

Mark 12:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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—this quotes the levirate marriage law from Deuteronomy 25:5-6. The Hebrew term *yibbum* (יִבּוּם) described this practice where a man's brother married his widow to produce offspring credited to the deceased. The Greek *exanastēsē sperma* (ἐξαναστήσῃ σπέρμα, "raise up seed") meant establishing the dead brother's lineage and inheritance.

This law protected widows in ancient patriarchal society, ensuring economic security and preserving family land within tribal allotments (see Ruth 4). The Sadducees correctly cited Torah to set up their test case. Their strategy was clever: use Scripture the Sadducees accepted (Pentateuch) to create scenario making resurrection seem absurd. This demonstrates how Scripture can be wielded correctly in detail yet wrongly in interpretation—a cautionary tale about proof-texting without understanding theological context.

Historical Context

Levirate marriage (from Latin *levir*, "brother-in-law") appears in Genesis 38 (Tamar and Judah's sons) and the book of Ruth (Boaz as kinsman-redeemer). The practice ensured deceased men's names continued through offspring, prevented property from leaving the family, and provided for vulnerable widows in societies

lacking social welfare systems. By Jesus' time, levirate marriage was rare, replaced by other provisions for widows. The ceremony of halitzah (הַלִּיצָה, "removing the shoe," Deuteronomy 25:7-10) allowed a brother-in-law to decline the obligation. The Sadducees used this antiquated practice to construct their hypothetical precisely because its complications created apparent absurdity when applied to resurrection life.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does the Sadducees' accurate quotation of Scripture demonstrate that correctly citing biblical texts doesn't guarantee sound interpretation?
2. What does the levirate marriage law reveal about God's concern for protecting vulnerable people (widows) in ancient society?

Interlinear Text

Διδάσκαλε	Μωσῆς	ἔγραψεν	ἡμῖν	ὅτι	ἐάν	τινος	ἀδελφῷ
Master	Moses	wrote	unto us	If	^{G1437}	a man's	brother
G1320	G3475	G1125	G2254	G3754		G5100	G80
ἀποθάνη	καὶ	καταλίπη	γυναῖκα	καὶ	τέκνα	μὴ	ἀφ᾽ ἵνα
die	and	leave	his wife	and	children	no	leave that
G599	G2532	G2641	G1135	G2532	G5043	G3361	G863 G2443
λάβη	ὁ	ἀδελφῷ	αὐτοῦ	τὴν	γυναῖκα	αὐτοῦ	καὶ
should take	^{G3588}	brother	his	^{G3588}	his wife	his	and
G2983		G80	G846		G1135	G846	G2532
ἐξαναστήσῃ	σπέρμα	τῷ	ἀδελφῷ	αὐτοῦ			
raise up	seed	^{G3588}	brother	his			
G1817	G4690		G80	G846			

