

12A

RELIGION

Unraveling
the mystery
of RevelationSunday
School Lesson

Devotional reading: Romans 2:1-11
Lesson Scripture: Revelation 2:18-29

Thyatira should not be entirely unknown to readers of the New Testament. Lydia, the "seller of purple" who was Paul's first convert in Philippi of Macedonia (Acts 16:11-15), came from Thyatira. This detail fits well with the fact that many highly organized trade guilds were present in Thyatira. Membership in these guilds posed special problems to those who, like Lydia, became followers of Jesus. This is because the trade guilds were closely associated with heathen worship, which included feasts in honor of idols, and the accompanying immoral practices. To live as a Christian businessman or businesswoman in Thyatira demanded real commitment! We can only surmise the pressures that Lydia may have faced if she returned to her home and sought to share her new-found faith with others.

Thyatira was located on the Lycus River in Asia, on the road between Pergamos (the capital of Asia) and Sardis. Its principal deity was Apollo, the mythical Roman god of light and learning. Its modern name is Akhisar, or "White Castle," so named for the rocky hill overhanging it.

Once again the angel, or messenger (apparently one of the leaders of the congregation), was to receive, deliver, and circulate the letter. Thyatira was the first of four inland cities of Asia to be addressed by the Lord of the church. Earlier letters (to Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos) had gone to towns located closer to the seacoast. It should be noted that this letter to Thyatira is the longest of the seven.

The title Son of God is not used anywhere else in Revelation. It emphasizes Christ's deity, perhaps as a direct response to the aforementioned tendency of trade guilds to promote idol worship. The description of Jesus as having eyes like unto a flame of fire is reminiscent of how He first appeared to John as the Son of man (Revelation 1:14). In addition, it further challenged the belief that the god Apollo was the source of light. It emphasized that Christ is not only ever present with His own, but also perceives their inmost thoughts. The feet...like fine brass again recalls Christ's initial appearance to John (Revelation 1:15).

One may question why the phrase thy works is used twice in this verse. A clearer reading, with the second usage appearing in its correct place, is given in the American Standard Version: "I know thy works, and thy love and faith and ministry and patience, and that thy last works are more than the first." This made Thyatira's pattern of growth the very opposite of that of Ephesus, which had lost its "first love" and had fallen from its "first works" (Revelation 2:4,5).

The believer's works should include such inner qualities as charity (love) and faith, along with the more visible attributes of service to others and patience when suffering affliction. At the same time, love cannot be expressed without action (1 John 3:17,18), and neither can faith (James 2:14-18).

Thyatira's crowning achievement lay in a level of maturity that produced more and better accomplishments for Christ as the years went on. Like a good fruit tree, these believers brought forth a better crop each season.

Could that be said of us?

Faith community to play role in reform

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The Rev. Ralph Williamson is taking welfare reform to local churches.

Williamson, associate pastor of Steele Creek AME Zion Church, was selected in August to oversee religious affairs for the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services. His mission is to form a coalition between Charlotte's faith community and DSS.

"We started in August of '96," Williamson said. "Our effort is to look at the diverse faith community with the common mission of helping people regardless of the orientation. We're saying that

each orientation can reach out and help someone."

Next week, a consortium, "A Faith Community United," will be held at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church to raise the awareness of the faith community to people affected by welfare reform. The conference will feature Nancy Boyd-Franklin Ph.D., a therapist psychologist and professor at Rutgers University. Boyd-Franklin has studied the African American family extensively. Several topics will be addressed during the two-day conference, from parenthood to developing community services that are faith based.

New welfare legislation, which

went into effect in October, places strict limits on how long families and individuals can receive benefits.

The bill, which was met with derision by congressional Democrats and welfare experts, ended Aid for Families with Dependent Children, the preeminent source of cash welfare for more than 35 million Americans. The bill also pushed responsibility from the federal government to states.

DSS director Richard "Jake" Jacobsen called it the "old shift and shaft" in an interview last fall.

"As people's entitlement goes away, they have to go back into the work force, how can the church

provide support for them," Williamson asked. "We're saying one of the ways is by teaching the message of personal responsibility, good ethics, being there for them as they go back into the work force. We believe that the church can be there to help them long-term."

The reform package will affect many African American families in the county. Although African Americans make up less than 30 percent of the total population, they constitute more than 80 percent of local welfare recipients.

So far, the faith community has been leery. Many see DSS passing off responsibility in light

See DSS page 13A

Bible basis
for all law,
judge says

By Jay Reeves
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Thousands of people, including Christian families and long-haired bikers for Jesus, rallied Saturday to support a judge who refuses to remove a display of the Ten Commandments over his bench.

The demonstration for Judge Roy Moore turned into a litany against liberal courts, abortion, television and civil libertarians.

"We are drawing a line in the sand and saying 'Devil, you've taken enough from us!'" the Rev. Clifford Terrell shouted from the white marble steps of the Alabama Capitol, where the Confederacy was born and voting rights marchers rallied in 1965.

With Confederate flags and countless posters of the Ten Commandments waving overhead, Moore told the crowd, "Your presence today will send a message across this nation. That message is clear: We must — nay, we will — have God back in America again."

An Alabama court has found that Moore's display of the Christian tenets violates the Constitution by promoting one religion in a government setting. Moore is appealing, and Gov. Fob James has threatened to call out the National Guard and state troopers if anyone tries to remove Moore's plaque.

