



The Lineage of David

December 6, 2009

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:

RUTH 4:13–17;

MATTHEW 1:1–17

PRINTED TEXT:

RUTH 4:13–17; MATTHEW 1:1–6

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

Opening Song

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting

Opening Prayer

RUTH 4:13-17; MATTHEW 1:1-6 (NIV)

4¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and 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 kinsman-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, laid him in her lap 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.

1¹ A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:

² Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

³ Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram,

⁴ Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon,

⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse,

⁶ and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

INTRODUCTION**A. GENEALOGY DETECTIVES**

Have you done any investigation into your genealogy? Interest in discovering facts about one's family background seems to be rising steadily. Some people hope to find a forgotten jewel in the past centuries. Maybe they are actually descended from royalty!

Others are interested because of medical reasons. Genealogical research may help them understand certain genetic conditions they may have inherited. Interest is also greater because of the enormous amount of genealogical resources that are increasingly accessible. Some Internet sites allow such research for a nominal fee. This can be fascinating work. We may discover a branch of family nearby that we didn't even know about.

In the ancient world, genealogies were remembered with great care. It was important to know who your ancestors were. For example, the great families of Rome were judged on whether or not they could trace their ancestry to the city's beginnings. Julius Caesar was from the great patrician family *Julia*, which claimed to be descended from the founder of Rome. Wealth and accomplishment in Rome did not trump family background.

For believers in Christ, all this takes on added significance. Some genealogical inquiries are worthless, even counterproductive (see 1 Timothy 1:4; Titus 3:9). But just the opposite is true with regard to Jesus Christ. One of the important aspects of our belief in Jesus as the Messiah is the way the New Testament presents him as a fulfillment of prophecy. Some prophecies are tied to ancestors of Jesus who played major roles in the history of Israel.

B. LESSON BACKGROUND

The book of Ruth is counted in Jewish tradition as one of the five "Festal Scrolls," shorter books from the Hebrew Bible that were traditionally read on festival days. Ruth was read on Shavuot, also known as the Feast of Weeks. Shavuot is better known to Christians as Pentecost. It had originally marked the period from the Passover exodus from Egypt until the giving of the law at Sinai, but it developed into a harvest festival celebrating the spring crops. This seems to be its connection with Ruth, a little book whose story is bound up in the farming customs of the ancient Near East.

The book of Ruth, a story taking place about 1100 BC, is set in the time of the judges of Israel. The book tells of an Israelite man named Elimelech (meaning "my God is king") who moved his family to the neighboring land of Moab because of famine. His family consisted of his wife (Naomi) and two sons. Over a period of a decade, they apparently made a permanent home in Moab. The sons even married Moabite women.

Tragically, Elimelech and the sons died. This left Naomi without husband or sons to support her. She also had two widowed daughters-in-law. On hearing of the availability of food in her ancestral homeland, Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem, which was located in the tribal province of Judah. This was a risky move, since she had been gone for a decade and did not know how she would be welcomed. One daughter-in-law, Ruth, decided to go with Naomi. In the process, Ruth pledged loyalty to Naomi and to her God (Ruth 1:16, 17).

When the two arrived in Bethlehem, they were received, but the male-dominated nature of their culture presented a challenge. Naomi understood that they needed to be connected with one of the men in order to ensure survival. The likely candidate was Boaz, a wealthy farmer and a kinsman of her dead husband. This resulted in Ruth attracting the attention of Boaz. She eventually married him according to the intricate customs of the time.

Ruth was a beloved book among the Jews of Jesus' day because of its story of these two strong and resilient women. This is not why the book was written, however, or why it is included in the Old Testament. The book of Ruth is important because it tells a significant story about the ancestors of King David. The amazing detail is that one of the key ancestors of David, namely his great grandmother, was not an Israelite. This detail becomes even more important for Matthew. He includes several foreign women in his genealogy of Jesus to support the point that Jesus, the promised Messiah, was to serve all nations, not just Israel.

