

Deuteronomy 25:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him: and if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her;

Analysis

Then the elders of his city shall call him, and speak unto him—the community leaders investigated, ensuring the brother-in-law understood his obligation and the consequences of refusal. **And if he stand to it, and say, I like not to take her**—if after counseling he persisted in refusal, the law provided release mechanism. The Hebrew *lo chafatsti* (לֹא חָפַת סִתְּרָה) means 'I have no delight/desire,' indicating this was voluntary choice, not coercion.

The elders' intervention served multiple purposes: ensuring the brother wasn't refusing from misunderstanding, giving the widow formal witness, and preparing the community for the public ceremony (verse 9) that would release both parties from obligation. The process balanced the widow's need for resolution with the brother's freedom of conscience, preventing both indefinite abandonment and forced marriage.

Historical Context

Given circa 1406 BC as part of the judicial procedures Israel would implement in Canaan. The elder system existed in tribal patriarchal society, with family heads serving as local authorities. This contrasted with Egypt's centralized bureaucracy and prepared Israel for the distributed governance structure appropriate to their scattered towns and villages. The elders' investigative role ensured hasty decisions didn't harm vulnerable parties.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. Why does wise governance sometimes require process and deliberation rather than immediate resolution?
2. How does this law balance individual freedom with communal responsibility and protection of the vulnerable?
3. What role should church elders play in mediating disputes and counseling difficult family decisions today?

Interlinear Text

אַל יְדַבֵּר לֵזֵזֶנְטִי עִירִזְבֵּן אַל יְקַרְאֵן

shall call H0 Then the elders of his city him and speak H413

H7121

H2205

H5892

H1696

לֹא אַמְתֵּן כַּפְעַצְתִּי לֹא אַמְתֵּן כַּפְעַצְתִּי

unto him and if he stand to it and say I like not to take

H5975

H559

H3808

H2654

H3947

Additional Cross-References

Ruth 4:6 (Parallel theme): And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it.