

“Jesus’ Ancestry”

Background Scripture: Ruth 1-4; Luke 3:23-38 **Devotional Reading:** Galatians 4:1-7

Ruth 4:9-17 (NIV)

⁹ Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, “Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰ I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon’s widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!”

¹¹ Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, “We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. ¹² Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.”

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴ The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! ¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.”

¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. ¹⁷ The women living there said, “Naomi has a son!” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Luke 3:23, 31b–32

²³ Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli,

³¹ the son of Nathan, the son of David, ³² the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon.

LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Fact:** To name individuals in the ancestry of Jesus.
- **Biblical Principle:** To explain the importance of that ancestry.
- **Daily Application:** To pray that God’s blessings for us echo throughout our generations.

INTRODUCTION

Grafted In

Grafting is a process in which a branch of one tree adheres to a rootstock of another tree of the same general type. The process is intended to benefit both the grafted branch and the rootstock tree.

In the current lesson, we focus on a particular point in the genealogy of Jesus, a “grafting in” of sorts. This addition to the family tree yielded abundant blessings, and it continues to bless.

LESSON CONTEXT

The events recounted in the book of Ruth took place in the period of the judges in Israel (1389–1050 B.C.; Ruth 1:1). This time in Israel’s history was marked by the people’s recurring failure to keep their covenant with the Lord (Judges 2:10–13; 3:7, 12; 4:1; etc.). In contrast to the disheartening accounts in Judges, Ruth tells the story of a handful of people living in faithful obedience to God.

The book of Ruth culminates in a genealogy of David (Ruth 4:18–22). Genealogies are found in literature from around the ancient Near East. Many of these examples recount a ruler’s lineage and were intended to legitimize a monarch’s reign. This function of genealogy hints at one reason the book of Ruth was written: to show God’s providence at work in King David’s ancestors, whether during or shortly after his kingship, or even after Israel was divided in two. Tracing Jesus’ lineage to David in Luke’s genealogy, covered in part below (see Luke 3:23–38), answered an important question: What right had Jesus to claim to be the king in Israel who fulfilled God’s promise to David? How could Jesus be the Messiah?

Naomi’s Family: Ruth 4:9–17

Having come to Bethlehem as widows, Naomi and her foreign-born daughter-in-law Ruth faced an uncertain future. But Ruth’s character and hard work won her favor with Boaz, a relative of Naomi’s. Events came to a quick climax: Naomi had a plan to enlist Boaz’s help (Ruth 3:9–13), and Boaz wasted no time putting his own plan into action (4:1–8). (For more context, read the entirety of Ruth 1–4.)

Boaz’s desire was to redeem Naomi’s land holdings and to marry Ruth. The laws regarding selling a family property are found in Leviticus 25:25–34 (compare Jeremiah 32:7). Because of the importance of land in Israel, the bias was to sell the property within a tribe to keep it in the extended family. For this reason, the family member who purchased the land was called a kinsman or kinsman-redeemer. And though property was generally inherited from father to son, there was precedent for a woman’s holding land (see Numbers 27:1–11; 36:1–12).

When a nearer kinsman abdicated his right to buy the land (and marry Ruth), *Boaz* stepped in (Ruth 4:1–6). In doing so, he took on the role of a kinsman for *Naomi* by buying the land that had belonged to her husband, Elimelech, and her sons, Mahlon and Chilion. At least ten *elders* were present (4:2), along with many *people*. *Witnesses* at this time served much like an oral form of a notary public for such transactions.

1. How did Boaz satisfy the responsibilities of a kinsman-redeemer? (Ruth 4:9)

Boaz further clarified his intention by announcing that he had *acquired* Ruth to be his wife. The reference to “acquired” here is that of the concept of “redeeming.” He also announced that he was willing to “maintain the name of the dead” upon his inheritance. This meant that he was willing to perpetuate the line of Elimelech and Mahlon which had been temporarily cut off by their deaths. Therefore, his son by Ruth would be considered as fulfilling the extension of their seed and would guarantee their possession remaining in Israel.

2. What was significant about Boaz’s actions in redeeming the land and marrying Ruth? (Ruth 4:10)

What Do You Think?

What are some practical ways believers can honor the dead appropriately?

Digging Deeper

How do these practices set Christian practice apart from worldly ways?

3. How did the elders and the people respond to Boaz’s announcement? (Ruth 4:11-12)

This all took place at the city *gate*, the typical meeting place in Israel for legal proceedings (example: Joshua 20:4). Going above and beyond their role as *witnesses*, the elders and the people responded so positively that they not only verify the transaction, but pronounce a benediction on Ruth, hoping that she would *like Rachel and like Leah*, who were the wives of Jacob and the legal mothers of the 12 tribes of Israel. The conclusion of the benediction is even more significant: *do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem*. Certainly they were to become famous in Bethlehem! This couple will become the great grandparents of David of Bethlehem, who would eventually become Israel's greatest king. He in turn would be the forefather of the predicted Messiah, Jesus Christ Himself!

