



Gratz Insider, September 2012 - Story Continuation

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Honor for Professor and Her Former Student

In January 2010, Michail Kitsos, a theology student and Greek Orthodox Christian, traveled from his native Greece to the United States to enter the Gratz master's program in Jewish Studies. In July 2012, Dr. Ruth Sandberg, the Gratz College Leonard and Ethel Landau Professor of Rabbinics, took the opposite route—from the United States to Amsterdam—to present a scholarly paper that she had coauthored with Kitsos, who is now the assistant director of the Gratz certificate program in Jewish-Christian Studies. This second trip across the Atlantic is a testament both to the pair's scholarship and to the richness of academic collaboration.

The Society of Biblical Literature, a prominent organization for Bible scholars, had invited Sandberg to present a paper on the Book of Ecclesiastes at its international conference in Amsterdam. Kitsos took on the responsibility not only of organizing the paper and doing the research for it, but also of creating new and unique ways of understanding rabbinic interpretation. The result was an innovative piece of scholarship that was so well received that it was selected for inclusion as a chapter in the Bible series called *The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies*, produced by renowned academic publisher T&T Clark International.

Thrilled by this honor, Kitsos, the up-and-coming scholar and last year's Gratz College valedictorian, explained, "It was a unique experience to have been drafted by Dr. Sandberg to show what I can really do in the field of rabbinics and interpretation."

Their paper focuses on rabbinic methodologies for interpreting the Book of Ecclesiastes and offers New Testament parallels. Esoteric matters of interest to biblical scholars perhaps, but Sandberg maintains that the overall message of the Book of Ecclesiastes actually speaks to the very real feelings of worry and anxiety that permeate the world today. She explains, "Ecclesiastes gives people a vehicle for maintaining faith in spite of our doubt, and optimism in spite of our pessimism."

According to Sandberg, Ecclesiastes is also particularly pertinent this time of year because we read from this book on the holiday of Sukkot. While there are several explanations for the reading of Ecclesiastes on Sukkot, the one that especially

resonates with Sandberg is that both the book and the holiday share the message of life's fragility. She points to the fact that the sukkah is nothing more than a temporary structure that should be enjoyed to the fullest while it remains standing. Similarly, in its existential exploration, the Book of Ecclesiastes also depicts life as a fleeting gift to be fully appreciated. This message is "one of the most powerful connections about reading Ecclesiastes on Sukkot," says Sandberg.