

RUTH

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF RUTH

This book is called Ruth, not because she was the author of it, but because she is the principal subject of it. In the Syriac and Arabic versions, it is called the Book of Ruth the Moabitess, which describes her by the country of which she was. Her name, according to Hillerus ^{f1}, signifies beautiful, of a good aspect, the same with Calliope in Greek. As to the author of this book, some attribute it to Eli the priest, who seems to have been too soon to give an account of the birth of David; others to Gad or Nathan; some to Hezekiah, and others to Ezra; but what the Talmudists assert, which is most generally received, and most probable, is, that it was written by Samuel; so they say Samuel ^{f2} wrote his own book, Judges, and Ruth; and it is commonly said that this book is an appendix to that of the Judges, and the introduction to Samuel, and is fitly placed between them both. According to Eusebius ^{f3}, with the Hebrews, Judges and Ruth make one book they call Shophetim, or Judges; the principal design of it is to give the genealogy of David, whom Samuel had anointed to be king of Israel, and from whom the Messiah was to come, and who therefore may be said to be the aim and scope of it, as he is of all Scripture; and whereby it appears that he sprung both from Jews and Gentiles, and is the Saviour of both, and there is a good foundation for both to hope in him; and the call and conversion of Ruth the Moabitess may be considered as a shadow, emblem, and pledge of the conversion of the Gentiles. Many things besides may be learnt from this little book, as the different circumstances of good people in this life, and the particular providence of God respecting them. It furnishes out examples of bearing afflictions patiently, of industry, courteousness, kindness to strangers, and young converts; and none can doubt of the divine authority of this book, that considers the use made of it in the genealogies of Christ by the Evangelists Matthew and Luke.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO RUTH 1

This chapter treats of a family that removed from the land of Canaan to the land of Moab on account of a famine, where the father of it and his two sons died, and each of them left a widow, (^{<R001>}Ruth 1:1-5) the mother-in-law proposed to return to her own country, and set forward with her two daughters-in-law, whom, when they had gone a little way with her, she entreated to go back, and expostulated with them about it, (^{<R006>}Ruth 1:6-13), upon which one of them did, but the other, Ruth, the subject of this book, resolved to go the journey with her, (^{<R014>}Ruth 1:14-18) and they both came to Bethlehem, the former residence of her mother-in-law Naomi, who was greatly taken notice of by her old friends and acquaintance, to whom she related her present circumstances, (^{<R019>}Ruth 1:19-22).

Ver. 1. *Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled*, etc.] So that it appears that this history is of time and things after the affair of Micah, and of the concubine of the Levite, and of the war between Israel and Benjamin; for in those times there was no king nor judge in Israel; but to what time of the judges, and which government of theirs it belongs to, is not agreed on. Josephus ^{f4} places it in the government of Eli, but that is too late for Boaz, the grandfather of Jesse, the father of David, to live. Some Jewish writers, as Jarchi, say it was in the times of Ibzan, who they say ^{f5} is the same with Boaz, but without proof, and which times are too late also for this history. The Jewish chronology ^{f6} comes nearer the truth, which carries it up as high as the times of Eglon, king of Moab, when Ehud was judge; and with which Dr. Lightfoot ^{f7} pretty much agrees, who puts this history between the third and fourth chapters of Judges, and so must belong to the times of Ehud or Shamgar. Junius refers it to the times of Deborah and Barak; and others ^{f8}, on account of the famine, think it began in the times the Midianites oppressed Israel, and carried off the fruits of the earth, which caused it, when Gideon was raised up to be their judge; Alting ^{f9} places it in the time of Jephthah; such is the uncertainty about the time referred to:

that there was a famine in the land; the land of Canaan, that very fruitful country. The Targum says this was the sixth famine that had been in the world, and it was in the days of Boaz, who is called Ibzan the just, and who was of Bethlehemjudah; but it is more probable that it was in the days of Gideon, as before observed, than in the days of Ibzan

and a certain man of Bethlehemjudah; so called to distinguish it from another Bethlehem in the tribe of Zebulun, (^{<4895>}Joshua 19:15) which had its name from the fruitfulness of the place, and the plenty of bread in it, and yet the famine was here; hence this man with his family removed from it:

and went to sojourn in the country of Moab; where there was plenty; not to dwell there, but to sojourn for a time, until the famine was over:

he and his wife, and his two sons; the names of each of them are next given.

