

Deuteronomy 25:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her.

Analysis

If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child—the Hebrew yabam (יָבָם) gives its name to this practice: 'levirate marriage' (from Latin levir, 'brother-in-law'). **The wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger**—she couldn't marry outside the family while the brother-in-law lived. **Her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife**—the surviving brother had first obligation to marry the widow and raise children in his deceased brother's name, preserving both the family line and the widow's security.

This law protected widows from destitution in a society where women couldn't inherit land, while ensuring deceased men's names and property rights continued. The firstborn son of the levirate union would legally be the dead brother's heir, inheriting his portion. The practice appears earlier with Judah's sons and Tamar (Genesis 38) and later with Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 3-4), where Boaz acted as kinsman-redeemer, extending the principle beyond literal brothers.

Historical Context

Given circa 1406 BC as part of family law in preparation for settled life in Canaan. Levirate marriage existed in various ancient Near Eastern cultures (Hittite, Assyrian codes), but Israel's version uniquely prioritized the deceased's name and inheritance rather than merely the survivor's interests. The practice presumed patrilineal land inheritance, extended family dwelling proximity, and strong clan identity—conditions met in agricultural Canaan but not nomadic wandering.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does levirate marriage reveal God's concern for both family continuity and vulnerable widows?
2. In what ways does Boaz as kinsman-redeemer in Ruth's story typify Christ's redemptive work?
3. What modern structures protect widows' dignity and economic security as this law intended?

Interlinear Text

מִתְּמָמָן אֶת־אֶת־יְמֵינֶךָ וְשָׁבֵן כִּי
H3588 dwell If brethren together of the dead and one מִתְּמָמָן
H3427 H251 H3162 H4191 H259 H1992

בְּמִתְּמָמָן לֹא־לֹא אֵין יְבָב־
and have no child H369 H0 H3808 H1961 her to him to wife of the dead
H1121

בְּמִתְּמָמָן לֹא־יְשַׁב־זֶר יְבָמָה אֶבֶן
shall not marry without unto a stranger H2114 her husband's brother shall go in
H2351 H376 H2993 H935

לֹא־שָׁבֵן וְלֹקֶט־הַלְּבָב עַל־יְבָב
unto her and take H0 her to him to wife
H3947 H802

וְיַבְּמָה:
and perform the duty of an husband's brother
H2992

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 22:24 (Parallel theme): Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

Luke 20:28 (Parallel theme): Saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If any man's brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

Mark 12:19 (Parallel theme): Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

Ruth 3:9 (Parallel theme): And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.

Ruth 4:5 (Parallel theme): Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.

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