

Ruth (of Moab) and Naomi (of Bethlehem)

The folk history of Ruth, a masterwork of Hebrew narrative art, tells the experience of two strong women “in the days when the judges ruled” (1:1 → Esther, the only other Bible book names for a woman). The book, probably originating in a circle of wise women as oral narrative, is unique in the canon of Hebrew scriptures and Israelite patriarchal society because it celebrates one woman’s love and devotion to another¹ Previously the book commonly was dated after the Babylonian exile (538-400 BCE), but recent studies indicate linguistic characteristics that suggest an earlier origin, sometime after David (950-700 BCE; JSB, JB, HCSB). Perhaps the oral form of Ruth was early, but was then developed and revised. The concluding genealogy, ending with David (Ruth 4:18-22) would have been especially significant after the Babylonian exile that ended the Davidic monarchy. After the exile, the book would have encouraged those who returned to trust God’s promises that they would be blessed, like Naomi returning from Moab to Bethlehem with Ruth. The positive depiction of the Moabite Ruth may be polemical, protesting the campaigns of → Ezra 9-10 and → Nehemiah 13 against mixed marriages,² or of → Leviticus 18 and 20 against fourteen kinds of incestuous unions. In later Jewish tradition Ruth became the designated reading for the annual festival of Weeks/Pentecost, the first harvest (barley); cf. the famine that prompted the departure of Naomi with her husband and two sons to Moab.

The strong predominance of Ruth and Naomi in each division of the book suggests to many that the author must have been a woman,³ but not one who exalted matriarchy over patriarchy. However, if not a woman, the author certainly shows extraordinary sensitivity to the sufferings and perspectives of women. Postexilic readers, facing the dominant exclusive ideologies reflected in → Obadiah, Nahum, Ezra, Nehemiah, would find in Ruth support for a more universal and inclusive theology (→ Jonah). After the exile, with the monarchy eliminated, readers tired of corrupt priests and governments, probably desired the restoration of an autonomous monarchy rather than the puppet governors imposed by foreign empires (perhaps signaled by the final Davidic genealogy).

Discrepancies exist between Ruth and the Law (perhaps finally edited by Ezra, ca. 458 BCE). According to Genesis, Moab was Lot’s son, fruit of his incestuous union with his older daughter (19:37). The Law forbade Israelites to marry women from Moab and Edom,⁴ but the book of Ruth celebrates precisely this kind of union (see Jesus’ “Good Samaritan” → Lk 10:25-37; cf. Jn 4). Is this because Ruth’s story originated previous to the law? Or perhaps later, to modify the law, make it more flexible, or to insist on the spirit and intention behind the law? The law sought to protect the rights of the poor to share the harvest.⁵ According to David Pleins, the book of Ruth “profoundly presents the implicit recognition that law must be driven by a covenant motivation or a motivation that the community has together shared in the exodus experience of freedom from economic oppression.”⁶

The levirate law (from Latin *levir*, “brother-in-law”) sought to assure the preservation of name and property in the cases of males who died without sons, and also to guarantee economic support for the widow (→ Deut. 25:5-10; cp. Lev. 18:16, 20:21). Why, however, do the narratives of Ruth (4:5) and Genesis 38 (Judah and Tamar; cf. Ruth 4:12) not follow the law literally? And if Jesus wanted to insist in the authority of the law in each detail (Matt. 5:17-20), as many today would insist, should Christians obey the levirate law (Mark 12:19; Luke 20:28; Matt. 22:24)? Ruth and Naomi take advantage of the levirate legal provisions, but do not achieve an independent liberation (4:10); rather they enable Boaz to be responsible and fulfill the law,⁷ or to incarnate its values.⁸

Women/Poor/Sexual Minorities (widows). The book of Ruth provides us with classical examples of multiple identities: Ruth and Naomi are *women*, in addition to being *poor* and representatives of *sexual minorities* (widows; lesbians?). Ruth, moreover, is a foreign immigrant, but not an idolater, since she decided to abandon her country (Moab) and her god (Chemosh) to enter into covenant relationship with Yahveh, the Liberator God of the Exodus, worshipped by her mother-in-law Naomi, and the deceased husbands. The multiple identities represented by Ruth and Naomi, both in the Bible and in other history, generally represent weak persons and groups who suffer oppression and violence at the hands of the stronger (prosperous males, married and living in their own country). The history of Ruth thus demonstrates the fundamental error of any liberation theology that claims to “opt for the

poor” but demonstrates solidarity only with “the poor” as an abstract identity—forgetting that in real life the “poor” may be women, sexual minorities, foreigners, descendants of incestuous unions, etc.⁹

