

The Timing of Sefer [Ruth](ruth.html)

By Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben [David](fathers.html) (Greg Killian)



Our Sages [teach](teacher.html) us that [Ruth](ruth.html) and Naomi left [Moab](stages.html) on [Pesach](passover.html). The trip from [Moab](stages.html) took [two](two.html) days, and they arrived on [Nisan](feasts.html) 16. They began their travels on the Yom Tov of [Pesach](passover.html). This should not surprise us given that [redemption](redemption.html) always begins on [Pesach](passover.html) ([Passover](passover.html)). Just as our [redemption](redemption.html) [from Egypt](thebirth.html), in the [time](time.html) of Moshe, began on [Pesach](passover.html), so also did the [redemption](redemption.html) of the Bne [Israel](gen-jew.html), through [Ruth](ruth.html), begin on [Pesach](passover.html).

The following map shows that [Moab](stages.html) about sixty miles from [Bethlehem](bethlehem.html). This would be a good [two](two.html) day [journey](stages.html) for Naomi and [Ruth](ruth.html) who made the trip barefoot.



To put this [journey](stages.html) into perspective, it is instructive to examine some of the other [events](feasts.html) that began on [Passover](passover.html):

1. [Abram](avraham.html) leaves Haran.  [***Exodus***](exodus.html) ***12:40-41***, ***Genesis 12:1-10***
2. Lot and his daughters flee Sodom.  ***Genesis 19:1, 18:14***
3. [Jacob](israelja.html) and sixty-[nine](nine.html) descendants [enter Egypt](thebirth.html).  [***Exodus***](exodus.html) ***12:40-42***
4. [The Exodus](exodus.html) form Egypt begins! [***Exodus***](exodus.html) ***12:48-51***

When we look at these [events](feasts.html) we notice that the [Yaaqov](jacob.html) and his family went to [exile](galuyot.html) in Egypt because of a [famine](famine.html). In the same way, Elimelech and his family went to [exile](galuyot.html) in [Moab](stages.html) because of [famine](famine.html). The [Midrash](orallaw.html) also [connects](connection.html) these [two](two.html) [famines](famine.html):

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah -*** [***Ruth***](ruth.html) ***I:4*** *THAT THERE WAS A* [*FAMINE*](famine.html) *IN THE LAND.* [*Ten*](ten.html)[*famines*](famine.html) *have come upon the* [*world*](worlds.html)*.* [*One*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Adam*](adam.html)*,* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of Lamech,* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Abraham*](avraham.html)*,* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Isaac*](isaac.html)*,* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Jacob*](israelja.html)*,* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of Elijah,* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of Elisha,* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of* [*David*](fathers.html)*,* [*one*](one.html) *in the days when the judges judged, and* [*one*](one.html) *which is destined still to come upon the* [*world*](worlds.html)*.* [*One*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Adam*](adam.html)*, as it is said, Cursed is the ground for thy sake (Gen. III, 17);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of Lamech, as it is said, From the ground which the Lord hath cursed (ib. V, 29);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Abraham*](avraham.html)*, as it is said, And there was a* [*famine*](famine.html) *in the land; and* [*Abram*](avraham.html) *went down* [*into Egypt*](thebirth.html) *(ib. XII, 10);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Isaac*](isaac.html)*, as it is said, And there was a* [*famine*](famine.html) *in the land, beside the* [*first*](one.html)[*famine*](famine.html) *(ib. XXVI, 1);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Jacob*](israelja.html)*, as it is said, For these* [*two*](two.html) *years hath the* [*famine*](famine.html) *been in the land (ib. XLV, 6);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of Elijah, as it is said, There shall not be dew nor rain these years (I Kings XVII, 1);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of Elisha, as it is said, And there was a great* [*famine*](famine.html) *in Samaria (II Kings VI, 25);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of* [*David*](fathers.html)*, as it is said, And there was a* [*famine*](famine.html) *in the days of* [*David*](fathers.html)[*three*](three.html) *years (II Sam. XXI, 1);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of the judges, as it is said, THERE WAS A* [*FAMINE*](famine.html) *IN THE LAND; and* [*one*](one.html) *which is destined to come to the* [*world*](worlds.html)*, as it is said, That I will send a* [*famine*](famine.html) *in the land, not a* [*famine*](famine.html) *of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord (Amos VIII, 11).*

We see that this is also the [time](time.html) of the year when [Abram](avraham.html) left Ur and Lot left Sodom. This suggests that this is the [time](time.html) of the year for [new](new.html) beginnings. As the [spiritual](physical.html) [world](worlds.html) begins to bloom, so also does the [physical](physical.html) [world](worlds.html).