I. DRAMA OF DAVID'S ANCESTRY (RUTH 4:13–17)

A. BIRTH (v. 13)

13. So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

Although some of the maneuvers used by Ruth and Naomi to get Boaz to marry Ruth are confusing to us, this verse makes it clear that their relationship is proper and respectable. Boaz does not sleep with Ruth until after their marriage, and their marriage is blessed by God with *a son*.

The earlier chapters of this book present Boaz as a confident and capable person. We should understand that he has entered this marriage willingly, not from trickery or compulsion. He must truly care for Ruth, and their marriage is welcomed by that rich farmer.

B. BLESSING (vv. 14, 15)

14. The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel!"

Surprisingly, the author points to *Naomi* as the one who is most blessed by the birth of Ruth's son. Her plan to return to Bethlehem has been a complete success. Not only have she and Ruth managed to survive, they have been blessed. In some ways, the return of Naomi to Israel is seen as a return to the God of Israel. God welcomes her back and rewards her faithfulness.

The women who are friends of Naomi understand the implications of these events. God has acted to preserve Naomi. He has given her a *kinsman-redeemer*, a security for the future. Therefore, the women praise God. They ask that the child of Boaz may be *famous throughout Israel*. This repeats what the elders of the city wish for Boaz himself on hearing of his pending marriage (Ruth 4:11, 12). The word for *famous* is based on a root that involves spoken communication. Boaz's son is to be one who is talked about.

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 addition to the son's fame is the security that Naomi now has for her *old age*. She is too old to marry again and must count on her *daughter-in-law* and grandson to provide for her. Boaz himself is not a young man at this time (see Ruth 3:10). While Boaz's graciousness to Naomi is welcome, it will be his son who will provide for Naomi should Boaz precede her in death.

The blessing of the women also contains a remarkable tribute to Ruth. They tell Naomi that Ruth *is better* to her *than seven sons*. In a society that values boys above girls, this is praise of the highest sort. Naomi had had a good husband and two fine sons, but they are now gone. The only person who has persevered with her is this foreign woman, her loyal daughter-in-law. No amount of sons, even the "perfect number" of seven,

can replace the love and honor that Ruth has given her mother-in-law.

C. BEGINNING (vv. 16, 17)

16. Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him.

Although Ruth is the mother of *the child*, Naomi claims him too. She is determined to take an active role in his upbringing, as is her right according to the customs of that time. Today, family displacement for education and employment strains or even severs the ties of the extended family. Raising children is a challenge, and the help of grandparents can make it much easier for a weary mother. Surely, Ruth takes comfort from Naomi's help and delights in her mother-in-law's joy.

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.

When Naomi returned from Moab, she had asked that she be called *Mara*, meaning "the bitter one" (Ruth 1:20). Life to that point had been cruel to her. Now there is no room for bitterness, and *the women* affirm her as *Naomi*, which means "my delight." This is something like a girl nicknamed *Sunshine* going through a rough period and wishing to be called *Stormy*. Now the joy is back. Naomi is *Sunshine* again.

Realizing the significance of this birth, the local women phrase it as "*Naomi has a son.*" She shares the blessing of this boy with Ruth in full measure. The name the women give the child is *Obed*, which means "servant." This can have a religious significance, so that we can understand *Obed* also to mean "worshiper." There are five men by the name of *Obed* in the Old Testament, so we should take care not to mix them up.

This verse closes by revealing the most important aspect of this story: its connection with *David*. *Obed* ultimately is the grandfather of that great king. *David* is beloved by his people, and the stories of his

ancestors are of interest to Israel. This dramatic account thus provides background for the equally providential tale of *David* and his rise to the throne many decades hence.

II. DETAILS OF JESUS' ANCESTRY (MATTHEW 1:1-6)

A. KEY ANCESTORS (v. 1)

1. A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:

Matthew begins his Gospel in dramatic fashion. His Jewish readers immediately recognize the implications of *a record of the genealogy*, with certain listings of Genesis coming to mind. Genesis 2:4 introduces the "account of the heavens and the earth," that is, the creation of the world. Genesis 5:1 introduces the genealogical list of Adam's descendents. Matthew intends his readers to understand that what he is relating presents Jesus as a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15), as a new Adam (compare Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:22).

