1 OF 8

## The Lord looked at her purpose, not amount

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Cyprian says Jesus did not weigh how much the widow gave, but how much she gave it out of. Her two mites were all she had, so in His eyes she gave more than the rich.

**1** “When the Lord noticed and saw her, He looked not at the amount of her gift, but at her purpose. He considered not how much she had given, but out of how much she had given it.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 6, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

POINT 2 OF 8

## The giver's mind sets a gift's worth

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Gregory Thaumaturgus uses the widow to teach that a small offering given with a sincere mind is not lesser. He says Scripture judges an offering by the disposition of the one who gives it.

**2** “For, in my judgment, the sacred word has not set the large outward amount of the gift as the standard. Rather, it has set the mind and disposition of the giver as the measure by which the worth and magnificence of the offering are judged.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Gregory Thaumaturgus,** *Oration to Origen* 1 (c. 240–270 AD) **Source 5, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

POINT 3 OF 8

## Christ counts people rich by their choice

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Clement of Alexandria places the widow's mites among sayings that show Christ trains the soul. He says Christ judges riches by a person's choice, not by what they own, and he retells how the widow gave more than all.

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**3** “Therefore Christ, who trains the soul, counts one rich, not by his possessions, but by his choice.”

*later in the same passage*

“Again, when He saw the rich casting into the treasury according to their wealth, and the widow casting in two mites, He said that the widow had cast in more than they all, because they had contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her destitution.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Alexandria,** *Stromata* 4.6 (c. 190–215 AD) **Source 3, page 6** Read it in the library ›

*THF's updated English*

POINT 4 OF 8

## Her example shames rich people who give little

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Cyprian calls her blessed and says she was praised by the Judge before the day of judgment. He turns her example on wealthy believers who give nothing and says even the poor should do good works.

**4** “Let the rich be ashamed of their barrenness and unbelief. The widow, the widow poor in resources, is found rich in works.”

*later in the same passage*

“And although everything that is given is bestowed on widows and orphans, she gives, though she should have received, so that we may know from this what punishment awaits the barren rich man, when by this example even the poor ought to labor in good works.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Treatises* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 6, page 6** Read it in the library ›

*THF's updated English*

POINT 5 OF 8

## Free people give all they have joyfully

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Irenaeus contrasts the tithe given under the law with Christians, who as free people give all their goods to the Lord's purposes. He names the poor widow as the pattern for this glad and free giving.

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**5** “For this reason, the Jews had their tithes of goods consecrated to Him, but those who have received freedom dedicate all their possessions for the Lord’s purposes, giving joyfully and freely not the least valuable parts of their property, having hope for better things to come; just as that poor widow did who gave all she had to the treasury of God.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Irenaeus,** *Against Heresies: Book IV* (c. 175–202 AD) **Source 2, page 6** Read it in the library ›
*THF's updated English*

POINT 6 OF 8

## God gladly receives gifts from the poor

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Archelaus says Jesus welcomed the gifts of the rich, but also gladly received the widow's two mites. He sees this as going beyond Moses, since Jesus accepts gifts even from those who have almost nothing.

**6** “So the two mites of the poor widow are also received with gladness.”

*later in the same passage*

“For Moses received gifts from those who had, but Jesus receives them even from those who do not have.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Archelaus,** *Disputation with Manes* 1 (c. 270–300 AD) **Source 10, page 6** Read it in the library ›
*THF's updated English*

POINT 7 OF 8

## Believers should give from their own labor

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

Commodianus tells his readers to share with their brother and to give from what they earn. He points to the widow whom Christ preferred as the example to follow.

**7** “Besides, you ought to give into the treasury from your labor, just as that widow whom the Anointed One preferred.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Commodianus,** *Writings* (c. 250–300 AD) **Source 9, page 6** Read it in the library ›
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POINT 8 OF 8

## The church prayed to be received like her

***Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say***

An early liturgy names the widow's coins beside Abraham's sacrifice and Cornelius's alms. It asks God to accept the people's offerings in the same way and give them heavenly things in return.

