

discover
**THE
GUARDIAN-
REDEEMER**

LEADER GUIDE

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**THE
GUARDIAN-
REDEEMER**



CoffeeBreak



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The Guardian-Redeemer

**Leviticus 25:23-28, 47-55; Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Ruth 4:1-10;
1 Peter 1:17-21; Galatians 3:10-14**

Getting Started

In this lesson we explore the guardian-redeemer (kinsman-redeemer) concept in Scripture as a follow-up to one of the main theological teachings in the book of Ruth. Some groups will use this lesson after studying the book of Ruth, and others may use it as a stand-alone session. Some of you have already discovered that the story of Ruth beautifully illustrates the concept of guardian-redeemer, and now you will learn more about this concept from other passages in the Bible. In the book of Ruth the law regarding levirate marriage is merged in some ways with the responsibilities of the guardian-redeemer. For this reason, some Scriptures dealing with levirate marriage will also be covered. We will look at some Old Testament texts to gain an understanding of the rationale for these ancient laws, and we will consider how we might apply the spirit of these laws today. Even more important, we will have opportunity to study some New Testament passages pointing to Christ as the ultimate Guardian-Redeemer, and we'll see what that means for our lives today.

Optional Share Question

Describe an act of kindness that you have either heard about or experienced personally.

What Does the Bible Say?

In this lesson some group members will be learning about guardian-redeemer and levirate marriage responsibilities for the first time. Some aspects of the ancient laws cited here may be difficult for any of us to grasp, considering our 21st-century viewpoints. It will be important to allow people to react honestly. Accept their reactions, some of which may be quite negative, while reminding everyone of the situations and perspectives people had to deal with in ancient times.

The main discoveries to take away from this study will relate to the provisions that were made for people who were disadvantaged. Though the same laws may not be in place in our societies today, we can identify

some ways in which the spirit of those laws is carried on in principle. Most important, we will see how these provisions point to Christ and how we, his people, can thrive because of his protection, love, and grace.

Study Note: Hard Living in Ancient Times

As you study the Old Testament laws about guardian-redeemer responsibilities and levirate marriage in ancient Israel, try to imagine living in that culture. At that time it was very important that land remain within a family or clan and that a family's name continue. The obligation to take care of family members in need was often more challenging and risky than it is in our culture today because there were no government-sponsored safety nets for people who faced significant loss. Widows in that day were especially at risk economically and physically, so they needed protection through a household. As you look at some of the following Scriptures, imagine being someone who was impoverished in such times, and reflect on the desperate situations you could have encountered.

1. Leviticus 25:23-28

Note: Leviticus is a book of laws and ceremonies given by God to his people Israel.

a. To whom did the land belong, and what were the restrictions?

The land belonged to God, and God's people had the privilege of living in it. They had rights of possession but not ultimate ownership. They were also charged with managing the land well and keeping it in their families, clans, and tribes (see also Gen. 1:28-29; 2:15).

- **What differences do you notice between the property rights expressed here and the property rights in your culture?**

b. If someone became poor and had to sell their land, who was to buy it back?

It was very important that the land remain within families and clans as much as possible. For this reason, if land had to be sold because the owner could not afford to keep it, a family member was to act as a guardian-redeemer to purchase or buy back (redeem) the land in order to keep it in the family. Sometimes a land purchase could be advantageous for the guardian-redeemer, but often it required an amount of sacrifice, particularly if the transaction had contingencies or other

strings attached. If a considerable risk was involved, some individuals were unwilling to meet their guardian-redeemer obligations.

c. What does it mean that the people lived “as foreigners and strangers” in the land, and in what ways should we have that perspective?

- **How did God want the people to view the land?**
- **What should our perspective be with regard to the things God has given us?**

By reminding the Israelites that the land belonged to him, God was teaching them not to hold on to material blessings too tightly. This is a helpful reminder that all good gifts—such as a home or a job, material goods, family blessings, good friendships and other relationships—come from God (see James 1:17). What’s more, material blessings should be shared, and in other passages we learn that God calls his people to share with foreigners and others who may be in need—for the Israelites themselves, God said, were foreigners and slaves in Egypt. This was one way God reminded the people that he blessed them in order to be a blessing to others, even reaching out with his mercy and love to people from other nations. (See Gen. 12:2-3; Lev. 19:10, 33-34; 23:22; Num. 15:15-16; Deut. 10:12-22; 24:17-22.) God wanted the people to know that life in the promised land pointed to the full life that all people could have with him—beginning now and continuing in his presence forever (which we now understand takes place in heaven and later in the new heaven and earth). (See Isa. 2:1-5; 25:6-8; 42:6-7; 66:17-19; Luke 2:27-32; 23:42-43; John 10:10-16, 27-30; Rev. 21:1-5.)