In this verse, Matthew also gives the three keys to understanding his genealogy of Jesus. First, Jesus is *Christ*. That means he is the promised anointed one of the Jewish nation. (The Greek word *Christ* means the same as the Hebrew word *Messiah*.) Second, he is *the son of David*. *David* was the king who was promised repeatedly that his throne would be eternal, his dynasty unending (see Psalm 89:3, 4). The designation *son of David* thus is distinctly messianic. Third, Jesus is *the son of Abraham*. In this, he fulfills the promise given to the father of the Hebrews that his descendant would be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3; see Galatians 3:16).

B. EARLY ANCESTORS (vv. 2-5)

2-5.... Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

There is no rigid form for genealogies in the ancient world. Matthew begins his genealogy at the most distant point he wants to include, which is *Abraham*. From there Matthew works forward to Jesus. In contrast, Luke begins his genealogy with Jesus and works backward all the way to Adam and to God himself (Luke 3:23–38).

This difference in procedures is because genealogies are more than simple lists of ancestors; they are lists with a purpose. Matthew's purpose is to use the lineage data to show that Jesus is the rightful heir to the promises given to David. Thus Jesus is the legitimate Messiah. Matthew also wants to teach his readers some other lessons by using this genealogy, as we shall see.

When we look at the whole of Matthew's genealogy (Matthew 1:1–17), we see that he is selective in what he includes. He seems to use his selectivity in order to end up with 3 sets of 14 (1:17). When we compare Matthew's list with Old Testament data, we notice that some names have been dropped intentionally. For example, Matthew goes from Jehoram to Uzziah in verse 8. Uzziah (also known as Azariah) was actually the great great grandson of Jehoram. This means that Matthew has decided not to include Ahaziah (2 Kings 8:24), Joash (2 Kings 13:1), and Amaziah (2 Kings 14:1).

There seems to be a couple of reasons why Matthew presents Jesus' genealogy as 3 sets of 14. First is the value this gives to one who seeks to memorize the list. It is always easier to recite a list if we can remember how many items it contains. For example, my brother has 4 children. I may not be able to list their names immediately because of the foggy nature of memory. But I know that I must keep going until I come up with 4 names. Eventually I can do this, and the list is therefore complete.

A second, more subtle reason for the arrangement in sets of 14 may be found in the ancient Jewish practice of *gematria*. The

Jews use the letters of the Hebrew alphabet for their numbering system, so each letter has an assigned numerical value. The numerical value for the name *David* is 14. Thus, the triple 14 may be another way of reinforcing the point that Jesus is the proper heir to David's messianic throne.

The first 4 names of the list are familiar to anyone who has read the book of Genesis. *Judah and his brothers* are, of course, the 12 patriarchs of Israel, the fathers of the 12 tribes. Matthew mentions them because they represent the whole of Israel. Even so, his focus is on Judah, the royal tribe, the tribe of King David (see Genesis 49:10).

**3.... Judah the father of Perez and Zerah,
whose mother was Tamar,
Perez the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,**

In the first half of this verse, Matthew alludes to the scandalous behavior of *Judah* in his unwitting impregnation of his widowed daughter-in-law, *Tamar* (a story told in Genesis 38). The result was a set of twins, namely *Perez and Zerah* (38:28–30). *Tamar* is the first woman in Matthew's list. This is an unusual move in a time when genealogies include male ancestors only.

Altogether, Matthew includes four women in his listing, and it is likely that all were Gentiles: *Tamar* probably was a Canaanite; *Rahab* was a resident of Jericho; *Ruth* was a Moabitess; and *Uriah's wife* (that is, *Bathsheba*) probably was a Hittite. Matthew therefore shows the contribution of Gentiles to the lineage of Jesus. He is to be the Messiah for everyone, not just the Jews.