Ver. 2. *And the name of the man was Elimelech*, etc.] Which signifies “my God is King”, as he was King over Israel. In the times of the judges, the government was a theocracy; the judges were raised up immediately by the Lord, and ruled under him; the Targum calls him a great man, and so Jarchi; and it is very likely he was, especially if it be true what is said the Jewish chronology ^{f10}, that he was the brother of Salmon, prince of the tribe of Judah; and it is certain that Boaz the son of Salmon was a kinsman of his, (^{<8811>}Ruth 2:1),

and the name of his wife Naomi; which signifies “sweet, pleasant”, very likely a comely person, and of a sweet disposition; a name of the same signification with Naamah, the sister of Tubalcain, (^{<0042>}Genesis 4:22) and according to the Talmudists she was Elimelech’s brother’s daughter; for they say ^{f11}, that Elimelech, Salmon, and the kinsman (spoken of in this book), and the father of Naomi, were all of them the sons of Nahshon, prince of the tribe of Judah; the same Jarchi observes on (^{<8812>}Ruth 1:22)

and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion; which seem to have their names from weakness and consumption, being perhaps weakly and consumptive persons; and it appears they both died young. It is a tradition of the Jews, mentioned by Aben Ezra, that these are the same with Joash and Saraph, who are said to have dominion in Moab, (^{<1342>}1 Chronicles 4:22) which is not likely:

Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah: Jarchi interprets Ephrathites by men of worth and esteem; and the Targum is,

“Ephrathites, great men of Bethlehemjudah”

but no doubt they were called so, because Ephratah was one of the names of Bethlehem, (^{Q159}Genesis 35:19 ^{Q180}Micah 5:2) so called from its fruitfulness; though Aben Ezra thinks it had its name from Ephratah the wife of Caleb; but it was so called in the time of Moses, as in the passage referred to:

and they came into the country of Moab, and continued there; unto their death; all excepting Naomi, who returned when she heard the famine was over.

Ver. 3. *And Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died*, etc.] According to Josephus^{f12}, after he had dwelt in the land ten years, and had married his two sons to Moabitish women; but, as Alshech observes, the text shows that while he was living they were not married to them, but after his death; and it is said of them only that they dwelt there about ten years; so that it is most probable that their father died quickly after he came into the land of Moab: and she was left, and her two sons; in a strange land, she without a husband, and they without a father.

Ver. 4. *And they took them wives of the women of Moab*, etc.] Not before they were proselyted to the Jewish religion, as Aben Ezra thinks, and which seems plainly to be the case of Ruth; at least she was so afterwards, if not before; and also of Orpah, as the same writer concludes from (^{Q015}Ruth 1:15) though others are of a different opinion, and some excuse their marriage, and others condemn it as unlawful, among whom is the Targumist, who paraphrases the words,

“and they transgressed the decree of the Word of the Lord, and took to them strange wives of the daughters of Moab;”

however it was so permitted by the Lord, and ordered in Providence, that from one of them the Messiah might spring:

and the name of the one was Orpah; she was married to Chilion; and Alshech gathers from hence that the youngest was married first before his brother:

and the name of the other Ruth the Targum adds,

“the daughter of Eglon, king of Moab;”

and that she was his daughter, or the daughter of his son, is a notion commonly received with the Jews ^{f13} though without any just foundation; she was married to Mahlon, (~~ORHO~~Ruth 4:10), one Philo ^{f14} asserts these two women to be own sisters, for what reason does not appear; and a Jewish writer ^{f15} says they were both daughters of Eglon, king of Moab: and they dwelt there about ten years; that is, Mahlon and Chilion, who married these women; which is to be reckoned either from the time they came into the land, or from the time of their marriage; the latter seems to be the case from the connection of the words.

Ver. 5. *And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them,* etc.] As well as their father, in the land of Moab, after they had lived with their wives in it about ten years; the Targum is,

“because they transgressed the decree of the Word of the Lord, and joined in affinity with strange people, their days were cut off;”

or shortened:

and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband; deprived both of her husband and her sons, which was a great affliction, aggravated by her being in a strange country; many are the afflictions of the righteous.

