

# Deuteronomy 25:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And if the man like not to take his brother's wife, then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders, and say, My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother.

## Analysis

**And if the man like not to take his brother's wife**—the brother-in-law could refuse the obligation, though at social cost. **Then let his brother's wife go up to the gate unto the elders**—the city gate was where legal matters were adjudicated publicly. She initiated proceedings, saying **My husband's brother refuseth to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel, he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother** (yibbemi, יִבְבֵּם, 'act as my levir').

The law recognized the brother-in-law's right to decline—levirate marriage couldn't be coerced—but required public process. The widow gained advocate status, able to bring accusation before community leaders. This protected her from indefinite limbo; the brother must either marry her or release her through public ceremony. The procedure gave her dignity and agency, contrasting sharply with cultures where widows had no legal standing.

## Historical Context

Spoken circa 1406 BC in anticipation of Israel's settled judiciary system. The elders at the gate functioned as local court, handling disputes, witnessing transactions (Ruth 4:1-11), and ensuring justice. This decentralized system

presumed small communities where public shame carried weight. The widow's ability to initiate proceedings and publicly challenge the brother showed Israel's law protected even vulnerable women's rights.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 10:9** — Confession and belief for salvation

**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

## Study Questions

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1. Why does God allow the brother-in-law to refuse while also creating public accountability?
2. How does giving the widow legal standing and voice demonstrate God's justice for the vulnerable?
3. What situations today require public accountability rather than private decisions to protect the powerless?

## Interlinear Text

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וְבִמְתָת וְלֹא אִם  
H518 H3808 like And if the man not to take his brother's wife  
H2654 H376 H3947 H853 H2994

וְעַלְמָה go up his brother's wife to the gate and say  
H5927 H2994 H8179 H413 H2205 H559

בַּישְׁבָא לְשָׁם מֵאַיִלְמָה יְבָמָה לְבָקָם יְמָמִים לְאַחֲרֵי לְבָקָם יְמָמִים  
refuseth My husband's brother to raise up unto his brother a name in Israel  
H3985 H2993 H6965 H251 H8034 H3478

וְאַבְהָלָא  
H3808 he will not perform the duty of my husband's brother  
H14 H2992