Boaz makes passing reference to youths “rich or poor” whom Ruth didn’t seek out (3:10), the only reference to the poor in the entire book. However, as David Pleins indicates, like many folk stories, Ruth seeks to defend specific norms of justice.¹⁰ The entire book relates the experience of a household impoverished by famine and then of poor widows bereft of their husbands’ support. The widows’ experience does not support the ideology of the Exodus (Jewish immigrants enslaved and impoverished by the imperial oppression). Neither does Ruth support Proverbs’ ideology (warning sons of Israel’s elite that their sloth and vices would impoverish them). The story of Ruth demonstrates the danger of drawing sweeping theological conclusions about poverty from methodologically-limited word studies of poor/poverty (an occasional weakness in the excellent works of David Pleins).¹¹ The Bible refers to more than 20 causes for poverty, indicating the great complexity of human experience in this area.¹² As Marcella Althaus-Reid points out: “Any theology concerned with issues of wealth and poverty needs to consider more the incoherence of oppression and its multiple dimensions rather than its commonalities.”¹³

According to the Exodus paradigm, oppression is the basic cause for poverty, and the Bible spotlights this cause (more than 160 texts), among some 20 other causes. Ruth, however, demonstrates that ecological elements (famine) and family tragedies (the deaths of the husbands of Naomi, Orpah and Ruth) may be decisive, rather than the oppression seen in Exodus and the vices denounced in Proverbs. Thus, from a Biblical perspective, especially in the New Testament, “the problem” is not so much the poor and their poverty but the rich and their wealth. However, since the Bible commands solidarity with the poor in their needs and suffering, we may conclude that any effective praxis must start from an analysis of the complex multiple causes for poverty and not isolate ourselves and console ourselves with cruel ideologies that blame the poor as alone responsible. (Proverbs occasionally faults the poor, but the sons of the wealthy are the ones warned against sloth and vices.)

Lesbian scholar Phyllis Trible shows how the placement of Ruth after Proverbs 31 in the canonical order in the Hebrew Bible enriches the perspective about women.¹⁴ In modern Christian translations (following the LXX), Ruth is placed after Judges, reflecting the purported historical context of the story related. Ruth thus provides a strong contrast with the horrifying earlier story about the rape and murder of the Levite’s concubine, where God appears to be absent (Judges 19–21). Ruth demonstrates that even in the period of the Judges, before the establishment of the monarchy, there were exceptional pious males (such as Boaz) and not all men “did what was right in their own eyes” (Judg. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Some males lived by the norms of *khesed* (solidarity, compassion; see 1:8; 2:20; 3:10)¹⁵ and treated women well, even when the women were poor immigrants.

In the Septuagint order, besides the contrast with the raped and murdered concubine, Ruth precedes and complements the story of Hannah (1 Samuel 1–2), where God providentially protects women in their troubles (Hannah’s infertility – since from the pre-scientific patriarchal viewpoint women were always to blame). Since Ruth meant more to Naomi than seven sons (Ruth 4:15), so Hannah meant more to Elkanah than ten sons (1 Sam. 1:8) – strong assertions, given the patriarchal context. Similarly, as Jewish tradition (MT) placed Ruth after the Book of Proverbs with its concluding acrostic poem about the rarity of a woman of “noble character” (Prov. 31:10–31), so Ruth uses the same phrase to describe the leading woman, thus providing an ideal example (Rut 3:11).

