

# 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

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**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, יָבֵבְמִי, '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

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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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וְאָם	לֹא	יִחַפֵּץ	הָאִישׁ	לִקְחָתָא	אֶת	יְבִמְתּוֹ
H518	H3808	like H2654	And if the man H376	not to take H3947	H853	his brother's wife H2994
וְעָלָתָהּ	יְבִמְתּוֹ	הַשַּׁעַר	אֶל	הַזְקֵנִים	וְאָמְרָהּ	
go up H5927	his brother's wife H2994	to the gate H8179	H413	unto the elders H2205	and say H559	
יֵמָּה	יְבִמִּי	לְהָקִים	לְאָחִיו	שֵׁם	בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	
refuseth H3985	My husband's brother H2993	to raise up H6965	unto his brother H251	a name H8034	in Israel H3478	
לֹא	אָבֵהּ	יְבִמִּי:				
H3808	he will H14	not perform the duty of my husband's brother H2992				

