

## Jesus' Ancestry

Devotional Reading: [Galatians 4:1–7](#)

Background Scripture: [Ruth 1–4](#); [Luke 3:23–38](#)

### [Ruth 4:9–17](#)

<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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!”

<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.”

<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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! <sup>15</sup> 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.”

<sup>16</sup> Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. <sup>17</sup> 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](#)

<sup>23</sup> 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,

<sup>31</sup> the son of Nathan,

the son of David, <sup>32</sup> the son of Jesse,

the son of Obed, the son of Boaz,

the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon.

## Key Text

The women living there said, “Naomi has a son!” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. —**Ruth 4:17**

## A King Forever and Ever

### Unit 1: Jesus, the Heir of David

Lessons 1–5

#### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Name individuals in the ancestry of Jesus.
2. Explain the importance of that ancestry.
3. Sketch a spiritual “family tree.”

#### Lesson Outline

##### Introduction

- A. Grafted In
- B. Lesson Context

##### I. Naomi’s Family (Ruth 4:9–17)

- A. Boaz Acts (vv. 9–10)  
*Surprising Reward*
- B. The People Bless (vv. 11–12)
- C. The Lord Blesses (vv. 13–17)

##### II. Jesus’ Family (Luke 3:23, 31b–32)

- A. Near Ancestors (v. 23)
- B. Distant Ancestors (vv. 31b–32)  
*Lost to History*

##### Conclusion

- A. God’s Faithfulness in Family
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

#### How to Say It

Boaz *Bo-az*.

Elimelek *Ee-lim-eh-leck*.

Ephrathah *Ef-rah-tah*.  
Heli *Hee-lie*.  
Kilion *Kil-ee-on*.  
levirate *leh-vuh-rut*.  
Mahlon *Mah-lon*.  
Nahshon *Nah-sahn*.  
Perez *Fair-ezz*.  
Zerah *Zair-uh*.

## Introduction

### A. Grafted In

Some years ago, my wife and I were researching various ways to use our 12 acres of land to make some supplemental income. We considered growing chestnuts, in part because they grow well in our climate. As part of the process of learning about this possibility, we went to a seminar about grafting. Grafting is a process in which a branch of one tree is adhered 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 today's account, 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, both then and in Jesus' day. It continues to bless.

### B. Lesson Context

Almost nothing can be said definitively about the date or author of the book of Ruth. But the lack of attribution need not hinder our understanding of the book or our text today ([Ruth 4:9–17](#)). The events recounted in Ruth took place in the period of the judges in Israel (1389–1050 BC; [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. Recounting the grandeur of one's bloodline was meant 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? For more context on the book of Luke, see [lessons 3–5](#) of this quarter.

## I. 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.)

### A. Boaz Acts (vv. 9–10)

**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.**

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](#)). The gist of the regulation was that a sale of Israelite land was more of a lease since the land would return to the sellers' family when they could afford to redeem it or, at the latest, in the Year of Jubilee ([Leviticus 27:16–25](#)). 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 guardian-redeemer 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](#)).



Visual for [Lesson 1](#). Allow learners one minute to pray for their families, both physical and spiritual, that God's will be done for and through them.

When a nearer guardian-redeemer 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 guardian-redeemer for *Naomi* by buying the land that had belonged to her husband Elimelek and her sons Mahlon and Kilion. 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.

**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!”**

This is the first time we learn that *Ruth* had been *Mahlon’s* wife (not *Kilion*); this identification was likely due to the legal nature of the proceedings. Boaz repeated the phrase, “Today you are witnesses,” identically worded as in [Ruth 4:9](#) (above), creating bookends that open and close his formal, legal argument. There would be no doubt in the future that Boaz acted with integrity in redeeming the land or marrying *Ruth*.

The language around marrying *Ruth* is like that of levirate marriage ([Deuteronomy 25:5–10](#); see commentary on [Ruth 4:10](#), below). But a few details prevent its exact characterization as such. First, *Ruth* was a *Moabite*, not an Israelite. The two people groups, though related (see [Genesis 19](#)), were often at odds with each other (examples: [Numbers 22–25](#); [Judges 3](#)). God had even barred Moabites from being grafted into Israel ([Deuteronomy 23:3](#))!

Second, Boaz was not a surviving brother of the deceased husband. He wasn’t even Naomi’s closest guardian-redeemer. Third, the guardian-redeemer who Boaz approached as first in line was not publicly shamed (as levirate law required) for declining to marry *Ruth* and redeem the land as a packaged deal.

This unnamed man serves as a foil to Boaz. The man acted in keeping with conventional wisdom and was not reprimanded for doing so (as had Orpah; see [Ruth 1:11–14](#)). In contrast, Boaz exhibited extraordinary integrity in his zeal to provide for Naomi and *Ruth* (as had *Ruth*; see [1:16–18](#)). He honored the spirit of the levirate law with his concern for Mahlon’s family line (*that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown*). The first child born to Boaz and *Ruth* would be raised as Mahlon’s child with his inheritance so that the dead man’s name and property would be maintained (compare [2 Samuel 18:18](#); [Isaiah 56:4–5](#)). By using the language of acquiring both land and a wife (unusual language for marriage), Boaz combined the levirate law in principle with the kinsman-redeemer concept.