Phyllis Trible also shows that many elements in Ruth find significant resemblance in compositions from other periods in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁶

- The heroic decision of Ruth to abandon her country, her clan and gods in order to go with Naomi resembles Abraham’s decision (cf. Gen. 12:1–3 with Boaz’s words in Ruth 2:11).
- The elderly men of Belen compared Ruth with the matriarchal women of Israel (Raquel and Lea; Ruth 4:11; see also Tamar).
- The book’s concluding genealogy (4:18–22; cf. 1 Chron. 2) connects Ruth’s story with the entire historic liberation project (see God’s election of King David, descendant of Ruth the Moabite).

- → Matthew (1:3-6) carries the subversion a step further by including Ruth, Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba in Jesus' genealogy, all women (Ruth and Rahab also are Gentiles) who, like Mary, had irregular sexual histories. Ruth thus allows us to see, as in the case of Moses (the courage of his mother, sister and midwives, Exodus 1), how the brave leadership of marginalized women was essential to the establishment of Israel as a nation, the monarchy under David and his descendents, and for Jesus' birth (→ Esther, who risked her life to preserve her people in the face of violent persecution during the Exile).

As an impoverished woman, suspicious immigrant and sexual minority (widow), Ruth (following Naomi's advice) made use of a sexual strategy quite common among poor women in order to get out of her crisis – and also to keep her mother-in-law alive: she first seduced and then proposed marriage to the wealthy Boaz, an older relative of Naomi. Fundamentalists like to pretend that the Bible always requires exclusive and permanent sexual relationships sealed by a marriage covenant. The Bible, however, contains a legal provision for cases like Ruth and Naomi, the levirate law which is not a favorite fundamentalist proof text. This legal measure (Deut. 25:6-10) provides the cultural and legal background for understanding Ruth's behavior. As Robert Hubbard shows, the situation of Naomi and Ruth does not correspond exactly with levirate law: Naomi is an older woman so can not give birth; Boaz is not Naomi's brother-in-law, but a more distant relative (Ruth 2:20; 3:9, 12s; 4:4, 6; Lev. 25:23-34, 47-66); thus Ruth replaces Naomi and procreates with Boaz a son for her mother-in-law.¹⁷

Moreover, for the modern reader, understanding Ruth's behavior is obscured by the repeated references to Boaz's "feet/legs" (3:4,7-8,14), long recognized by scholars as a euphemism for genitals. Until recently the various study Bibles did not clarify the matter, supplying only notes that would not disturb the readers' sexual ideologies (even the HCSB; but see now the JSB 1583, and NOAB 395, both cautiously, but the NISB 387-88, more boldly). Edward Campbell indicates that here we do not have the common Hebrew word for feet (*regel*). Recognizing the euphemism, Campbell points out that the translation "legs" (representing the Hebrew word *margelotaw*, occurring only here four times + Dan. 10:6, where it clearly means "legs").¹⁸ In addition to the use (four times) of the words "feet/legs" as a euphemism for genitals, the verb "uncover" (*glh*, v. 4), is mainly used to describe illicit sexual relationships;¹⁹ the verb "lie down" (*shakab*, v. 4) also suggests illicit sexual relationships.²⁰

As Marcella Althaus-Reid reminds us, although "respectable" modern readers may be shocked at Ruth's sexual behavior, poor and abandoned women commonly have no other options if they are to survive and provide for their children: "Ruth is not a Moabite judge who challenges the judicial system to her advantage; the result of the triumph by excess of femininity is not always a happy one. Bread is exchanged for bitter intimacy."²¹

After the seduction, Boaz praises Ruth's gesture of solidarity and fidelity²² with her mother-in-law. At the end of the story Boaz marries (literally "acquires") Ruth, and they procreate descendants that include King David and Jesus (4:18-22). However, Ruth's famous "vow of commitment," ever popular in traditional heterosexual marriage ceremonies, in the original context does not express of Ruth's love for her husband Boaz (who "acquired/purchased" her as wife along with the ancestral property; 4:5, 9-10, cf 13), but a promise of love and faithfulness by which the despised Moabite "comes out," declaring her love and lifelong commitment to her Israelite mother-in-law, Naomi, the closest physical relationship between two women expressed anywhere in the Bible:

Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!

Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.

Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.

May Yahweh do thus and so to me,
and more as well,

if even death parts me from you! (Ruth 1:16; cf the erotic poetry of Sappho of Lesbos, ca. 600 B.C.).