**8** "As You accepted the sacrifice of our father Abraham, the incense of Zacharias, the alms of Cornelius, and the widow's two small coins, so also accept the thank offerings of these people."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Early Liturgies,** *Divine Liturgy of St. Mark* 1 (c. 200–400 AD) **Source 4, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
*THF's updated English*

THE LIMITS

## What these passages don't tell us

- These passages do not say every Christian must give away their last coin in every case.
- Archelaus also says using riches for mercy is acceptable, so the widow is a pattern of heart more than a fixed rule.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

## The Sources

The 10 early Christian passages and 129 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–10, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 11–92, in Bible order), then 47 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF's updated English unless marked "1885 English" (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). "… [continues online]" marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

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## EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *10 passages from 9 writers*

**Tatian**, *c. 150–180 AD · source 1*

**1** *Diatessaron* 32 (1885 English) “12:42a And there came a poor widow, and cast in two mites… [continues online] **read ›**

**Irenaeus**, *c. 175–202 AD · source 2*

**2** *Against Heresies: Book IV* (1885 English) **Quote 5, page 4** “that poor widow acted who cast all her living into the treasury of God… [continues online] **read ›**

**Clement of Alexandria**, *c. 190–215 AD · source 3*

**3** *Stromata* 4.6 **Quote 3, page 3** “seek first the kingdom of heaven, and its righteousness, for these are the great things, and the things… [continues online] **read ›**

**Early Liturgies**, *c. 200–400 AD · source 4*

**4** *Divine Liturgy of St. Mark* 1 **Quote 8, page 5** “You accepted the sacrifice of our father Abraham, the incense of Zacharias, the alms of Cornelius, and the… [continues online] **read ›**

**Gregory Thaumaturgus**, *c. 240–270 AD · source 5*

**5** *Oration to Origen* 1 (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** “is it laid down in the sacred writings,Luke 21:2 that a certain poor and lowly woman, who was with the rich and powerful that were contributing largely and… [continues online] **read ›**

**Cyprian**, *c. 248–258 AD · source 6*

**6** *Treatises* **Quotes 1, 4, pages 2, 3** “and yet you take part in the sacrifice that the poor man has offered. Consider in the Gospel the widow who remembered the heavenly commands. Even in the troubles and… [continues online] **read ›**

**Apostolic Constitutions**, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 7–8*

**7** *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 1) “that widow who is honored in the Gospel by the Lord's testimony, who came into the temple and cast two mites into the treasury, which make a farthing. And… [continues online] **read ›**

**8** *Apostolic Constitutions* (on point 7) “not able to put anything considerable into the Corban, then at least give to strangers one, or two, or five mites. Store up for yourself heavenly treasure, which neither moth… [continues online] **read ›**

**Commodianus**, *c. 250–300 AD · source 9*

**9** *Writings* (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** “the treasury, besides, you ought to give of your labour, even as that widow whom the Anointed One preferred… [continues online] **read ›**

**Archelaus**, *c. 270–300 AD · source 10*

**10** *Disputation with Manes* 1 **Quote 6, page 4** “too little if gifts were placed into the treasury by the rich alone. So the two mites of the poor widow are also received with gladness. And in that offering… [continues online] **read ›**

## THE BIBLE *82 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

**11** **Genesis 38:19** Then she arose and went away, took off her veil, and put on her widow’s garments. **read ›**

**12** **Exodus 30:13** This is what everyone who passes through the census shall give: half a didrachm, according to the holy didrachm—twenty obols make the didrachm—and the half didrachm is the contribution to the Lord. **read ›**

**13** **Exodus 30:15** The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than the half didrachm when they give the contribution to the Lord, to make atonement for your souls. **read ›**

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14 **Exodus 38:3** He made all the furnishings of the altar, its fire pan, the base, the bowls, and the bronze flesh hooks. (Septuagint Exodus 38:23 (Exodus 38:3 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

15 **Exodus 38:10** and their pillars twenty, and their bases twenty; (Septuagint Exodus 37:8 (Exodus 38:10 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