#### **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?

### **Surprising Reward**

Dianne Gordon was walking to work one cold Michigan morning when she stopped at a gas station to warm up. She had made the same 2.7-mile journey both ways every day since her car broke down a year before. When Dianne noticed a bag of cash lying in the station’s parking lot, she immediately called the police. Police found nearly \$15,000 and wedding cards addressed to a newlywed couple to

whom the money was returned. Despite her great need, Dianne said she never even considered not turning in the cash. She just knew turning it in was the right thing to do.

When a community member heard of Dianne’s selfless act, she set up a GoFundMe page to raise enough money for Dianne to purchase a vehicle. They met their goal with plenty to spare. Dianne had expected no reward for her selfless act and yet received it.

Boaz’s decision to marry Ruth led to a blessing for him: he was included in the genealogy of Jesus. How might choices you make today benefit physical or spiritual descendants you will never know (1 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4)?

—L. M. W.

## B. The People Bless (vv. 11–12)

**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.**

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 people pronounced a blessing on Boaz and the new household that was forming. The blessing clearly focuses on Ruth (*the woman*), as a blessing for Boaz would more likely call for the Lord to make Boaz like Jacob. *Rachel* and *Leah* (and their maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah) bore the ancestors of the tribes of *Israel* (Genesis 29–30). To *have standing* and *be famous* are blessings for wealth and a good name. The name probably assumed the couple would require children to experience these blessings (see Luke 3:32, below).

*Ephrathah* seems to be an old name for the area of Bethlehem, also spelled “Ephrath” (example: Genesis 35:16, 19; 48:7), most famously mentioned in the messianic passage of Micah 5:2 (quoted in Matthew 2:6). Rachel especially was associated with the area, as she was buried near *Bethlehem* (Genesis 35:16–19).

Though 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 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 and hints at the Lord’s pleasure with her (see 4:13, below).

### What Do You Think?

What responsibilities do witnesses today have toward the newly wed? How long do those responsibilities last?

### Digging Deeper

How should those responsibilities be translated to care for unmarried people?

**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.”**

The account of Perez’s birth is found in Genesis 38. *Tamar* was entitled to a levirate marriage when

her husband, Er, died ([Genesis 38:8](#)). But several failures found Tamar back in her father's house with no prospect of continuing her dead husband's lineage. When she tricked *Judah* into sleeping with her, Tamar conceived *Perez* and his twin brother, Zerah. 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 above childlessness?

### C. The Lord Blesses (vv. 13–17)

**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.**

It is unclear why *Ruth* did not bear children in her first marriage, which lasted approximately ten years ([Ruth 1:4](#)). In hindsight, however, we might sense God's invisible hand preparing her for this moment. 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](#)).

#### 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?

**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!”**

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.

**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.”**

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 grandson to *renew your life and sustain you in your old age*, Naomi need not be burdened about her future.

Even as the women celebrated this grandson, Ruth was extolled as being *better to you 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.

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

It was not uncommon for well-off families (as Boaz’s seems to have been) to have nurses for their children. In Naomi’s case, the role is not that of a wet nurse but as a guardian and caretaker (compare [Genesis 24:59; 35:8](#)). An informal adoption might be in view.

This is the only place in the Bible where neighbor women are said to have named a baby (contrast [Luke 1:59–63](#)). Ironically, there is no evidence to suggest that these same women honored Naomi’s request to be called by a new name ([Ruth 1:20](#)). The name *Obed* means “worshipper” or “servant,” the latter meaning lending itself to the idea that he would serve as a redeemer for Naomi one day. 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*.

## II. Jesus’ Family ([Luke 3:23, 31b–32](#))

Over 1,000 years passed between the events recorded in *Ruth* to 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](#))?

### A. Near Ancestors (v. 23)

**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.**

A Levite could begin serving in the tabernacle at *thirty years old* ([Numbers 4:3](#)), although other texts reflect ages beginning at 20 ([1 Chronicles 23:24; 2 Chronicles 31:17; Ezra 3:8](#)) or 25 years old ([Numbers 8:24–25](#)). These differences could reflect the variety of roles that were available at these ages, new age limits set in the temple rather than in the tabernacle, or changing supply and demand in demographics. In any case, Jesus’ age certainly would have qualified him to minister in the temple.

Luke adds the editorial comment that *it was thought* that Jesus was the son of *Joseph* in order to be clear that, in reality, Jesus is God’s Son. But Joseph was legally Jesus’ father. Many scholars believe that Luke’s genealogy reflects a family tree traced through Mary, such that Joseph was the son-in-law of *Heli*. Or it could be that Matthew traces through Mary’s family and Luke through Joseph’s. Other proposals for the differences have also been put forward. Nonetheless, we need not be perturbed by the differences between Matthew and Luke (see [Matthew 1:1–16](#); see commentary on [Luke 3:31b](#), below). We also do well to remember that the ancient genealogy was not intended to be a complete accounting of a family. Neither account needs to be taken as mistaken or corrected against the other.