In addition to her vow, Ruth “clung/stuck” to Naomi (1:14, *dabaq*), the same Hebrew verb that describes the union between Adam and Eve, which made them “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).²³ Today Ruth’s vow is also used for gay marriages and for blessing same-sex couples—which is more consistent with the original context. However, few churches or synagogues are willing to sanction such blessings, even after decades marked by millions of deaths from AIDS, when encouraging fidelity between same-sex couples may be a matter of life or death.

- 1 Compare the modern concept of marriage with that in Ruth.
- 2 How could Ruth promise to be faithful to Naomi without implying sexual exclusivity? Compare the modern concept of “fidelity” with Ruth’s understanding.
- 3 Compare the modern concept of nuclear family with the patriarchal household established by Ruth, Naomi and Boaz.

Notes

1. Ina Johanne Petermann (Batmartha), “Das Buch Rut: Grenzgänge zweier Fragüen im Patriarchat”, in *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker (Gütersloher: Chr. Kaiser, 1998/99), 104; see also Mona West (“Ruth,” QBC 2006:190).
2. Marjo C. A. Korpel, *The Structure of the Book of Ruth* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001).
3. Phyllis Trible, “Ruth, Book of,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 842-847.
4. Deut. 23:2-8; cp. Num. 25:1-5; Hosea 9:10; Ezra 9:1-2, 10; Neh. 13:1-3, 23-31.
5. Deut. 24:19-22; Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22 [the Feast of Weeks/Pentecost]; cp. Ex. 23:10-11.
6. David Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible: A Theological Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001:195).
7. *Ibid.* Boaz’s “spreading the cloak” over Ruth signified marriage, Ezek 16:8; Mona West (2006:190) also emphasizes the place of *go’el* (redeemer) legal responsibilities in Ruth (2:20; 3:9, 12-13; 4:1,3-4, 6-7; cf Lev. 25), pointing out that the laws are “intentionally ambiguous in order to provide possibilities for the characters to act above and beyond what society requires of them” (190, citing the study of David Biale, 1997).
8. Robert Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*. NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 48-51.
9. Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2001, *passim*).
10. Pleins, *Social Visions*, 2001:194.
11. Pleins; 1992; 2001; cp. Thomas Hanks, “Poor/Poverty” (New Testament), in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 414-415; *The Subversive Gospel: A New Testament Commentary of Liberation* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000).
12. Thomas Hanks, *God So Loved the Third World: The Biblical Vocabulary of Oppression* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983), 33-39; cf. 1982:44-46, omitted from the English edition.
13. Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 169.
14. Trible, *Ruth*, 846.
15. Petermann, “Das Buch Rut,” 105.
16. Trible, *Ruth*, 846.
17. Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 48-51; the women say “a son has been born to Naomi” (4:17; West 2006:194)!
18. Edward F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth*, Anchor Bible 7 (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 121. For *regel* as a euphemism for sexual organs see Ex. 4:25; Deut. 28:57; Judg. 3:2; 1 Sam. 24:3; 2 Kings 18:27 = Isa. 36:12; Isa. 6:2; Ezek. 16:25; Robert Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 203; cf. Noah’s son “looking on” his father’s “nakedness” as a euphemism for rape (anal intercourse, Gen. 9:22).
19. Twenty-four times in Leviticus 18 and 20 plus Deut. 23:1, 27:20, Isa. 22:8.
20. Gen. 19:32-35; Ex. 22:15/16; Lev. 18:22; Deut. 22:22; 1 Sam. 2:22; 2 Sam. 11:4, etc.; Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 203-204.
21. Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 169; cf. p. 90.
22. *khesed*, 3:10; cp. 1:8; 2:12, 20.
23. Amy-Jill Levine, “Ruth”, *Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992/98), 80; Mona West refers to Ruth’s “coming out” to Naomi (2006:191).