16 **Leviticus 2:7** If your gift is a sacrifice from the hearth, it shall be made of fine flour with oil. **read ›**

17 **Leviticus 15:29** On the eighth day she shall take for herself two turtledoves or two young pigeons and bring them to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of witness. **read ›**

18 **Leviticus 27:4** For a female the assessment shall be thirty didrachms. **read ›**

19 **Leviticus 27:7** If the person is from sixty years old and upward, if a male, his valuation shall be fifteen didrachms of silver, and if a female, ten didrachms. **read ›**

20 **Numbers 5:15** then the man shall bring his wife to the priest, and he shall bring the gift for her, a tenth of an ephah of barley meal. He shall not pour oil on it or put frankincense on it, for it is a sacrifice of jealousy, a sacrifice of memorial, bringing sin to remembrance. **read ›**

21 **Numbers 15:21** the firstfruits of your dough; and you shall give the Lord a portion set apart throughout your generations. **read ›**

22 **Numbers 30:10** If her vow is in her husband's house, or the obligation on her soul with an oath, (Septuagint Numbers 30:11 (Numbers 30:10 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

23 **Deuteronomy 15:7** If there is a needy one among you, one of your brothers in one of your cities in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not turn your heart away, nor shall you shut your hand at all against your brother who is in need. **read ›**

24 **Deuteronomy 15:11** For the needy one shall never cease from your land; therefore I command you to do this thing, saying, 'You shall surely open your hands to your brother who is poor and in need in your land.' **read ›**

25 **Ruth 1:5** Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was left without her husband and without her two sons. **read ›**

26 **Ruth 2:18** She took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gathered. And Ruth brought out and gave her what she had left over after she was satisfied. **read ›**

27 **2 Samuel 12:3** But the poor man had nothing but one little female lamb, which he had bought and kept alive and reared. It grew up with him and with his sons together; it ate of his bread and drank from his cup and slept close to his chest, and it was like a daughter to him. **read ›**

28 **2 Samuel 14:5** The king said to her, "What is the matter with you?" **read ›**

29 **1 Kings 17:9** "Arise, go to Sarepta of Sidonia. Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to feed you." **read ›**

30 **1 Kings 17:12** And the woman said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have no cake, only a handful of flour in the jar and a little oil in the jug. And behold, I am gathering two sticks, and I will go in and make it for myself and my children, and we will eat it, and die." **read ›**

31 **2 Kings 4:37** And the woman went in and fell at his feet and bowed down to the ground; and she took her son and went out. **read ›**

32 **2 Kings 12:17** Then Hazael king of Syria went up and fought against Gath and captured it; and Hazael set his face to go up against Jerusalem. (Septuagint 4 Kingdoms 12:18 (2 Kings 12:17 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

33 **Job 8:4** If your sons sinned before him, he sent them away in the hand of their lawlessness. **read ›**

34 **Job 8:5** But rise early and pray to the Lord Almighty. **read ›**

35 **Job 8:8** For ask the former generation, and search out the line of the fathers; **read ›**

36 **Job 9:4** For he is wise in mind, mighty and great; who has hardened himself against him and endured? **read ›**

37 **Job 10:3** Is it good for you if I do wrong? For you have rejected the works of your hands, and paid attention to the counsel of the ungodly. **read ›**

38 **Psalms 4:7** You have put gladness into my heart; from the fruit of their grain and wine and oil they have been multiplied. (Septuagint Psalm 4:8 (Psalm 4:7 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

39 **Psalms 12:8** The ungodly walk all around; according to your loftiness you have greatly cared for the sons of men. (Septuagint Psalm 11:9 (Psalm 12:8 in most Bibles)) **read ›**

40 **Proverbs 2:11** good counsel will guard you, and holy insight will keep you, **read ›**

41 **Proverbs 19:17** He who has mercy on the poor lends to God, and he will repay him according to his gift. **read ›**

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42 **Proverbs 22:9** He who has mercy on the poor will himself be nourished, for he has given of his own bread to the poor. He who gives gifts gains victory and honor, but he carries off the soul of the owners. **read ›**