Ver. 6. *Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab,* etc.] After the death of her two sons, and having heard of the ceasing of the famine in Israel, she had a desire to go into her own country, where she would have better opportunities of serving the Lord; and having no heart to stay in Moab, an idolatrous country, where she had lost her husband, and her two sons; and therefore prepared for her journey, and set forward, and her two daughters-in-law with her, to accompany her some part of the way; for it does not appear to be their intention, at least at first setting out, to go with her into the land of Canaan; and therefore it is only said, that they arose

that she might return, etc.

for she had heard in the country of Moab: which was near the land of Israel, the borders of it reaching to the salt sea; the Targum says she heard it by the mouth of an angel, but it is highly probable it was by common fame:

that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread; that he had been kind and gracious to the people of Israel, by granting them plenty of provisions; which might be their happy case after Gideon had vanquished the Midianites, who came yearly, and destroyed and carried off the fruits of the earth, which had caused a famine; (see ^{<0708>}Judges 6:3-6 8:28). It seems as if the famine had continued ten years, (see ^{<0804>}Ruth 1:4) nor need this be thought incredible, since there was a famine in Lydia, which lasted eighteen years ^{f16}.

Ver. 7. *Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was*, etc.] What part of Moab she had dwelt in, and now removed from, is not said; it is called the country or field of Moab, she returned from; hence some have thought, that she and her husband, and her sons, did not live in any of the cities of Moab, but in a field; either because the Moabites would not suffer them to dwell in their cities, only allowed them to pitch their tents in their fields; or they chose to dwell there, that they might as much as possible avoid conversation with them, and be preserved from their idolatry, and other corruptions:

and her two daughters in law with her; who, out of respect to her, accompanied her some part of the way, as relations and friends usually did:

and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah; they went along with her to the border of the land of Judah, in her return thither; for returning can only be said of her with any propriety, because her two daughters had never been there; that was not the country from whence they came, and therefore could not be said to return thither.

Ver. 8. *And Naomi said to her two daughters in law*, etc.] When they were come, as it is very probable, to the utmost limits of the land of Moab, and to the borders of the land of Israel:

go, return each unto her mother's house: the mother's house is mentioned, and not the father's, not because they had no father living; for it is certain Ruth had a father as well as a mother, (^{<0811>}Ruth 2:11) but because mothers are most affectionate to their daughters, and they most conversant together; and because women in those times had apartments to themselves, and who used to take their daughters to them when become widows; though such was the strong love of those young widows to their mother-in-law, that they chose rather to dwell with her, while she lived in Moab, than with their own mothers:

the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me; that is, with their husbands, who were dead; as the Targum is, that they refused to marry men after their death; or rather it respects their affectionate care of their husbands, and behaviour towards them when living, as well as the respect they showed to their memory, at and since their death; and also their filial duty to her, both before and since; and particularly, as the Targum expresses it, in that they had fed and supported her.

Ver. 9. *The Lord grant you,* etc.] Some make a supplement here, the Targum a perfect reward, Aben Ezra an husband; and so Josephus says ^{f17}, she wished them happier marriages than they had with her sons, who were so soon taken from them; but a supplement seems needless, for what follows is connected with the wish, and contains the sum of it:

that you may find rest; each of you:

in the house of her husband; that is, that they might each of them be blessed with a good husband, with whom they might live free from brawls and contentions, as well as from the distressing cares of life, having husbands to provide all things necessary for them, and so from all the sorrows and distresses of a widowhood estate:

then she kissed them; in token of her affection for them, and in order to part with them; it being usual then as now for relations and friends to kiss at parting:

and they lifted up their voice and wept; to think they must part, and never see one another more; their passions worked vehemently, and broke out in sobs, and sighs, and tears, and loud crying.

Ver. 10. *And they said unto her,* etc.] When they had eased themselves in cries and tears, and had recovered their speech:

surely we will return with thee unto thy people; to be proselyted, as the Targum; not only to dwell with them, but to worship with them.