**4, 5.... Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,
Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother
was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was
Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,**

The list continues, including mention of *Boaz*, *Obed*, and *Ruth* from the first part of our lesson. See also Numbers 1:7.

C. ROYAL ANCESTORS (v. 6)

6.... and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife.

Matthew comes to a climactic statement in his genealogy, for we have been led to *King David*. No one else is given this title in this

listing, not even the mighty *Solomon*. In fact, no one else is given any title until the very end, where Jesus is designated as *Christ* (Matthew 1:16).

David is the beginning of the true royal lineage in Israel. God's providential care of David's line allowed it to continue for 1,000 years, to find fulfillment in Jesus, the true son of David (see Matthew 1:1; 21:9).

CONCLUSION

Jesus had frequent controversies with the Pharisees, who were Jews strongly committed to keeping the Law of Moses as they interpreted it. These men often asked Jesus questions in order to catch him in an inconsistency or offensive remark. In the case at Matthew 22:42, however, Jesus was the one who initiated the conversation by asking, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" The Pharisees respond by saying, "The son of David." Jesus then proceeded to show that even the legendary King David acknowledged that the Messiah was his Lord. Such a view stood the Jewish expectation for Messiah on its head.

Trying to come to grips with the prophetic connections of the Bible can be both fascinating and frustrating. When we don't quite understand, we still must trust that God is in control of history. His purposes cannot be thwarted by the worst of human behavior. God's plan to provide humanity with a redeeming king took many odd turns over the centuries. Tamar? A shameless trickster. Rahab? A prostitute. Ruth? Not even an Israelite. David? Committed murder and adultery. Despite these all-too-human characters, God's divine drama of salvation triumphs in the person of Jesus. He is the fulfillment of all our hopes and needs.

THE FAMILY VOCATION

"Once upon a time," as the saying goes, sons often followed in their fathers' footsteps in terms of vocation. In biblical times, for example, the temple priests all came from the family of Levi.

This following-in-the-footsteps phenomenon is much less common today than it was in centuries past. This shift is due, at least in part, to the fact that today there are many more occupations and opportunities from which to choose than was once the case. Even so, we occasionally still see cases of families whose generations follow each other in full-time church ministry or missionary work.

The naming of Ruth's son to be Obed puts something of a prophetic spin on this ancient custom. The name *Obed* means "servant" or "worshiper," and the biblical author reminds us that Obed became the grandfather of King David. David was certainly a servant of God. But David may be best known for his worship of God, given David's authorship of a vast number of the songs of praise that fill the book of Psalms.

In this sense, David continued in his grandfather's "family business." Regardless of the earthly vocation we or our descendants choose, we will serve best when we follow spiritually in our Father's "family business" (compare Luke 2:49).

HEREDITY VS. DECISIONS

The “notorious Jukes family” was thought by social scientists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to prove heredity to be the primary force in determining behavior. The supposedly dysfunctional Jukes clan was thought to have had a disproportionate number of social misfits in its family tree. The list included various types of criminals, prostitutes, and people with mental and physical disabilities that apparently cost society a lot of money for imprisonment and treatment.

Thus certain researchers saw the Jukes family as proof that compulsory sterilization was appropriate to relieve society of the burden of those deemed to be likely to produce “unfit” offspring. The supposed evidence of a hereditary defect that ran throughout the clan fueled a eugenics movement that advocated a terrible kind of social engineering.

More recently, however, researchers have found records at the State University of New York at Albany that show that many of the family members were leading members of society. The original research methodology was flawed, and the whole Jukes mythology has now been discredited.

The genealogy of Jesus contains some less-than-sterling characters—Rahab the prostitute to name one. Yet there is no consistent upward or downward trend in character quality of the individuals in this genealogy that would support a “heredity determines life” outlook. Jesus, as Son of God, is a special case, of course. Yet the fact that his life did not repeat the sins of his ancestors gives us hope that we too can control the quality of our character. He strengthens us to do so.

LET’S TALK IT OVER

1. What are some ways that people respond to suffering today? How is one’s view of God affected when difficult times come? How *should* one’s view of God be affected in such times?