What [time](time.html) of year did [Yaaqov](jacob.html) and his family go [down to Egypt](thebirth.html)? The Torah tells us that they came out on the very day they went in:

***Shemot (***[***Exodus***](exodus.html)***) 12:40-41*** *Now the sojourning of the children of* [*Israel*](gen-jew.html)*, who* [*dwelt*](dwelling.html) *in Egypt, was* [*four*](four.html) *hundred and* [*thirty*](thirty.html) *years. 41 And it came to pass at the end of the* [*four*](four.html) *hundred and* [*thirty*](thirty.html) *years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *went* [*out from the land of Egypt*](thebirth.html)*.*

Since we [know](daat.html) that the [exodus](exodus.html) began on [Pesach](passover.html), we [know](daat.html) that [Yaaqov](jacob.html) and his family went to Egypt on [Pesach](passover.html).

What makes this interesting, for comparison purposes, is that Naomi and [Ruth](ruth.html) left [Moab](stages.html) on [Pesach](passover.html) and arrived in [Bethlehem](bethlehem.html) on [Nisan](feasts.html) 16. Why did they leave [Moab](stages.html) on [Nisan](feasts.html) 15? The text tells us that they left because they heard that the [famine](famine.html) was over:

[***Ruth***](ruth.html) ***1:6-7*** *Then she arose with her daughters in* [*law*](law.html)*, that she might return from the country of* [*Moab*](stages.html)*: for she had heard in the country of* [*Moab*](stages.html) *how that* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *had visited his people in giving them bread. 7 Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her* [*two*](two.html) *daughters in* [*law*](law.html) *with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.*

Why did Naomi hear at this [time](time.html) of the year? Why did [Yaaqov](jacob.html) [know](daat.html) about the [famine](famine.html) at this [time](time.html) of year?

Since the barley harvest begins on [Nisan](feasts.html) 16, by [Adar](feasts.html), we [know](daat.html) if we are having a good crop or a poor crop. That is why [Yaaqov](jacob.html) [knew](daat.html) that the [famine](famine.html) would continue. That is why Elemelech [knew](daat.html) that the [famine](famine.html) would continue, and that is why Naomi [knew](daat.html) that the [famine](famine.html) was over.

I have heard it said, by Rabbi [Yosef](joseph.html) [Gavriel](angels.html) Bechhofer, that Naomi returned from [Moab](stages.html) on the very day that they arrived in [Moab](stages.html)! This concords with what happened when [Yaaqov](jacob.html) went [down to Egypt](thebirth.html) and his descendants left Egypt on the selfsame day. It is also [sevara](rules.html), logical, that they should leave when they see the [famine](famine.html) [coming](coming.html), and return when they see the [famine](famine.html) leaving.

Our Sages [teach](teacher.html) us that [Ruth](ruth.html) and Naomi arrived in [Beit Lechem](bethlehem.html) in [Nisan](feasts.html) 16, when the [Omer](omer.html) is reaped. This is the [first](one.html) day of a [forty](forty.html)-[nine](nine.html) day period [known](daat.html) as [Sefirat HaOmer](omer.html), the counting of the [omer](omer.html).