What follows in [Luke 3:24–31a](#) (not in our printed text) are generations from Matthat to Mattatha.

## B. Distant Ancestors (vv. 31b–32)

### 31b. the son of Nathan, the son of David,

*Nathan* was a son of *David* by *Bathsheba* ([1 Chronicles 3:5](#)). The Gospel of Matthew traces Jesus' line through Solomon rather than Nathan ([Matthew 1:6](#)). Undoubtedly, what was most important to both writers was showing that Jesus can trace his earthly lineage straight back to David. This relationship was the key to Jesus' being able to fulfill the promise that God made to David: "I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" ([2 Samuel 7:12–13](#)).

### 32. the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon.

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

#### 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?

## Lost to History

My mother recently gave me a box full of old family photos. Looking through them, she could identify many faces. However, we found several photos of people we had never seen before. I'm sure my grandmother would have known them, but she passed away years ago. Most of her generation is gone, and no one today remembers the identities or stories of those people in the photos.

Despite this, I know something about those people. Their genetics and their choices have helped create me. I may not know their names, but I see a familial resemblance. I may not know their biographies, but I know they valued faith and taught their children to do the same, just as I do.

Jesus' family tree is detailed and extensive, full of names. No doubt, some family members' stories were not retained. But those people affected Jesus' life, nonetheless. How does knowing that your decisions affect future generations, physical and spiritual, influence how you live today?

—L. M. W.

## Conclusion

## A. 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.

## B. Prayer

Lord, 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.

## C. Thought to Remember

God's faithfulness resounds through generations.

## Involvement Learning

*Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).*

## Into the Lesson

Give learners one minute to read the genealogy in [Luke 3:23–38](#). While they read, distribute blank pieces of paper. After the minute is up, have learners pair up. Then, give them one minute to list as many names from the genealogy as possible. At the end of the minute, ask the pairs to grade their list against Luke's genealogy. They should strike out any names that do not appear in Luke's genealogy (even if they are present in Matthew's). After they have checked these answers, ask learners to identify



with stars which names in [Luke 3:23–38](#) can also be found in Ruth without consulting [Ruth 4](#). (*Answers*: Obed, Jesse, David ([Ruth 4:17](#); [Luke 3:31b–32](#)), and Boaz ([Ruth 4:13](#); [Luke 3:32](#)).

Lead into the studying by saying, “As we dive into our lesson today, we will see the importance of lineage and legacy within the Bible, particularly in the books of Ruth and Luke.”

## Into the Word

Ask the class to work together to summarize what has happened in [Ruth 1:1–4:8](#). Consult the Lesson Context for this lesson and the Bible text as desired. *Option*. Prepare a lecture on this context or assign it before class to a volunteer. *Alternative*. Have learners pair up to complete the “Setting the Scene” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. After several minutes, bring the class back together to fill in any remaining gaps.

Ask for volunteers to read [Ruth 4:9–17](#) aloud. Distribute a handout (you prepare) with the text printed. As learners read along, have them mark anything puzzling with a question mark, anything that seems important with a star, and anything that stands out in some other way by underlining it. Use the commentary to help answer the questions learners might have about the text. Then have them discuss in small groups what they starred and underlined.

After some discussion, divide the class into four groups: **Boaz**, **Naomi**, **Ruth**, and **The Witnesses**. Have these groups work together to detail the words and actions of their assigned person or group. Then, groups should answer two questions about the subject of their groups: 1–How did this person or group act righteously? 2–What conclusions did or might this person or group make about the Lord’s action in this story? Answers will vary to some degree in answer to both questions, but in general, righteousness is demonstrated by honoring God’s law, and we could expect that all these people assumed that God had worked to bring these events to their conclusion so he could bless the parties involved.

Lead into the text on Jesus’ genealogy by giving a brief summary of what happened between Ruth’s lifetime and Jesus’ birth.

Have a volunteer read [Luke 3:23](#), [31b–32](#). Ask the class to compare the purpose(s) of the brief genealogy in [Ruth 4](#) to the purpose(s) of the genealogy in [Luke 3](#). Expect to hear at least something along the lines of the genealogies emphasizing God’s providence at work in the family and serving to prove the legitimacy of the king (David in Ruth, Jesus in Luke).

## Into Life

Have learners work in small groups to compare what we know of Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi’s character with Christ. Ask, “What family resemblances do we find?” Based on those answers, ask learners to work alone for one minute jotting down their own characteristics that speak to a family resemblance with these four people.

*Alternative*. Instruct the learners to complete the “A Spiritual Family Tree” exercise as directed.

Once finished with either activity, provide a few minutes for reflection before concluding with a



prayer thanking God for his generations-long work bringing Jesus into the world.

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To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on your hard drive. Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

[Activity Page \(December 1—Jesus' Ancestry\)](#)

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