

SHAVU'OS AND MEGILLAS RUS

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

The Megilla of Rus (Ruth) is read on the holiday of Shavu'os. The author of the Megilla, our sages tell us, was Shmuel HaNavi, the prophet Samuel. There are many commentators who have given reasons explaining the connection between Shavu'os and Megillas Rus. (For some reasons, see vol. I, 26.) However, an answer to a question posed in the Medrash gives us a particularly important understanding of the connection between Shavu'os and Megillas Rus. In the Medrash Rabbah on Rus (2:14), we find the following question: Rav Zaeira said 'This Megilla (of Rus) does not tell of the laws of purity and impurity...Why was it written?' The question, however, does not have to end here. We can question further. Even once we know a reason for why it was written, why was it necessary to include it among the Scriptures?

In order to understand the answers, a little background about an issue of Halacha that was of concern at the time of Rus is needed. Generally, according to Halacha, gentiles are allowed to join the nation of Israel through conversion. However, there are certain nations that the Torah explicitly lists whose members may not join the nation of Israel. The Torah states "Lo yavo Amoni U'Moavi b'kahal Hashem," "An Ammonite or a Moavite shall not enter into the assembly of G-d." As Rus was from the nation of Moav, how could it happen that not only was she permitted to convert, but she also married one of the most respected, distinguished, and wisest men of her generation, Boaz ?

The answer lies in the verse cited above. The verse says that a "Moavi," a male Moavite, can not enter into the nation of Israel. However, the verse does not say that a "Moavis," a female Moavite, can not enter into the nation of Israel. Boaz understood that the law was a female Moavite was indeed allowed to convert, and therefore Rus' conversion and marriage to a Jew presented no problems. This Halachik ruling about the status of a female Moavis, however, was not widely known amongst the nation of Israel. Many thought that no person, male or female, from the nation of Moav was allowed to convert to Judaism. This understanding of the law not only presented problems in the time of Rus, but also in the time of King David, Rus' great-grandson. In the time immediately proceeding the crowning of David as king and right afterwards, there were those who began to publicly raise doubts as to whether David was of proper, "kosher," lineage, because of his great-grandmother Rus.

Shmuel HaNavi, the author of the Megillas Rus, was the one who anointed David and proclaimed him king. Shmuel saw first hand how weak the knowledge of the nation of Israel was regarding the laws surrounding the conversion of Moavite women. Therefore, Shmuel decided he had to educate

the masses in this area. It could even be that Shmuel felt he was obligated to do such, because he was the one who anointed David as king over the nation of Israel. Therefore, he was the one who had to "defend" what he had done and publicize the fact that David was of proper lineage, according to Jewish law, and more than fit to be king of Israel. The Megilla of Rus accomplished this task. It cleared the air of any doubts as to the lineage of David, from who Moshiach, the Messiah, will descend. It proclaims that a Moavite woman, like Rus, may join the nation of Israel.

It is because of the importance of the underlying message of Rus that not only was it included in Scriptures, but it is read on Shavu'os on well. When Boaz married Rus, there were those that were amazed - the Torah says that a Moavite cannot enter the nation of Israel! Boaz, a leader of the generation, is blatantly violating a law of the Torah! When we read the Megilla, we could ask the same questions, and add to them: How could Moshiach, who will come to redeem the entire nation of Israel, come from such blemished lineage, from a union prohibited by the Torah? The answer is that there are two components of the Torah that was given to us on Sinai by G-d: The Written Torah, and the Oral Torah. It is true that the Written Torah seems to say that Rus' conversion and marriage was forbidden. However, the Oral Torah clarifies the issue for us. It lets us know that the verse only forbade male Moavites from converting. The Oral Torah contains the laws of the Torah and their explanations. Both the Oral and Written Torah were given to the nation of Israel at Sinai. Both need to be followed.

The Megilla of Rus stands for the proposition that the Oral Law was given to us at Sinai, and that the Oral and Written Torah are truly one intertwined gift from G-d. Boaz acted properly based on that which he knew from his study of the Oral Torah. His willingness to act on that which he knew to be the law should send us a message: we must show that we truly believe in the Oral Torah, that we recognize that the Oral Torah was given to us at Sinai. Because of the importance of this message, the Megilla was included in Scriptures. This message also makes the reading of the Megilla on Shavu'os appropriate. On Shavu'os, the day on which we celebrate the fact that we were given the Torah, we demonstrate our belief that the Written and Oral Torah were both given to us on this day by reading the Megilla. By reading the Megilla, we reaffirm our belief in the authenticity of the Oral Torah. On Shavu'os, we affirm and celebrate our acceptance of the Torah, and therefore the Megilla, which tells of this affirmation, is read on Shavu'os. (from Hegyonai Halacha)

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