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Note, Linafelt 1999:43, 48 points out significant changes open to a variety of interpretations:

2:8 ("girls") → 2:21-23 ("boys...girls...girls")

3:4 ("he will tell you what to do") → 3:9 (*Ruth* asks Boaz to take her as wife)

Mona West (2006). “Ruth”. *The Queer Bible Commentary*. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, Thomas Bohache, eds. London: SCM, 190-194. [The Rev. Dr. West was Southern Baptist; now she is MCC pastor]:

“All these actions [Ruth 3-4] indicate Naomi, Ruth and Boaz’s decision to create their own family and define their own understanding of kinship and responsibility to one another within the context of the inheritance and kinship laws of ancient Israel. These actions are similar to the ways in which Queer people of today create families: a bisexual man and two lesbians live together with their biological child; a gay man is a sperm donor for a lesbian couple and is part of the parenting of their child; three gay men live together as lovers and family for twenty years; a lesbian mother and her lover live two doors down from her lesbian daughter and her lover.”

“Ruth, Naomi and Boaz provide our community with an ancient example of the ways in which we have been creating our families. We find, however, that like us they must overcome some legal barriers in the creation of their family...Certainly there are ways that we in the Queer community manipulate laws to overcome barriers that deny the legality of our relationships. We also work the system to make our relationships more permanent and secure....In their words and actions the townswomen acknowledge the procreative strategy of Ruth and Boaz that produced a son for Naomi....Naomi is not the biological mother of Obed, yet the townswomen realize Ruth’s relationship to Naomi has been life-giving-procreative [4:17]. The Queer community hears the blessing of our unions in the words of the townswomen of Bethlehem. We claim with them that our unions, our love, our families with or without children, are life-giving and procreative (193-194).”

Boaz gay or bisexual?

- 1 Older but unmarried although many women are available to him; no indication of being widowed (3:10; 2:8-9,22-23).
- 2 Boaz is very sensitive and spiritual and even uses a feminine image for God (2:1-12, esp. 12).
- 3 When he discovers Ruth in bed with him his reaction is not lust but fright (3:8).
- 4 He is impressed with Ruth’s virtue (3:11; cf Prov 31), acquires her as wife and fulfills his levirate duties of siring a son for Naomi but shows no romantic interest in Ruth (3:5; 4:10), who makes a nice beard but loves Naomi.

Naomi’s experience, personality and theology (cf Job, losing all, but eventually regaining even more).

- 1 1:6-7, 10 Believed report of God’s providential provision (“visited”) of bread/food for his people in Judah; Naomi’s original intention with that of Orpah and Ruth was to travel together to Bethlehem..
- 2 1:8-9 Naomi had second thoughts, believed Yahweh would show *khesed* to Orpah and Ruth in Moab, and decided to make the trip to Bethlehem alone (as an evangelist in reverse gear she sends Orpah back to her gods, 1:15).
- 3 1:11-13 Naomi argues that Orpah and Ruth should return to their mother and reveals her conviction that behind all her bitter suffering was the fact that “Yahweh’s hand has gone out against me” (famine, death of husband and sons).
- 4 1:14-18 When Ruth clings to Naomi and declares her love, Naomi accepts her decision.
- 5 1:19-22 In Bethlehem Naomi insists she be called “Mara” (bitter) because Shaddai (the Almighty) has embittered her life, brought her back “empty” from Moab, oppressed/afflicted [*’anah*] her and brought evil [*ra’ah*] upon her.
- 6 2:1-3 Naomi agrees to Ruth’s plan to glean behind the barley harvesters and Ruth “happened” [*wayyiqer miqreha*] (providence/chance?) to glean in the fields of Boaz, Naomi’s prosperous and pious relative.
- 7 2:17-20 Naomi sees Ruth’s ephah (half bushel) of barley, eats and asks where she had gleaned, blessing the unidentified man who took notice of her; Ruth reveals she had worked with Boaz. Naomi blesses him, affirming that “Yahveh has not stopped showing his *khesed* to the living and the dead” and reveals that Boaz is a close relative and “one of our kinsman-redeemers” (20).
- 8 2:21-23 Naomi encourages Ruth to accept Boaz’s invitation to stay with his workers, since in company of his servant girls she would be safe.
- 9 3:1-4 Naomi tells her daughter in law her plan for Ruth to “find rest” (a home, married) by seducing Boaz (after washing and perfuming herself), going where he sleeps (on a pile of barley), uncovering his “feet/legs” [*’et*=genitals?] and then doing whatever he tells her; Ruth then follows Naomi’s plan and even proposes to Boaz (3:9).
- 10 3:16-18 Naomi gets Ruth’s report and assures her that Boaz will settle that same day the legal question of a possible alternate kinsman-redeemer claiming precedence.
- 11 4:1-8 The alternate kinsman-redeemer wants to buy the ancestral land from Naomi and Ruth but backs out on learning that with the land he will acquire Ruth with levirate responsibility, which would endanger his own estate.
- 12 4:9-10 Boaz buys the land from Naomi, also acquiring Ruth and accepting the levirate responsibilities with her.
- 13 4:13-17 Boaz impregnates Ruth; the town women assure Naomi of Boaz’s care and Ruth’s love and refer to Ruth as “better to you than seven sons” [the love was mutual]. They name the son Obed, saying “Naomi has a son.” Naomi takes Obed in her lap and cares for him. Obed is King David’s grandfather and also ancestor of Jesus (18-22).

