

Verses 5-10 outline what is called “levirate” marriage (not related to the word “Levi”). Its purpose was to ensure that a man’s line of descent would not end with his death and that his land could stay in his family. Scripture gives us two examples of this principle: The story of Tamar and Onan in Genesis 38 and Ruth and her unnamed relative in the book of Ruth.

The Pharisees concoct an extreme example of levirate marriage to try and trip up Jesus in Matthew 22:24-28. The practice is also one explanation for differences in the genealogy of Jesus between the gospels of Luke and Matthew.

The rabbinical writings in the Talmud have detailed instructions for the ceremony described in verses 8-9, known as the *halizah* (right down to the shoe used).

The *halizah* went out of common use before the nineteenth century. It is now practiced only with great rarity among Orthodox Jews in Israel.

The principle of preservation of bloodlines remains. In Genesis 12 God promises Abraham that his offspring will endure and bless all the families of the earth. In 2 Samuel 7 He tells David his throne will remain forever. And the nation of Israel, God’s earthly people, has been preserved through centuries of diaspora and persecution, a clear example of God’s providence.

Notes:

25:3 In 2 Corinthians 11:24 Paul speaks of receiving forty lashes less one. Tradition says that the Jews when flogging a criminal would inflict 39 lashes to avoid accidentally exceeding the limit set in this verse. The Lord Jesus, however, was flogged by the Romans and we are not told how many blows he suffered.

Questions:

1. What principles of justice do we see in verses 1-3?
2. Where is verse 4 cited in the New Testament? For what purpose?
3. What is the point of requiring a man to marry his brother's widow?

4. What is the reason for the ceremony in verses 8-10? Where do we see it in scripture?

5. What bloodlines do we see preserved in scripture? ‘

6. How could a dishonest person use different sets of weights to cheat people?

7. What for us today might be parallels to using two different sets of weights?

8. Read Exodus 17:8-16. Why do the Amalekites come under condemnation? Extra credit: Where in the Bible do they finally disappear from history?