

# 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 (יָבֵם) 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

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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

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**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

**Colossians 1:16** — All things created through Christ

## Study Questions

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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?

## Additional Cross-References

**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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