2. Leviticus 25:47-55

What did the law say about people who sold themselves into servitude?

- **What was the obligation of a relative to be a guardian-redeemer in the case of servitude?**

The topic of servitude or slavery may bring up some negative observations from members of your group. Although slavery was never a good thing, in ancient times it was sometimes a person’s only choice if they were deep in debt and had no other way to pay. Israelites who were unable to support themselves and their family members could sell themselves into servitude, usually for just a limited time. God’s law allowed for them to be released in the Year of Jubilee (occurring every

fifty years); they could also be redeemed (bought back, ransomed) by a relative (guardian-redeemer), or, if they were able to prosper, they could redeem themselves. In fact, if any Israelite sold themselves into servitude or slavery, it would be expected that a guardian-redeemer in their family would redeem them. Again, this would often involve a financial sacrifice on the part of the guardian-redeemer.

3. Deuteronomy 25:5-10

Note: The word *levirate* comes from the Latin word *levir*, which means “husband’s brother.”

Explain the levirate law and how it worked in ancient Israel.

- **How did the practice help widows?**

If a married man died without producing an heir, his brother was required to marry the widow and try to produce an heir to preserve his brother’s name. The heir born to this relationship would be raised as the deceased brother’s son, and he would inherit the deceased brother’s property. This provision was apparently based on a long-standing tradition in the ancient Middle East, because some form of it was observed long before God included it in Israel’s law (see Gen. 38:1-11). Some group members may find the practice difficult to accept, and most would think it odd at best.

Invite group members to consider the purposes of this provision in God’s law. The main reasons had to do with providing protection for widows and preserving the family line. Polygamy was never ideal, but if a woman did not have a means of protection and support, she often had little choice but to beg or become a prostitute. The levirate arrangement provided an alternative that gave her the protection of her deceased husband’s extended family and household.

- **Why was it important to produce an heir on behalf of a brother?**

A son born to a levirate marriage would inherit what the deceased brother would have inherited, and that brother’s name would be continued.

4. Ruth 4:1-10

a. *How did Boaz act as a guardian-redeemer in contrast with the closer relative?*

- **Discuss the actions Boaz took.**
- **Why did the closer relative not fulfill his obligation?**

In the book of Ruth, we see Boaz as a man who went out of his way to do the right thing. If your group is doing this lesson as a follow-up to the Ruth study, they will already know about Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi. However, if your group is using this as a stand-alone session, you or another member of the group will need to give a brief summary of the book of Ruth. Since you have already looked at the passages dealing with guardian-redeemer and levirate marriage laws, you can discuss how Boaz fulfilled those obligations. It will be instructive to note also that Boaz recognized Ruth as someone who honored the Lord in her determination to stay with her widowed mother-in-law, Naomi, returning to Bethlehem with her, gleaning to provide food, and willingly following Naomi's instructions to seek out a guardian-redeemer (see Ruth 1:16-17; 2:2-12; 3:1-11). So both Ruth and Boaz went to unusual lengths to honor God's law, reflecting the steadfast love (*chesed*) of the Lord himself by their actions. In contrast, the closer relative, who could have become the guardian-redeemer, showed interest in buying the land but refused to redeem it when he learned that he would also be required to marry Ruth "to maintain the name of the dead with his property" (4:5).

So Boaz acted as guardian-redeemer by purchasing the land that belonged to Elimelek and his sons, Mahlon and Kilion. He also married Ruth, the Moabite widow of Mahlon, and later, when "the LORD enabled her to conceive . . . she gave birth to a son," Obed (4:13). All of this would have affected Boaz financially, but he was willing to do the right thing even though it was costly.

b. *In what ways might we act as a guardian-redeemer for someone?*

Allow group members to consider ways we can care for people who need support and/or protection. Consider some of the practical ways Boaz helped Ruth and Naomi. What are the ways he showed respect, protection, and care? What are some of the ways we can help others?

Boaz is an outstanding example of what a guardian-redeemer should be, but he is only a reflection of the ultimate Guardian-Redeemer, Jesus. When we care about others in a sacrificial way, we are reflections of God our Savior.

As you explore the following New Testament passages portraying Christ as our Redeemer, pray that members of your group will gain a new perspective on Jesus as the ultimate Guardian-Redeemer. In your discussion of these passages, remember also that the questions and comments in the leader guide provide suggestions for study but are not meant to be followed like a script. The way Jesus fulfills the role of guardian-redeemer can be expressed in many ways. As you look at the New Testament passages, be open to where the Holy Spirit may be leading members of your group in their understanding of Christ as their Redeemer.