Ver. 11. *And Naomi said, turn again, my daughters,* etc.] Supposing this resolution of theirs only arose from a natural affection, and not from any love to the God or people of Israel; at least doubting whether it was so or not, and willing to try whether anyone, or both of them, were really from a principle of religion inclined to go with her; and desirous that they would

thoroughly consider what they did, lest they should repent and apostatize, and bring a reproach upon the true religion:

why will ye go with me? what reason can you give? this she said in order to get out of them if there was any real inclination in them to the true worship and service of God; though she keeps out that from her own questions put to them as follows, that it might come purely from themselves:

are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?

is there any likelihood that I should ever have any sons to be instead of husbands, or really husbands to you? can it be thought that at my age, supposing I had an husband, or an husband's brother to marry me, that there is in me a natural power of conceiving and bearing children? this therefore can surely be no inducement to you to go along with me; for some, as Jarchi, think she refers to the law of a husband's brother marrying his widow, and raising up seed to him, which was known among the Gentiles before it was given to Israel; (see ^{<OR>}Genesis 38:8 ^{<ET>}Deuteronomy 25:5), to which Aben Ezra rightly objects, that that law respects a brother by the father's side, and not by the mother's only; to which may be added, that this law was not binding on a brother unborn, but on one that was living before the death of his brother; besides if this law had been in her mind, it would rather have furnished out an encouraging reason them to go with her, since there were kinsmen of her sons, to whom they might be married, as one of them afterwards was.

Ver. 12. *Turn again, my daughters, go your way,* etc.] This she repeated still to try their affections to her, and especially whether there was any real love to the God of Israel, his people, and worship, but still proceeds upon the same topic:

for I am too old to have an husband; and can never think of marrying again on account of age, nor can you surely ever think I should, at these years I am now arrived to:

if I should say I have hope; of marrying, and bearing children; suppose that:

if I should have a husband also tonight; be married to a man directly, suppose that:

and should also bear sons; conceive and bear, not female but male children, allow that; all which are mere suppositions, and, could they be

admitted, would not furnish out any reason why you should be desirous of going with me.

Ver. 13. *Would you tarry for them till they were grown?* etc.] It is not to be thought that they would tarry till she was married and had children, and then till these infants were grown up to men's estate, and be marriageable; for though Tamar tarried for Shelah, yet he was born, and of some years of age, though not a grown man, (^{GEN}Genesis 38:11,14)

would ye stay for them from having husbands? they were young widows, and it was fit they should marry again; and it could not be imagined that they would deny themselves having husbands, in expectation of any sons of hers:

nay, my daughters; I am well satisfied you will never tarry for them, nor deprive yourselves of such a benefit; it is unreasonable to suppose it:

for it grieveth me much for your sakes; that she could be of no manner of service to them, either to give them husbands, or to support and maintain them, should they go with her; or "I have exceedingly more bitterness than you"^{f18}; her condition and circumstances were much worse than theirs; for though they had lost their husbands, she had lost both husband and children: or it was more bitter and grievous to her to be separated from them, than it was for them to be separated from her; her affection to them was as strong, or stronger than theirs to her; or they had friends in their own country that would be kind to them, but as for her, she was in deep poverty and distress, and when she came into her own country, knew not that she had any friends left to take any notice of her:

that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me; in taking away her husband and children, and reducing her to a low estate, penniless and friendless; so poor, as it appears, that her daughter-in-law, when come to the land of Canaan, was obliged to glean for the livelihood of them both, as in the next chapter.

Ver. 14. *And they lifted up their voice, and wept again,* etc.] Not being able to bear the thought of parting, or that they must be obliged to it:

and Orpah kissed her mother in law; gave her the parting kiss, as the Jews^{f19} call it; and which was used by other people^{f20}; but not without affection to her, and took her leave of her, as her kiss testified, since it must be so; and being moved by her reasons, and having a greater inclination to her

own country than Ruth had; of the kiss at parting, (see ^{<0128>}Genesis 31:28 ^{<1193>}1 Kings 19:20)

but Ruth clave unto her; hung about her, would not part from her, but cleaved unto her in body and mind; forsaking her own people, and her father's house; neither the thought of them, nor of her native country, nor of not having an husband, or any likelihood of it, nor of poverty and distress, had any manner of influence upon her, but determined she was to go and abide with her.