43 **Proverbs 22:16** He who oppresses the needy increases his own goods, yet he gives to the rich to his own loss. **read ›**

44 **Proverbs 28:27** He who gives to the poor will not be in want, but he who turns away his eye will be in great distress. **read ›**

45 **Ecclesiastes 3:10** I have seen all the distraction that God has given to the sons of men, to be distracted by it. **read ›**

46 **Ezekiel 27:15** The sons of the Rhodians were your merchants; from the islands they multiplied your merchandise, elephants' tusks; and to those who were brought in you paid your wages, **read ›**

47 **Ezekiel 29:13** Thus says the Lord: After forty years I will gather the Egyptians from the nations among whom they were scattered, **read ›**

48 **Ezekiel 36:21** And I spared them for the sake of my holy name, which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they went. **read ›**

49 **Amos 7:14** And Amos answered and said to Amaziah, "I was not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet, but I was a goatherd and a scraper of sycamore figs; **read ›**

50 **1 Esdras 4:39** And with it there is no partiality or acceptance of bribes; but it does what is just, apart from all that is unrighteous and wicked; and all approve its works, **read ›**

51 **1 Esdras 5:45** and to give to the holy treasury of the works a thousand minas of gold and five thousand minas of silver, and a hundred priestly robes. **read ›**

52 **Tobit 1:16** And in the days of Enemessar I did many acts of alms for my brothers: **read ›**

53 **Tobit 2:14** But she said, "It was given to me as a gift in addition to the wages." And I did not believe her, and I told her to give it back to the owners, and I was ashamed of her. But she answered and said to me, "Where are your alms and your righteous deeds? See, everything about you is known." **read ›**

54 **Tobit 4:7** Give alms from your possessions, and do not let your eye be envious when you give alms. Do not turn your face away from any poor man, and the face of God will certainly not be turned away from you. **read ›**

55 **Tobit 12:8** Prayer is good with fasting and alms and righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than much with unrighteousness. It is better to give alms than to lay up gold. **read ›**

56 **Tobit 12:9** For alms delivers from death, and it will purge away every sin. Those who do acts of alms and righteous deeds will be filled with life; **read ›**

57 **Judith 8:4** And Judith remained a widow in her house three years and four months. **read ›**

58 **Judith 8:5** And she made herself a tent on the roof of her house, and put sackcloth on her waist; and she wore the garments of her widowhood. **read ›**

59 **Judith 8:8** And there was no one who spoke an evil word against her, for she feared God greatly. **read ›**

60 **Judith 9:4** and you gave their wives as plunder and their daughters into captivity, and all their spoils to be divided among the sons you loved, who were zealous with your zeal and detested the defilement of their blood and called on you for help. O God, my God, hear me also, a widow. **read ›**

61 **Judith 10:3** She took off the sackcloth she had put on and put off the garments of her widowhood; she washed her body with water and anointed herself with rich ointment; she arranged the hair of her head and put a headband on it; and she put on the garments of her gladness, which she used to wear in the days when her husband Manasseh was alive. **read ›**

62 **Judith 16:24** The house of Israel mourned for her seven days. Before she died she divided her property among all the closest relatives of Manasseh her husband and those nearest in her own family. **read ›**

63 **Wisdom of Solomon 7:14** For she is an unfailing treasure for men; those who use it gain friendship with God, commended by the gifts that come from discipline. **read ›**

64 **Wisdom of Sirach 4:8** Turn your ear to the poor, and answer him in words of peace with meekness. **read ›**

65 **Wisdom of Sirach 7:10** Do not be faint-hearted in your prayer, and do not neglect to do acts of mercy. **read ›**

66 **Wisdom of Sirach 14:16** Give and take, and indulge your soul, for in Hades there is no seeking of luxury. **read ›**

67 **Wisdom of Sirach 21:5** The plea of the poor goes from his mouth to God's ears, and his judgment comes quickly. **read ›**