5. 1 Peter 1:17-21

- a. *What does it mean to be redeemed in Christ?*
- b. *What are we redeemed from, and how was this accomplished?*

Redemption has to do with buying something back, and in ancient times it often involved releasing a person from debt or freeing them from servitude by paying a ransom.

As we noted earlier in this lesson, in ancient times it was fairly common for people to sell themselves into servitude or slavery (often temporarily) because they had no other way to pay a debt. If someone else redeemed (ransomed) them by paying the price for them, the debt was forgiven (see Lev. 25:35-55). In the New Testament we learn about the redemption payment that Christ gave to free us from our debt of sin. Because he paid this debt with his own life by dying in our place, our sins are forgiven.

- **What was the “empty way of life handed down . . . from . . . ancestors” (v. 18)?**
- **Why did Jesus’ sacrifice have to be without blemish or defect?**

In the Old Testament, a guardian-redeemer could pay the debt of relatives who had sold themselves into servitude or slavery (Lev. 25:47-49). When Peter, in his letter, describes the empty life of his readers’ ancestors, he is describing the slavery of living in sin (John 8:34-36; Eph.

2:1-3; 1 Pet. 1:14; 4:2-3), and he may also be referring to the slavery of trying to keep God's law perfectly, an exercise that never led to freedom or to release from the debt of sin (Rom. 3:19-31; 7:4-8:17; Gal. 3:10-14). Jesus brought us out of this slavery by his death on the cross. This was accomplished by God's accepting the perfect sacrifice of Christ's death (a sacrifice without spot or blemish), and it is affirmed through Christ's resurrection. Ephesians 1:7-8 may be a helpful reference in this discussion, because in that passage the apostle Paul indicates that our redemption, purchased through Christ's blood, provided us with forgiveness of our sins.

If you think it may be helpful for your group, ask why Peter describes Christ's blood as "precious" and what that implies. In the Ephesians passage, Paul describes the forgiveness that we experience as the "riches" of God's grace, and he states that God has "lavished" this grace on us. Explore together what these words imply about all we have received in Christ.

c. Why and how are we foreigners on this earth?

In Leviticus 25 we learned that God owned the land and that the people of Israel were responsible to take care of it and keep it within their families and clans as a sign of their inheritance as God's people. They were also to share God's love with others and to share with foreigners the abundant produce of the land God had given them, remembering that they were foreigners in Egypt and that they remained foreigners in the promised land (Lev. 25:23; Deut. 10:12-22). Peter reminds his readers that they also live as foreigners, recognizing that all good things are from God and that we should not hold too tightly to the things of this life that are perishable. In the Spirit of Christ we are willing to care for and sacrifice for others, because our "faith and hope are in God" (1 Pet. 1:21). Explore with your group how we live differently because we are foreigners. Titus 2:11-14 might be a helpful reference in this discussion.

6. Galatians 3:10-14

a. What does this passage say about our redemption in Christ?

- **What is the problem of relying on the works of the law?**
- **What is the curse of the law?**
- **What does the phrase "hung on a pole" describe (v. 13)?**

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Paul declares that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law. It may be helpful to discuss what that curse actually is. The curse of the law has to do with punishment for not keeping the law, as well as (ironically) not being able to keep the law because we are slaves to sin. This curse involves knowing that even when we want to do things that are right, we are often unable to do them (Rom. 7:15-26; Gal. 5:17). The Bible makes clear that we can never live up to the standard of God's law, no matter how hard we try (Matt. 5:17-48; Rom. 3:9-20, 23; James 2:10-11; 1 John 1:8-10).

We find freedom and new life, however, when we know that God the Father has already loved and accepted us in Christ the Son. Our curse of sin and imperfection has been transferred to Christ (Isa. 53:4-6), and we are credited with his righteousness (Rom. 3:22). The phrase "hung on a pole" describes the fact that Jesus was crucified on a cross in public view, enduring also the humiliation that would be part of that execution. What's more, Deuteronomy 21:23 points out that anyone "hung on a pole" was considered "under God's curse." Christ's death on a cross reminds us that he was cursed for our sake.

b. How is our standing before God changed through Jesus, our Redeemer?

- **What blessings do we receive?**
- **How is our status changed?**

Through Boaz, an Israelite, the blessings given to God's people through Abraham came to Ruth, a Moabite. Through Boaz and Ruth (as well as many other ancestors of Christ), the blessing of God's salvation came to all peoples through Christ. Boaz paid a price to redeem Naomi's land and to marry Ruth as their guardian-redeemer. Jesus paid the price of humanity's sin to redeem, at the cost of his own life, the lives of all who would believe in him (John 3:16).

