

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 20, Number 32

August 14, 2005



## Seasons: What Time is it?

*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth? I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it. He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-11)*

Is Solomon teaching that every event in human history is divinely ordained and so fixed that it cannot be otherwise? If so, he chose the wrong words in "season" and "time." Various Hebrew dictionaries are fairly consistent in their definition of these words as relating to seasons, particularly the seasons of the year that would be engrained in an agricultural culture. There is a season when a wise farmer will plant his crops and a season a few months later when he will harvest his crops.

Solomon contradicts this notion of deterministic fixedness related to the time of death in 7:17. If every individual lives under a fixed and ordained time for their death, no one could possibly die before his time. Hezekiah could not have fifteen years added to his life. And honoring one's father and mother, one of the Ten Commandments, could not result in prolonging one's days; as Paul observes, the only one of the ten that is specifically associated with a promise of blessing in its keeping, prolonged days. And if there is no divinely fixed and ordained time for each person's death, there is also no divinely ordained and fixed moment for the other events mentioned in the list.

Rather than teaching deterministic and divinely ordained cause for every event in the human experience, an idea that will inevitably lead to blaming God for man's sins and for the various tragedies imposed by evil humans upon each other, Solomon is instructing us in the matter of wisdom. In a

sermon from Ecclesiastes Haddon Robinson defined Biblical wisdom as "skill in the art of living." I'd only add one point to Robinson's predictable insightful thought. Biblical wisdom is skill in the art of living life as God directs us to live it. I believe that Solomon in these verses tells us that God has established seasons for us to practice the various godly activities that He has commanded, though He nowhere in Scripture teaches that He absolutely ordains and causes every act of obedience any more than He teaches that He absolutely ordains and causes every act of sin. Immediately following these verses Solomon will complain at the injustice of sinful men against each other, something that is never "in season" in God's commandments and way of living.

We respect seasons of life in our normal daily activities. At times we also observe, either in ourselves or in those around us, occasions of foolish conduct that is not at all seasonal. The middle aged man who wears flashy sport shirts and too much jewelry, trying to look and act younger than his true age has missed age-appropriate dress and conduct for his "season" in life. The middle-aged woman who dresses like a teenager and puts on multiple layers of makeup, trying to look years younger than her true age has equally missed the wisdom of living life in harmony with the season in which we find ourselves. Few pastors indeed who have served for any length of time have not

seen one of the members of the church that they serve failing to act in harmony with what should be their level of spiritual maturity. The inspired writer of the Hebrew letter confronted some of his readers with this problem of unseasonable immaturity (Hebrews 5:11-14). When we observe a Christian in a difficult situation react with godly and insightful wisdom, we sense the incredible maturity of the action, "skill in the art of living." It is living in harmony with the spiritual seasons of life.

In Ecclesiastes 3:11 Solomon makes this point in his observation that God makes every thing beautiful in "his time," his "season." When we live life in harmony with God's direction and ethics, we realize the beauty of God's way, the "good way" to live life "under the sun."

Interestingly in 1:3 Solomon asks a question. Then in 3:9 he asks the same question but without the qualifying point that appears in 1:3, "...under the sun." What is the true profit of life? What is its satisfying meaning and purpose? It is to live life in constant and faithful respect for the seasons that God has revealed in Scripture, in terms of our Christian service and obedience to the faith, to be "instant in season, out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). There are no occasions when our fickle moods should be allowed to govern our Christian conduct. Whether we are blessed at the moment with a sense of overarching rightness or not, godly obedience to God's commandments in Scripture are always in season.

There is something of a pattern of the things covered in Solomon's list.

1. Verses 2-3 deal with beginnings and endings. Solomon lists four examples: a time to be born-die; a time to plant-pluck up; a time to kill-heal; a time to break down-build up.
2. Verses 4-5 deal with emotions: a time to weep-laugh; a time to mourn-dance; a time to cast away stones-gather stones (likely referring to the ancient practice of filling an enemy's field with stones, a strong emotion; a time to embrace-refrain from embracing.
3. Verses 6-7a deal with ambition and/or possessions: a time to get-lose; a time to keep-cast away; a time to rend-sew.

4. Verses 7b-8 deal with our talk: a time to be silent-speak; a time to love-hate (The action of love or hate is words.); a time to talk war-peace.

What is Solomon's message? I believe he intends to teach us that God's Word, His commandments, cover every aspect of our life and conduct. In nothing can we claim divine speechlessness and choose our own way. Judges 21:25 describes in one verse the root cause of the abysmal conduct of Israel during the entire era of the judges, "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." This sentence is not a description of the way things should be, but a disclosure of the reason for the failure of the nation to maintain consistent and faithful obedience to God. God does not leave us to make our own way, however we decide or define it to be. He is God after all! He sets the mark. He issues the commandments. We are to do what is right in His eyes, not what is right in our own eyes.

For a child to enjoy childishness and act his/her age is as honoring to God as for an older person to demonstrate responsible maturity in their life. This thing that Solomon calls "season" and "time" reflects the concept of Biblical wisdom. We may well learn from our experiences. We may actually use that knowledge to improve our conduct and to grow as Scripture direct us. Sadly, far too many who profess Christianity spend far more of their time justifying their own ideas, what is "right in their own eyes," than learning from their mistakes. Equally far too many who profess Christianity fail to grasp the seasonal timeliness of God's ways—and God's way of living. They never see the beauty of God's way, nor find the joy of serving God that Scripture sets forth as the blessing of the faithful.

How is it with you? What season of life are you in today? Do you live according to the wisdom of God for that season? Or do you recoil in bitterness because things are not as you wish them to be? Our attitude will reveal our spiritual wisdom and maturity, our sense of the seasons that God has created for our growth and blessing, for the "beauty of holiness," a term that Solomon's father used in his inspired writings. And the final question; how much are you willing to change your life to discover that wisdom and beauty?

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.  
Joseph R. Holder Pastor