

Levirate Marriage

The term is derived from the Latin word “levir” meaning “brother-in-law.” Levirate marriage takes place when a man dies with no male children. His brother (or another relative) is to marry the widow and father a son for the deceased brother. It is the practice of raising up a son for a deceased relative.

There are only three places where this practice occurs in the Old Testament: Genesis 38, Deuteronomy 25:5-10, and Ruth.

The purpose of the law is to raise a son for the dead brother. If a man dies without sons, in a sense he dies entirely. In the levirate marriage the first son born is considered to be the son of the dead brother. When this son grows up he will inherit the property of his deceased father. Now the Law was not compulsory. A brother or relative could choose not to fulfill his duty. If he did refuse, he would be encouraged to change his mind and if he still refused he would be shamed with the ceremony of the sandal and the spitting in the face. It was not compulsory to fulfill the levirate duty but it was disgraceful not to.

The *Goel* (Kinsman-Redeemer)

“Kinsman-redeemer” is the translation of one Hebrew word: *goel*. The kinsman” is who the man is. He is a relative. The “redeemer” is what the man does.

There are three basic things a kinsman-redeemer does. The first two are found in Leviticus 25.

- i. Redemption of Property. Leviticus 25:25-28
The kinsman acts on behalf of an impoverished relative to purchase and return the land the poor man was forced to sell. He, the kinsman, redeems or buys back the land.
- ii. Redemption of Person. Leviticus 25:47-55
Here we see that the kinsman redeems a relative who was forced to sell himself into slavery. He buys him out of slavery and sets him free.
- iii. Redemption of Blood. Numbers 35:16-21, 31

Here we see that the *goel* is an avenger. When a relative of his is murdered, as the kinsman-redeemer, he is to avenge the death. It is his duty as *goel* to protect the honor of the family and exact vengeance.

Jesus Christ: Our Kinsman-Redeemer

(The kinsman-redeemer of the Old Testament foreshadows our kinsman-redeemer, Jesus Christ).

Redemption is a key word which describes our salvation. What is redemption? “The payment of the price of sin by the sacrifice of Christ whereby He purchased the believer out of the slave market of sin and set him free.” (Ephesians 1:7-8)

There are three things that are necessary for the kinsman-redeemer to fulfill if he is to redeem.

- i. The Kinsman-Redeemer must be related by blood.
The kinsman-redeemer is someone who is blood related. He is a part of the family. In Jesus, God became a man. He became related to us. He is God, but as our kinsman redeemer he is human. (John 1:14; Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 2:14-15)
- ii. The Kinsman-Redeemer must be able to pay the price.
The kinsman must have the required funds to be able to redeem the property or the person. He must have the necessary means. Jesus was able to redeem us from the slave market of sin because He was able to pay the price. That price was His own blood. (1 Peter 1:18-19)
- iii. The Kinsman-Redeemer must be willing to redeem.
As we saw in the Deuteronomy law and in Ruth it is possible for the kinsman to refuse to redeem. So if someone is going to be redeemed it will require a willingness on the part of the kinsman. Jesus was not only able to redeem us by paying the price through His death, He was willing to do so. He voluntarily gave up His own life (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; John 10:15).