Ver. 15. *And she said*, etc.] That is, Naomi to Ruth, after Orpah was gone:

behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods; meaning Orpah, who was the wife of her husband's brother, as the word used signifies; she was not only on the road turning back to her own country and people, but to the gods thereof, Baalpeor or Priapus, and Chemosh, (^{<0123>}Numbers 21:29 25:3) from whence Aben Ezra concludes, that she had been a proselyte to the true religion, and had renounced the gods of her nation, and retained the same profession while her husband lived, and unto this time, and now apostatized, since she is said to go back to her gods; and in this he is followed by some Christian interpreters ^{f21}, and not without reason:

return thou after thy sister in law: this she said, not that in good earnest she desired her to return, at least to her former religion, only relates, though not as approving of, the conduct of her sister, rather as upbraiding it; but to try her sincerity and steadfastness, when such an instance and example was before her.

Ver. 16. *And Ruth said, entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee*, etc.] Do not make use of any arguments to persuade me to go back: or "do not meet me", or "be against me" ^{f22}; do not meet me with objections, or be in my way, or an hinderance to me, in going along with thee; do not be against it, for to be against that was to be against her inclination, desires, and resolutions, and against her interest:

for whither thou goest I will go: let the country she was going to be what it would, though unknown to her, and though she should never see her own country any more:

and where thou lodgest I will lodge; though in ever so mean a cottage, or under the open air:

thy people shall be my people; whom I shall choose to dwell among, and converse with; whose religion, laws, and customs she should readily comply with, having heard much of them, their wisdom, goodness, and piety, of which she had a specimen and an example in Naomi, and by whom she judged of the rest:

and thy God my God; not Chemosh, nor Baalpeor, nor other gods of the Moabites, be they what they will, but Jehovah, the God of Naomi, and of the people of Israel. So a soul that is truly brought to Christ affectionately loves him, and heartily cleaves unto him, resolves in the strength of divine grace to follow him, the Lamb, whithersoever he goes or directs; and is desirous to have communion with none but him, and that he also would not be as a wayfaring man, that tarries but a night; his people are the excellent of the earth, whom to converse with is all his delight and pleasure; and Christ's God is his God, and his Father is his Father: and, in a word, he determines to have no other Saviour but him, and to walk in all his commands and ordinances.

Ver. 17. *Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried*, etc.] She was determined to abide with her unto death, and not only was desirous to die as she did, but where she should die; in the same country, cottage, and bed, and be laid in the same grave, in hope of rising together at the resurrection of the just; having no regard at all to the sepulchres of her fathers, which people in all ages and countries have been fond of being laid in, as an honour and happiness. So with the Greeks and Romans, not only relations, but intimate friends, and such as had a strong affection for each other, were sometimes buried in the same grave, as Crates and Polemon ^{f23}, Paris and Oenome ^{f24}, and others ^{f25}; (see ~~8020~~ Galatians 2:20 ~~5022~~ Colossians 2:12 3:1),

the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me; this is the form of oath she used for confirmation of what she had said, and to put an end to the debate on this subject; what she imprecates upon herself is not expressed, should she otherwise do than what she swears to; leaving Naomi to supply it in her own mind, and as being what was not fit to be named, and the greatest evil that could be thought to befall a perjured person.

Ver. 18. *When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her*, etc.] That she was strong in her resolutions, and steadfast in her determinations not to go back to her own country, but to go forward with

her; and nothing could move her from the firm purpose of her mind, which was what Naomi wanted to make trial of:

then she left speaking unto her: that is, upon that head of returning home; otherwise, no doubt, upon this a close, comfortable, religious conversation ensued, which made their journey the more pleasant and agreeable.

Ver. 19. *So they two went until they came to Bethlehem*, etc.] Went on their way directly till they came to it, without lingering or staying by the way, at least not unnecessarily, and not for any time; and they kept together, though Ruth was a younger woman, and could have gone faster, yet she kept company with her ancient mother, and was no doubt very much edified and instructed by her pious conversation; and it seems that they were alone, only they two; for as they had no camels nor asses to ride on, but were obliged to travel on foot, so they had no servants to wait upon them, and assist them in their journey, such were their mean circumstances:

and it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem; had entered the city, and were seen by some that formerly had known Naomi, or at least to whom she made herself known:

