



Levirate Marriage and the Family in Ancient Judaism (HBI Series on Jewish Women)

Dvora E. Weisberg

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In this study, Weisberg uses levirate marriage (an institution that involves the union of a man and the widow of his childless brother) as described in biblical law and explicated in rabbinic Judaism as a lens to examine the status of women and attitudes toward marriage, sexuality, and reproduction in early Jewish society. While marriage generally marks the beginning of a new family unit, levirate comes into play when a family's life is cut short. As such, it offers an opportunity to study the family at a moment of breakdown and restructuring.

With her discussion rooted in rabbinic sources and commentary, Weisberg explores kinship structure and descent, the relationship between a family unit created through levirate marriage and the extended family, and the roles of individuals within the family. She also considers the position of women, asking whether it is through marriage or the bearing of children that a woman becomes part of her husband's family, and to what degree a married woman remains part of her natal family. She argues that rabbinic responses to levirate suggest that a family is an evolving entity, one that can preserve itself through realignment and redefinition.

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