"By defending his liberty we preserve freedom for all Americans," James said at the rally.

The judge, a Baptist, invites others to pray with him in court — as long as they're not Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist. "We are not a nation founded upon the Hindu god or Buddha," he said earlier.

Organizers said Capitol police estimated the crowd at 20,000 to 25,000 people but the throng did not appear nearly as large as the 1965 rally at the close of the Selma-to-Montgomery voting rights march, when a reported 25,000 gathered at the same spot.

One man flew in from California to be part of what he described as a new wave of Christian activism and defend the judge.

"All Judge Moore is asking for is to acknowledge God, he's not asking to proselytize," said Mark Rizzo, an auto shop owner from Riverside, Calif. "He clearly is not trying to establish a national religion."

"Maybe this will be a wake-up call to America as it slips morally, economically, and most of all, spiritually," said Christian biker Mike Wiyugel of Tupelo, Miss., wearing a black leather jacket and fringed chaps.

A handful of opponents who accuse Moore of fostering religious intolerance debated his supporters carrying signs with slogans like "We Want God in America Again."

Log truck driver Wayne Willis said the judge's highly publicized fight is making it tougher to be one of only a handful of Jews in the southeast Alabama town of Troy.

"Just last week a boy held my boy's arm behind his back and tried to break it. He said he did it because he was Jewish," said Willis, with tattooed arms and a baseball cap decorated with the Star of David.

The judge's supporters said his battle is about saving America, not bigotry.

"All the laws we've got, even traffic laws, are based on biblical principles," said Al Coulter.

A day of unity and prayer



Charlotteans gather for last Sunday Day of Unity and Prayer. The ecumenical event drew an estimated 600 to Memorial Stadium. Spectators were treated to performances by many of Charlotte's top gospel groups.

Rain dulls numbers, not spirit

By Pete Iacobelli
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBIA, S.C. — A rally against hate fell short of numbers, but not spirit Saturday as about 400 people marched through drizzle to protest burned churches and the Confederate flag flying over South Carolina's Statehouse.

Organizers planned for more than 10,000 people at the national gathering. But early morning showers and an overcast afternoon kept turnout low.

"It's like church on Sunday, if it's raining or the weather is bad, you're not going to see as many people there," said the Rev. Terrance Mackey, whose Greeleyville church, Mount Zion AME, was burned to the ground in 1995 and rededicated by

President Clinton last June.

The focus of the rally, called the "March of Solidarity to Challenge Hate in America," were the church burnings that have plagued the South since 1990. On Friday, pastors, ministers and activists from across the country unveiled a tombstone monument with the names of those charred sanctuaries.

"I'm tired of walking into churches where people have tears in their eyes," the Rev. Mackey said. "We've got to let the country know that we are not going down any lower."

When the march began on the rain-slicked streets outside Allen University, an historically black college, participants seemed unsure how to proceed, even messing up the words to

the '60s civil rights standard "We Shall Overcome."

By the time the group hit the Capitol about 45 minutes later, they were in sync and turned attention to the Confederate battle flag. The banner flies third in line beneath the American and state flags over the Statehouse.

Cries of "What do we want? The Confederate flag down. When do we want it? Now," bounced off the building, currently under renovation. The marchers got part of their wish, thanks to the wet weather.

While the American and Palmetto flag gusted open, a soggy Stars and Bars flag was wrapped against the pole.

The South Carolina Committee for Racial Justice, the South Carolina Burned

Church Restoration Coalition and the Center for Democratic Renewal are sponsors.

Marchers traveled from several states to participate. Annie Henry of Chelford, Ark., took a 14-hour bus trip to honor her rebuilt St. Mark's Missionary Baptist Church, which burned two Novembers ago.

There were 25 students from Western New England College in Springfield, Mass., with Project Rebuild. They will stay a week, despite finals coming up in three weeks, to help fix Rosemary Baptist, a predominantly black church in Barnwell burned April 13, 1996.

"The problems of hate are not just a Southern issue and not just a black issue," said student Jacob Burgess. "It affects all of us."

Small group rekindles love of sacred harp

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BARNESVILLE, Ga. — The singers who perform once a year at Liberty Hill Primitive Baptist Church have turned their voices into a Sacred Harp.

The group, whose members come from as far as 100 miles away, is helping preserve the tradition of Sacred Harp singing — a rhythmic, a cappella hymn-singing style.

"It's kind of strange to 20th century ears," said Raymond Hamrick, a Sacred Harp singer from Macon. "It's medieval in sound."

Inside the middle Georgia church, full-volume songs echo off the hardwood floors and walls, making the choir sound larger than its 15 members.

Sacred Harp singing is known as shape-note singing because it

uses shapes — squares, diamonds, ovals and triangles — in place of musical notes.

Shape-note singing, which uses a four-note scale, began in the 1700s as a way to improve music in church. The music came to Georgia in 1841, and in 1844 Georgians B.F. White and E.J. King published "The Sacred Harp," a collection of hymns written as shape-note music,

said Fletcher Anderson, professor of music at Wesleyan College.

In Sacred Harp singing, the singers sit in a "hollow square" facing inward. Trebles, altos, tenors and basses each make up a side of the square. The melody is always sung by the tenors, and women and men sing both the alto and treble parts.

Singers takes turns leading.