that all the city was moved about them; the news of their arrival was soon spread throughout the place, and the whole city rang of it; so the Septuagint version, “all the city sounded”; it was all the talk every where, it was in everybody’s mouth, that Naomi, who had been so long out of the land, and thought to be dead, and it was not expected she would never return again, was now come; and this drew a great concourse of people in a tumultuous manner, as the word signifies, to see her; and as it may denote a corporeal motion of them, so the inward moving and working of their passions about her; some having pity and compassion on her to see such a change in her person and circumstances; others treating her with scorn and contempt, and upbraiding her for leaving her native place, and not content to share the common affliction of her people, intimating that she was rightly treated for going out of the land at such a time into a strange country; and others were glad to see their old neighbour again, who had always behaved well among them; so the Syriac and Arabic versions, “all the city rejoiced”; many no doubt knew her not, and would be asking questions about her, and others answering them, which is commonly the case of a crowd of people on such an occasion:

and they said, is this Naomi? that is, the women of the place said so, for the word is feminine; and perhaps they were chiefly women that gathered about her, and put this question in a way of admiration; is this Naomi that was so beautiful, and used to look so pleasant and comely, and now so wrinkled and sorrowful, who used to dress so well, and now in so mean an habit! that used to be attended with maidens to wait on her, and now alone! for, as Aben Ezra observes, this shows that Elimelech and Naomi were great personages in Bethlehem formerly, people of rank and figure, or otherwise there would not have been such a concourse of people upon her coming, and such inquiries made and questions put, had she been formerly a poor woman.

Ver. 20. *And she said, call me not Naomi, call me Mara*, etc.] The one signifying “prosperity”, according to Josephus ^{f26}, and the other “grief”; but he is not always correct in his interpretation of Hebrew words, or to be depended on; by this indeed her different states are well enough expressed, and he rightly observes, that she might more justly be called the one than the other; but the words signify, the one “sweet” and pleasant, and the other “bitter”, (see ^{<0253>}Exodus 15:23), and the reason she gives confirms it:

for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me; had wrote bitter things against her, brought bitter afflictions on her, which were very disagreeable to the flesh, as the loss of her husband, her children, and her substance; (see Lam 3:15,19).

Ver. 21. *I went out full*, etc.] Of my husband and children, as the Targum; of children and riches, as Aben Ezra and Jarchi; wherefore some Jewish writers blame her and her husband for going abroad at such a time, and ascribe it to a covetous disposition, and an unwillingness to relieve the poor that came to them in their distress, and therefore got out of the way of them, on account of which they were punished, so Jarchi on (^{<000>}Ruth 1:1), (see ^{<0025>}Judges 2:15) but this is said without any just cause or reason that appears:

and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: deprived of her husband, children, and substance; she acknowledges the hand of God in it, and seems not to murmur at it, but to submit to it quietly, and bear it patiently:

why then call ye me Naomi; when there is nothing pleasant and agreeable in me, nor in my circumstances:

seeing the Almighty hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? had bore witness that that was not a name suitable for her; or that she had sinned, and had not done what was well pleasing in his sight, as appeared by his afflicting her; she seemed therefore to be humbled under a sense of sin, and to consider afflictions as coming from the Lord on account of it, and submitted to his sovereign will; the affliction she means was the loss of her husband, children, and substance; (see ^{<18107>}Job 10:17 16:8).

Ver. 22. *So Naomi returned*, etc.] Aben, Ezra thinks this is to be understood of her returning at another time; but it is only an observation of the writer of this history, to excite the attention of the reader to this remarkable event, and particularly to what follows:

and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter in law with her, which returned out of the country of Moab; to Bethlehem, the birth place of the Messiah, and who was to spring from her a Gentile; and which, that it might be the more carefully remarked, she is called a Moabitess, and said to return out of the country of Moab:

and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest; which began on the second day of the feast of unleavened bread, on the “sixteenth” of Nisan, which answers to our March, and part of April, when they offered the sheaf of the firstfruits to the Lord, and then, and not till then, might they begin their harvest, (see Gill on “^{<18230>}Leviticus 23:10”), (see Gill on “^{<18234>}Leviticus 23:14”): hence the Targum here is,

“they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the day of the passover, and on that day the children of Israel began to reap the wave sheaf, which was of barley.”

So the Egyptians and Phoenicians, near neighbours of the Jews, went about cutting down their barley as soon as the cuckoo was heard, which was the same time of the year; hence the comedian ^{f27} calls that bird the king of Egypt and Phoenicia. This circumstance is observed for the sake of the following account in the next chapter.