

Sukkot And The Wisdom Of Ecclesiastes

"A season is set for everything - a time for every experience under heaven - a time to be born, and a time to die; a time for planting, and a time for harvesting; a time for slaying, and a time for healing; a time for tearing down, and a time for building up; a time for weeping, and a time for laughing; a time for wailing, and a time for dancing; a time for throwing stones, and a time for gathering stones; a time for embracing, and a time for shunning embraces; a time for seeking, and a time for losing; a time for keeping, and a time for discarding; a time for ripping, and a time for sewing; a time for silence, and a time for speaking; a time for loving, and a time for hating; a time for war, and a time for peace."

The Essence of Life

These well known verses from the third chapter of Ecclesiastes are read on the Shabbat during the holiday of Sukkot, which this year will fall on October 13. One of the most profound books of the Bible, it has been studied for centuries as the classic statement of what the essence of life really is by someone who has experienced it.

Rabbinic tradition indicates that King Solomon, the wisest of all men, authored three Biblical works. As a young man he wrote the immortal love poetry of the Song of Songs. In his middle years he penned the Proverbs, practical advice for living one's life, and as an old man with vast experience, he wrote Ecclesiastes. After all he had seen, there is nothing "new under the sun," he said.

Harvest

The festival of Sukkot was chosen as the time for reading Ecclesiastes because it was harvest time, the conclusion of the sunny season when produce was reaped before the heavy rains and winter set in. As such, Sukkot was a time of great festivity, highlighted, in particular, by the water-drawing ceremony. There was a feeling that a sobering element had to be introduced into the Holiday and the reading of Ecclesiastes was

selected to provide this tone.

The Book of Ecclesiastes is one of the five scrolls found in 'Ktuvim' - The Sacred Writings of the Bible. Among these scrolls which are read for different holidays, Ecclesiastes is the longest and the most quoted. The lines cited above were the favorite of the American President John F. Kennedy and he used them on many occasions.

For the great Jewish philosopher Moshe Maimonides, Ecclesiastes was a most seminal work, and he quoted from it fifty-three times in his Commentary to the Mishna, Mishneh Torah and Guide of the Perplexed. Other medieval Jewish philosophers such as Gersonides and Crescar saw within Ecclesiastes a text to assist them in their writings. The theological concepts in Ecclesiastes were challenging to medieval thinkers as they have continued to be to the modern thinker.

Two of the most renowned American Jewish Bible scholars, Professor H.L. Ginsberg and Professor Robert Gordis have made Ecclesiastes accessible through their translations and commentaries. Both take a different approach to the Book, but their Biblical expertise comes alive in their individual volumes.

Justice and Wickedness

Ecclesiastes stresses that there is a limitation on the phenomena of nature and the actions and experience of individuals. Moreover, the author notes that just as there have always been goodly individuals there will always be evil ones. "What is occurring occurred long since, and what is to occur occurred long since. And indeed I have observed under the sun - alongside justice there is wickedness, alongside righteousness there is wickedness." 3:15

Various kinds of advice are to be found in the book: "Keep your mouth from being rash and let not your throat be quick to bring forth speech before God. For God is in heaven and you are on earth - that is why your words should be few." This verse from the beginning of chapter 5 was utilized

by the rabbis as a basis for establishing the 'Ta'anit Dibur' - The fast of Words. Individuals would commit themselves to refrain from speaking on certain days because they did not want to utter words which might not have been properly thought out. Every word, they emphasized, is uttered before God and should be judged as such.

The Wisdom of Ecclesiastes

The following are well known quotations from Ecclesiastes: "A wise man has his eyes in his head whereas a fool walks in darkness." "There is nothing worthwhile for a man but to eat, drink and be merry." "Two are better off than one, in that they have great benefit from their earning. For should they fall, one can raise the other, but woe betide him who is alone and falls with no companion to raise him." "Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life that have been granted to you under the sun." "The making of many books is without limit."

The Book of Ecclesiastes holds a significant place in the Biblical canon because of the insights it offers. Annually on Sukkot it is read to us from the 'bima' of the synagogue, reminding us that not just the Torah but all of the Bible is a living and vibrant work. Let us, however, challenge Ecclesiastes through our deeds and prove that in truth there is something "new under the sun."

Boxing Hall of Fame president Jane Broadfoot announced that their yearly AWARDS DINNER is set for the evening of October 14, 1984 at the Maxim Hotel. Chairman Al Siciliano reports so far those to be honored include Deputy Attorney General Mike Rumbolz as Man of the Year and TV 3, Dick Gregg as Media Man of the Year. STRIP Stars will also be on hand including comedian Jackie Vernon, Dondino and others. Tickets, at \$15 per person, may be obtained by calling Jane at 384-5032 or 878-3968.

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