Just as Boaz's redeeming work gave Ruth and Naomi dignity, status, and a future, so Jesus' redemption gives his followers a new standing before God as children and heirs. Just as Boaz filled Naomi's and Ruth's life with abundance, meaning, and family, so Jesus gives to all who follow him full life in the family of God, where they are enfolded in love and enabled to carry out the life-fulfilling tasks God gives them. Galatians 4:4-7 is a helpful reference that describes how our redemption in Christ makes us part

of God's family. Our Redeemer adopts us into his family, and we are no longer slaves to sin; we are God's sons and daughters.

Taking It Home

a. Discuss how Jesus is the ultimate Guardian-Redeemer.

b. How does Christ become our Guardian-Redeemer?

● **Share how you have experienced this blessing in your life.**

c. How is our life different when Christ is our Guardian-Redeemer?

Use these questions or others as you deem appropriate to review what God has done for us through Christ and how that changes the way we live. It may be helpful also to review some "big ideas" covered in this lesson.

- **How does God show loving care to the disadvantaged?**
- **How does God care for us?**
- **How do we still act like slaves to the law and slaves to sin?**
- **What does it mean to be brought into a spiritual family?**
- **What does it mean that we can be God's children?**

The Taking It Home questions may lead some members of your group to realize that they have not yet asked Christ to be their Lord and Savior. Pray that the Holy Spirit will work in their hearts and give you wisdom as you lead the closing discussion. Aim also to avoid pressuring group members who may not be ready to make a commitment; trust that the Spirit knows best and will continue working in their hearts. If you pray as a group, indicate that you would be happy to talk privately with anyone who has further questions. You may also be led, before closing in prayer, to mention that anyone who has not yet asked Christ into their heart can do so silently while you pray.

In conversation with someone who is interested, you might find it helpful to use the following statements about asking the Lord for forgiveness and salvation:

I know there are things about myself that I cannot change, no matter how hard I try. I am a slave to sin.

I believe that Jesus took on himself the punishment I deserve when he died for me on the cross and redeemed me with his precious blood.

I commit to trusting God with my life, believing that he promises to guide me as his child.

I promise with God's help to live like a foreigner in this life, knowing that full life begins now and will last forever in God's presence.

For Further Study

Genesis 1:28-29; 2:15; 12:2-3; 38:1-11

Leviticus 19:10, 33-34; 23:22; 25:35-55

Numbers 15:15-16

Deuteronomy 10:12-22; 24:17-22

Isaiah 2:1-5; 25:6-8; 42:6-7; 53:4-6; 66:17-19

Matthew 5:17-48

Luke 2:27-32; 23:42-43

John 3:16; 8:34-36; 10:10-16, 27-30

Romans 3:9-31; 7:4-8:17

Galatians 3:10-14; 4:4-7; 5:17

Ephesians 1:7-8; 2:1-3

Titus 2:11-14

James 2:10-11

1 Peter 1:14; 4:2-3

1 John 1:8-10

Revelation 21:1-5

Prayer of Commitment

Here is a prayer of commitment recognizing Jesus Christ as Savior. If you long to be in a loving relationship with Jesus, pray this prayer. If you have already committed your life to Jesus, use this prayer for renewal and praise.

Dear God, I come to you simply and honestly to confess that I have sinned, that sin is a part of who I am. And yet I know that you listen to sinners who are truthful before you. So I come with empty hands and heart, asking for forgiveness.

I confess that only through faith in Jesus Christ can I come to you. I confess my need for a Savior, and I thank you, Jesus, for dying on the cross to pay the price for my sins. Father, I ask that you forgive my sins and count me as righteous for Jesus' sake. Remove the guilt that accompanies my sin, and bring me into your presence.

Holy Spirit of God, help me to pray, and teach me to live by your Word. Faithful God, help me to serve you faithfully. Make me more like Jesus each day, and help me to share with others the good news of your great salvation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Evaluation Questionnaire

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As you complete this study, please fill out this questionnaire to help us evaluate the effectiveness of our materials. Please be candid. Thank you.

Was this a home group ___ or a church-based ___ program?

What church? _____

1. Was the study used for

___ a community evangelism group?

___ a community faith-nurture group?

___ a church Bible study group?

2. How would you rate the materials?

Study Guide: excellent very good good fair poor

Leader Guide: excellent very good good fair poor

3. What were the strengths?

4. What were the weaknesses?

5. What would you suggest to improve the material?

6. In general, what was the experience of your group?

Your name (optional) _____

Address _____