68 **Wisdom of Sirach 26:14** A silent wife is a gift of the Lord, and nothing can be given in exchange for a well-instructed soul. **read ›**

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**69** **Wisdom of Sirach 29:9** For the commandment's sake help the poor man, and in his need do not send him away empty. **read ›**

**70** **Wisdom of Sirach 31:20** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

**71** **Wisdom of Sirach 32:2** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

**72** **Wisdom of Sirach 32:10** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

**73** **Wisdom of Sirach 40:24** Brothers and help are for a time of trouble, but above both an act of mercy will deliver. **read ›**

**74** **Baruch 4:16** and they carried away the beloved ones of the widow, and robbed the lonely woman of her daughters. **read ›**

**75** **Letter of Jeremiah 1:28** Their priests sell their sacrifices and squander the money; and likewise their wives preserve some of the sacrifices in salt, and give nothing to the poor or the helpless. **read ›**

**76** **1 Maccabees 2:11** All her adornment has been taken away; instead of a free woman she has become a slave. **read ›**

**77** **2 Maccabees 3:10** The high priest pointed out that there were deposits belonging to widows and orphans, **read ›**

**78** **2 Maccabees 8:28** After the Sabbath they gave some of the spoils to those who had been tortured and to the widows and orphans, and the rest they divided among themselves and the children. **read ›**

**79** **2 Maccabees 12:43** And having made a collection, man by man, of provisions to the sum of two thousand drachmas of silver, he sent it to Jerusalem to offer a sin offering, acting very well and honorably, taking account of the resurrection. **read ›**

**80** **4 Maccabees 15:26** Open the verse to read it. **read ›**

**81** **Mark 12:41** Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and saw how the multitude cast money into the treasury. Many who were rich cast in much. **read ›**

**82** **Mark 12:42** A poor widow came and put in two lepta, which make a quadrans. **read ›**

**83** **Mark 12:43** He called his disciples to himself and said to them, "Amen, I say to you, this poor widow gave more than all those who are giving into the treasury, **read ›**

**84** **Mark 12:44** for they all gave out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, gave all that she had to live on." **read ›**

**85** **Luke 2:37** and was a widow of about eighty-four years. She did not depart from the temple, serving with fastings and prayers night and day. **read ›**

**86** **Luke 11:41** But give what is within as alms, and behold, all things are clean to you. **read ›**

**87** **Luke 21:2** He also saw a certain poor widow putting in two lepta. **read ›**

**88** **Luke 21:3** He said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow put in more than all of them, **read ›**

**89** **Luke 21:4** for all these put in gifts for God from their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, put in all that she had to live on." **read ›**

**90** **Romans 9:19** You will say then to me, "Why does he still find fault? For who withstands his will?" **read ›**

**91** **1 Corinthians 4:12** and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; **read ›**

**92** **1 Corinthians 4:16** Therefore I urge you, become imitators of me. **read ›**

## ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *47 verses, by reference*

*Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.*

**Deuteronomy** 22:10 · 26:18

**Proverbs** 14:8

**Matthew** 5:4 · 5:5 · 5:8 · 5:32 · 6:19 · 6:20 · 6:21 · 6:31 · 6:32 · 7:12 · 7:13 · 7:15 · 7:21 · 8:10 · 9:13 · 10:10 · 10:39 · 10:41 · 12:7 · 16:26 · 23:27

**Mark** 2:19 · 8:36

**Luke** 6:37 · 12:20 · 12:22 · 12:30 · 12:33 · 13:32 · 14:33 · 19:8

**John** 12:25

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**Romans** 2:29 · 9:15 · 12:3
**1 Corinthians** 7:18 · 10:24 · 15:32
**2 Corinthians** 8:12 · 13:3
**Colossians** 3:5
**1 Timothy** 6:20
**Hebrews** 4:15 · 9:14

*Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.*

## ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “What did the early church teach about the widow's two mites (Luke 21:1–4)?” on October 20, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

**Library only.** This study was written only from The Historic Faith’s library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed above, with a link to read it.

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THE END OF THIS STUDY