This blessing was significant because although Ruth was a Moabite, she was also known to be a woman of great character (Ruth 3:11). She left behind her own people because of her love for her mother-in-law Naomi and the Lord without knowing what reception she could expect in Naomi's home. The blessing from the people confirms their acceptance of her.

The account of *Pharez's* birth by *Tamar* is found in Genesis 38. Ruth's situation was not identical, but it is notable that both Tamar and Ruth were foreign women who became ancestors to Jesus (Matthew 1:3, 5).

What Do You Think?

In what ways are children blessings in their communities?

Digging Deeper

How can faithful people avoid the trap of valuing parenthood over childlessness?

Some sometime after their marriage Ruth and Boaz gave birth to *a son*, whom they named Obed ("servant"). God would use this baby to be a source of blessing to many. The Lord's aid in her conceiving a son emphasizes His blessing of this union, even though historically, the Moabites were not to have any portion in Israel (Deuteronomy 23:3–4).

4. How did the Lord bless the union of Boaz and Ruth? (Ruth 4:13)

What Do You Think?

When has hindsight been beneficial in discerning blessings in your life?

Digging Deeper

What dangers are there in focusing too much on the past?

Verses 14–17 focus on *Naomi*, Ruth's mother-in-law. *The women* of the town had previously witnessed Naomi's heartbreaking return to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:19–20). Naomi concluded that the Lord had left her bitter and empty at the death of her husband and sons (1:20–21); the reality was that God provided for Naomi even when all hope seemed lost. This was a great reversal for Naomi. *Praise be to the Lord* acknowledges His action, especially that this action reveals His loving character.

In Israel, grown children were expected to take care of their aging parents (1 Timothy 5:4). This was especially true if their mother was widowed, as women had very few financial resources to fall back on if family could not help. Following the death of her husband and sons, Naomi's future was much in doubt. With the birth of *a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age*, Naomi need not be burdened about her future.

Even as the women celebrated this grandson, Ruth was extolled as being *better to thee than seven sons*. This is quite incredible, given the status a hypothetical mother of seven sons would enjoy in Israel! Those sons represented security in the future (especially in widowhood) and the hope of accrued wealth.

The reference that Naomi cared for the child indicates her special oversight regarding his care. It's not it does not refer to actually feeding the child, which would have been an impossibility at her age.

Eventually Obed, that “he [became] famous throughout Israel” (4:14) came to pass through his son, *Jesse*, who became the father of the greatest earthly king to reign in Israel, *David*.

5. In what way was this a blessing for Naomi? (Ruth 4:14-17)

Jesus’ Family: Luke 3:23, 31b–32

Over 1,000 years passed between the events recorded in Ruth and the time of Jesus’ birth. As one would expect, much changed over the passing generations: the Davidic kingdom rose, split, and then collapsed in exile. The people had returned to the land, but the kingship had not been restored. What of God’s promises of an everlasting kingdom (2 Samuel 7)?

About the age of 30 years old Jesus began his public ministry, as were the Levitical priests when they began their service (Numbers 4:3). By putting the genealogy here, Luke reminded his readers that the Son of God was also the Son of man, born into this world, identified with the needs and problems of mankind. And, since Joseph and Mary were both in David’s line, these genealogies prove that Jesus of Nazareth has the legal right to David’s throne (Luke 1:32-33).

Verse 32 brings us back to the story of Ruth (see Ruth 4:17). *Jesse* was David’s father, *Obed* his grandfather, and so on. Some names are omitted here, as *Boaz* likely lived near the end of the time of the judges (about 1100 B.C.), whereas *Salmon* (see Matthew 1:5) lived during the initial days of conquest in the promised land (about 1400 BC). *Naasson* was the tribal leader of Judah during the wilderness period (Numbers 1:4, 7).

6. Why did Luke 3:23 specify Jesus’ age? Why is He called the son of Joseph?

What Do You Think?

What influence has your family of origin had on your adult life?

Digging Deeper

Does this influence deserve celebration or require redemption? What encouragement can you take from Jesus’ family line in this regard?

God’s Faithfulness in Family

The story of Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi should be a great encouragement to us. Each chose to follow the Lord faithfully, as seen through their righteous actions. As a result of their faithful deeds and God’s faithfulness to their family, all three received blessings. First, their community responded positively to this family’s outstanding character. This was not a foregone conclusion, especially for the foreign woman Ruth. Second and more importantly, we see how God chose to bless the family’s faithful actions in their own times with a son. Truly, the Lord had turned their mourning into dancing (Psalm 30:11)!

The blessing continued beyond what Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi experienced for themselves. Israel was blessed by David, the future king, and much further in the future with Jesus, the promised King. This family could never anticipate how their faithfulness would echo through the generations and what a blessing their own blessings would be to the world. We are blessed today to see how God can work through us and for us when we choose to follow Him. But the greatest blessing, of course, is living in the Kingdom of God thanks to the sacrifice of our King.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we are awed by the story of the faith of Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi, and how You turned their blessing into a blessing for Israel and then the world. We praise You for the righteous acts of many that finally brought us to the person and work of Christ. In the name of Jesus, Your Son, we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

God's faithfulness resounds through generations.