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah -*** [***Ruth***](ruth.html) ***III:6*** *SO THEY* [*TWO*](two.html) *WENT (*[*Ruth*](ruth.html) *1:19). R. Samuel b. Simon said: That day was the day of the reaping of the* [*Omer*](omer.html)*, as we have learnt elsewhere: All the towns near by assembled together that it might be reaped with great ceremony.*

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah -*** [***Ruth***](ruth.html) ***IV:2*** *SO NAOMI RETURNED, AND* [*RUTH*](ruth.html) *THE MOABITESS HER DAUGHTER-IN-* [*LAW*](law.html) *WITH HER, WHO RETURNED OUT OF THE* [*FIELD*](field.html) *OF* [*MOAB*](stages.html) *(*[*Ruth*](ruth.html) *1:22). [People pointed to her saying] ‘This is the* [*one*](one.html) *who returned from the* [*field*](field.html) *of* [*Moab*](stages.html)*!’ AND THEY CAME TO* [*BETHLEHEM*](bethlehem.html) *IN THE BEGINNtNG OF THE BARLEY- HARVEST (ib.). R. Samuel b. Nahman said: Wherever the words barley-harvest occur in Scripture, they refer to the harvest of the* [*Omer*](omer.html)*. Wherever the words wheat- harvest occur, it refers to the* [*Two*](two.html) *Loaves.[[1]](#footnote-1) If it states simply harvest it may be applied to both.*

Finally, the intimate scene between Boaz and [Ruth](ruth.html) on the [threshing floor](temple.html), in Megillat [Ruth](ruth.html) chapter [three](three.html), takes place on [Shavuot](shavuot.html) (the [Feast of Weeks](shavuot.html)). On this same day Boaz [marries](marriageact.html) [Ruth](ruth.html). What makes this so interesting is that on [Shavuot](shavuot.html) we [know](daat.html) that [Israel](gen-jew.html) was [betrothed](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CShavuot%5Cbetroth.html) to [HaShem](hashem.html). This is the day of the ultimate [betrothal](betroth.html).

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah -*** [***Ruth***](ruth.html) ***VII:2*** *AND HE SAID: BRING THE MANTLE THAT IS UPON THEE (ib. 15). BRING (HABI) is written habah,* [*teaching*](teacher.html) *that he addressed her in the masculine, that none should notice her. AND HOLD IT.* [*teaches*](teacher.html) *that she girded her loins like a man. AND HE MEASURED* [*SIX*](six.html) *MEASURES OF BARLEY, AND LAID IT ON HER. R. Simon said: Bar Kappara expounded in Sepphoris: Is it then the custom of a king to* [*betroth*](betroth.html) *a wife with* [*six*](six.html) *grains of barley? Or is it the custom of a woman to be betrothed with* [*six*](six.html) *se'ah of barley?[[2]](#footnote-2)*

In many Sephardic congregations, prior to the Torah reading on the [first](one.html) day of [Shavuot](shavuot.html) a *ketubah le-*[*Shavuot*](shavuot.html) ([marriage](mashal.html) certificate for [Shavuot](shavuot.html)) is read as a symbolic [betrothal](betroth.html) of [HaShem](hashem.html) and His people [Israel](gen-jew.html). There are various versions of such *piyyutim* (religious poems), nearly all similar in terminology to the traditional *t'naim* [literally "conditions"] the premarital document specifying the conditions agreed upon between the [two](two.html) parties) or the ketubah (certificate the bridegroom presents to the bride at the [wedding](wedding.html) ceremony).

**\* \* \***

This [study](study.html) was written by

Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben [David](fathers.html)

(Greg Killian).

Comments may be submitted to:

Rabbi Dr. Greg Killian

12210 Luckey Summit

San Antonio, TX 78252

Internet address: gkilli@aol.com

Web page: <http://www.betemunah.org/>

(360) 918-2905

Return to [The WATCHMAN](http://www.betemunah.org) home page

Send comments to Greg Killian at his email address: gkilli@aol.com

1. The two loaves which were waved on Shavuot. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Scriptural text reads literally: And he measured six barleys. Bar Kappara holds that he gave her this in order to betroth her, and therefore observes: If it means literally six grains of barley, ‘surely a king (i.e. Boaz, who was a chief) would not betroth a woman with six grains of barley.’ If it means six measures (as E.V.), then the ordinary unit of measure was a se'ah, but six se'ah was a very heavy load. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)