

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Megillas Rus 5784

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The megillah commences:

וַיְהִי בַיָּמֵי שָׁפֵט הַשְּׁפֹטִים וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לָחֶם יְהוּדָה לְגוֹר בְּשֵׂדֵי
מוֹאָב הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו:

“And it was in the days that the Judges judged. And it was a famine in the Land. And an important man from Beis Lechem, a Yehudi, went to go sojourn in the fields of Moav; he, his wife, and his two sons.” (Rus 1:1).

This pasuk introduces a lot of information here. What does it mean when the Torah uses “and it was.” Also, the Megillah could have commenced with “In the days of the judges.” Why did it elaborate “and it was” and when the Judges judged? Besides being written as a possible motive for Elimelech’s actions, why did the Megillah record the fact of the famine? Why did it refer to Elimelech “an important man from Beis Lechem, a Yehudi” instead of just using his name, ala Elimelech, an important man from ...?

When the Torah uses the term וַיְהִי “and it was” it is teaching that the events took place within some other time period. The Torah is linear, for the most part. However, even though it is linear, it does not always record events in chronological order. The first six major books of Na’ch (the early prophets) are written in chronological order. Rus, though, is part of kesuvim (whose books are definitely not in chronological order) so it is telling us it occurred some other time. An example is: וַיְהִי בְעֵת הַהוּא נִגְרַד יְהוּדָה מֵאֶת אָחִיו “And it was at that time that Yehuda descended from his brothers...” (Bereishis 38:1). The events of Yehuda marrying the daughter of Shua and then Tamar are recorded in betwixt the episode of Yosef being sold down to Mitzrayim and him rising from prison.

Five other times the Torah uses the term וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם “And it was in the day of.” First when the Mesopotamian world war broke out in Avram’s time. (Ibid 14:1). The second is during Shimshon’s life when his father-in-law spurned him, leading to him to wreak revenge on the Philistines. (Shoftim 15:1). Third is when Yeshayahu is recalling the time of civil war between King Achaz of Yehuda and King Pekach of Israel. (Yeshaya 7:1). Fourth is when Yermiahu recalled when Hashem gave him prophecy. (Yeremiah 1:3). And finally, it was used to commence Megillas Esther. (Esther 1:1). Each of these six times, including our Megillas Rus, uses that language to begin a very important chronical. It recorded historical changing events such as the first world war, and the prestige Avram gained in his generation; the beginning of Shimshon’s campaign of vengeance against the Pilishtim – his lifelong nemesis; a major cross-road between the Kingdoms of Yehuda and Yisroel, when King Ahaz of Yehuda decided to call upon the Assyrians to aid him against Aram and Yisroel—a precursor to the Assyrian takeover of the Kingdom of Yisroel; Yermiahu’s commencement of his prophecy of the destruction; and the Purim account. Here, too, it recounts a major historical event – the ancestry of the House of Dovid.

It is also significant that the pasuk says it was when the Judges judged and there was a famine. Sefer Shoftim is full of quells and swells. There are periods of prosperity followed by sin and periods of war with neighboring nations. During each quell a Shofet would rise to lead Bnei Yisroel out of their sinful funk and defeat the enemies and harbringer a period of peace. Such a cycle took place during the times of Shofet Gideon of Shevet Menashe. After a period of Yisroel sinning, the Midianites acted wantonly against Yisroel for seven years. (Shoftim 6:1). Seven years evokes the seven years of famine in the times of Menashe's father – Yosef. Midian was joined by Amalek and the Kedemites. (Ibid 6:3). Their damage was so great against Yisroel that they caused a great famine. (Ibid 6:4). Yisroel were left without crops and livestock because of all of these raids. (Ibid 6:5). Gideon successfully defeated them. (Ibid 8:25).

The time of Gideon was when a Judge judged. He not only was a Shofet for the people, adjudicating their civil, criminal, and religious matters. He also led them as a leader. He was judge for their enemies and he defeated them. There was a great famine then. Without crops and livestock there was nothing to eat. Ironically, it was Menashe, a later-to-be enemy of the House of Yehuda, that saved Yisroel that time.

There were one hundred and sixty years between the famine and the birth of Dovid. Boaz was Dovid's great grandfather. Rus did not seem to conceive immediately, as the pasuk says, וַיִּתֵּן ה' לָהּ הַרְיָיוֹן וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן: "And Hashem gave to her physical ability to conceive, and she had a son." (Rus 4:13). That means that Hashem aided in the process that did not take immediately. Further, Dovid was Yishai's youngest. If it took a few years for Rus to conceive, Oveid living a long life before having Yishai, and Yishai fathering Dovid when he was old, then the one hundred and sixty years are easy to conceive. This is especially true given that many biblical figures had children as they approached one hundred years old (i.e. the Avos). It was also only about six hundred and twenty years between Peretz and Dovid—just nine generations. That is an average of 70 years per generation. It is easy to digest that one hundred and sixty years passed between Boaz marrying Rus, then she having Oveid, and then Yishai and then Dovid being born.

Further, the famine was caused by Midian, Amalek, and Kedem. It was not caused by Moav. Therefore, Elimelech escaped during the famine to Moav. It also explains why a prestigious individual would leave Yisroel to Moav. It was not just the lack of food; it was also the raids and war. The raids likely focused on the wealthier lands that had good crops and livestock so it effected Elimelech more than others.

Also, Yehuda had Peretz right at a time of a famine. Given that he left his brothers after the sale of Yosef to start a family the timeline fits. He married and had three children. They had to age to adulthood to marry. The first two die and Yehuda refused Tamar *yibum* to his youngest even when he reached adulthood. She then has a child with him. That is a span of about twenty years and the famine hit Eretz Canaan twenty years after Yosef was sold. Thus, Peretz was born at the time of the famine. This famine evokes that one, showing the line of Peretz coming to fruition, despite the humble events of the births.

Have a Chag Someach!