→ **Deuteronomy *3.7 Levirate marriage (with the widow of a deceased brother), Deut. 25:5-10** (cf. Genesis 38; Lev. 18:16; 20:21; → **Mark** 12:18-27 // **Mat.** 22:23-33; // **Lk** 20:27-40). A unique exception to the levitical prohibitions of incest is the law in Deut. 25:5-10 regarding levirate marriage (from the Latin *levir*, *brother-in-law*) which, in effect, commands what Leviticus (18:16 and 20:21) prohibits. If a brother died without a descendant, the surviving brother was obligated to have sexual relations with the widowed sister-in-law in order to ensure the continuity of the brother's name (lineage). In addition to the discrepancy with the Levitical laws against incest, Biblical scholars have noted several differences between the narratives (Tamar in Genesis 38 + Ruth):¹

- In Genesis 38 the widow Tamar only had the right to a descendant, not marriage (as in Ruth and Deuteronomic law), which provoked considerable difficulty for the biblical notion that sexuality implied a *permanent, exclusive* marital relationship;

- Deut. 25:5-10 limits Levirate marriage to the *brothers* who “reside together” (before dividing their inheritance) but in Genesis 38 the responsibility extends to the father-in-law (Judah) and in Ruth to an even more distant male (Boaz, relative of the mother-in-law Naomi);

- In Genesis and Deuteronomy levirate marriage is *obligatory*, but in Ruth it is *optional*.

- Deut. 25:7 stipulates that the brother's responsibility is to perpetuate the name of the deceased brother; however, Ruth's geneology (Ruth 4:18-21) names only the biological father (Boaz), not the distant relative whose place he took (Mahlon).

On the day of questions Jesus was obligated to deal with the Levirate law (→ **Mark** 12:18-27 // **Matthew** 22:23-33; // **Luke** 20:27-40). His answer included the affirmation that angels do not marry, which in the Neoplatonic tradition was interpreted as an indication that angels are spiritual in the sense that they are non-material beings and, consequently, incapable of coitus with anyone. Other texts, however, make clear the sexual capacity of angels (→ **Gen.** 6:1-4, 18-19, **Jude** 7 and **1 Cor.** 11:10). The Levirate law also offers considerable difficulty to those who see an absolute ethic against polygamy (by chance do three become one?) and homosexual relationships in the language of “two shall become one.” While it does not represent the ideal, for certain situations where the alternatives are worse a type of “open marriage” was not only permitted but actually commanded by God.

The law and practice of Levirate law, never abandoned in the New Testament, present serious problems for ideological fundamentalism. Fundamentalists who demand a simple “return to the Bible” for modern sexual questions must explain why in churches today no hands are cut off (Deut. 25:11-12), no one takes an oath in court with their hand on male genitals (instead of the Bible; see Gen. 24:1-4), neither are males with deceased brothers obligated to fulfill the responsibility of Levirate marriage, commanded in the Bible and never revoked.

¹ Claus Westermann 1976/84-82/86 III:52, “Excursus on the Levirate”; Jeffrey Tigay 1996:482-483; Frank Frick, WS 2001/98-199.

For the modern practice, common in Asian and African tribes, see → “Levirate marriage” en <http://en.Wikipedia>