

The Duty of Levirate Marriage

This law states that a **widow's brother-in-law** is obligated to marry **her** and father a son for **her** (if **she** was childless) so that **his** dead brother's name would continue (**Deuteronomy 25:5-10**). What happens in the book of **Ruth**, however, does not follow the strict commands of Levirate marriage. The key root *yavim*, meaning *to perform the duty of the brother-in-law* does not appear in this book. **The rabbis asked the question, "What is the reason behind this law?" Moses had simply stated to raise up a seed for the dead brother. So the rabbis taught that the soul of a man who dies childless finds no rest. This troubles his widow because his name is forgotten in Isra'el. In the event of her marrying his next of kin, and a child being born, it is as if the soul of the departed has been revived. The child would receive the name and status of the deceased and continue the line of the inheritance.**

Furthermore, there is no brother-in-law mentioned in **Ruth**, in fact **Na'omi** laments the fact that **she** cannot produce **any more sons** to take that role (**1:11**). But there is a broader application, which is that of the *go'el* (see **Au - Na'omi Evaluates the Meeting**), meaning *to redeem* or *act as a kinsman*. This is the application of the law of redemption in **Leviticus 25**, where people or property that have been lost can be redeemed by the payment of a fee, usually by the owner, or in other cases, by a relative. Marriage was not specifically mentioned in **Leviticus**, but seems to be assumed in **Ruth**. Then **Bo'az** said: **On the day you buy the land from Na'omi, you will also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property (4:5)**. Therefore, while the TaNaKh does not overtly state the need to use the Law of Levirate for redemption, this law appears to be an approved means to accomplish redemption.⁷