2. How are modern concerns for being able to “keep body and soul together” in old age similar to and different from those same concerns in the ancient world? What do modern attitudes tell us about people’s confidence in God’s provision?

3. Why is it harder to sense God’s sovereignty when we’re in the middle of a crisis than when we are looking back later on how God used everything (including the crisis) in our lives? How can we keep from “going off the deep end” when in the middle of a crisis?

4. What can we learn about God’s grace and sovereignty when we see all the “problem people” in Jesus’ family tree? How should this affect our attitudes toward the “problem people” in our own families?

5. How far back can you trace your spiritual heritage? Why is it important for us to be aware of our spiritual roots?

LET'S TALK IT OVER

1. What are some ways that people respond to suffering today? How is one's view of God affected when difficult times come? How *should* one's view of God be affected in such times?

People who are going through difficult times may believe that God is mad at them or that He is punishing them for some reason. But if the difficulty cannot be directly traced to a specific sin, then the hardship is probably not an act of God's corrective discipline. As we see in Job, a person's suffering may have nothing to do with his or her personal lifestyle.

However, suffering can provoke a long string of complaints and the desire for vindication (think of Job). Sometimes people become bitter, realizing that God could have prevented their hardship, but He did not. Others simply bow their heads in submission, demanding neither explanation nor justification, and patiently ride out the storm. Usually these are the folks who later are able to look back on these times and see God's hand at work.

2. How are modern concerns for being able to "keep body and soul together" in old age similar to and different from those same concerns in the ancient world? What do modern attitudes tell us about people's confidence in God's provision?

Investment firms have been known to play on the fears of those who are approaching retirement age. Often the advertisements of such firms get the future retirees to think that they're not going to have enough and may end up depending on others during their golden years. Many who have experienced God's provision in the past find it hard to generate the same confidence in God's provision for the future. As He did for Naomi, God will take care of His people, sometimes in ways that they do not envision. This fact is not a justification for careless financial planning. Rather, it is a challenge to focus on the ultimate source of our earthly and eternal hope.

3. Why is it harder to sense God's sovereignty when we're in the middle of a crisis than when we are looking back later on how God used everything (including the crisis) in our lives? How can we keep from "going off the deep end" when in the middle of a crisis?

Physical and emotional pain have ways of blocking awareness of God's presence in our lives. Perhaps we shouldn't expect it to be otherwise. Perhaps during times of crisis we need to recruit people we trust to "hope for us" as we endure our trial. They can help keep us from making questionable decisions while we are in emotional distress.

Later, when the distraction and pain of the crisis has passed, we can look back and see how God worked on our behalf while we were in the middle of that situation. We may be astonished at how everything resulted in our spiritual growth.

4. What can we learn about God's grace and sovereignty when we see all the "problem people" in Jesus' family tree? How should this affect our attitudes toward the "problem people" in our own families?

Matthew and Luke were not afraid to list people in Jesus' genealogy who were less than stellar in their personal or spiritual reputations. This is yet another reason why we accept the Bible as credible in its presentation of God's truth and biblical history. The biblical writers do not attempt to cover up what we may see as negative information.

What we learn from the “problem people” in Jesus’ genealogy is that God can use *anyone* to play a role in advancing His kingdom. We should remind ourselves of this truth when we must deal with the more difficult people in our families. Who knows—perhaps others in your family view *you* as one of the “problem people”!

5. How far back can you trace your spiritual heritage? Why is it important for us to be aware of our spiritual roots?

While our salvation does not depend on the faithfulness of anyone else (except Jesus), it’s important to see that there are such things as “spiritual family trees.” From these we can trace how the gospel was preached and received by our spiritual ancestors (who may or may not be our biological ancestors as well).

PRAYER

O Mighty Father, God of Abraham, God of David, we marvel at your wisdom and patience in preparing the world for your Son, Jesus the Christ. May we commit ourselves to his service anew, for we pray in his name. Amen.
