

12A

RELIGION

Revelations' visions of eternity

Sunday School Lesson

Devotional reading: Hebrews 9:7-14
Lesson scripture: Revelation 7.

The vision recounted in Revelation 7 seems to interrupt a series of events recounted in chapters 4-6. Yet it is built on what is found in those chapters. Chapters 4 and 5 describe the throne room of Heaven, focusing on the glorious One who is seated on the central throne. Accompanying Him is the Lamb, standing after having been slain, who alone was found worthy to open the sealed scroll of eternal mysteries. Surrounding the central throne appear four living creatures, suggesting the totality of created beings. Encircling all these are twenty-four thrones occupied by twenty-four white-robed elders, symbolizing either the leaders of believers from both Old and New Covenants or the believers themselves. Surrounding all of these is a throng of angels, joining in praise to God.

Chapter 6 presents a series of visions occurring with the opening of six of the seven seals on the scroll. Each of the first four visions consists of a horse with its rider. First comes a victorious rider on a white horse, followed by one on a red horse (representing war), another on a black horse (representing pestilence or famine), and a fourth rider (whose name was Death) on a "pale" horse. The opening of the fifth seal results in a vision of "the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held" (Revelation 6:9). The sixth introduces the terrors of final judgment, from which multitudes try to hide themselves.

The vision of the sixth seal closes (as does the sixth chapter of Revelation) with a penetrating question: "For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Who will be able to endure the release of divine wrath against human sin? And by what means? At this point, Revelation pauses from the opening of the seals to provide the answer. The seventh and final seal will not be opened until the beginning of chapter 8.

Matthew 13:39, 41, 42, and 24:29-31 refer to angels as agents of judgment. In the present vision John saw God's agents standing on the four corners of the earth. They were to prevent the destructive hurricanes of judgment from being released too quickly to work their devastation. For similar language used of diving judgment, see Jeremiah 49:35, 36. This act by the angels protected, at least for a time, the earth and sea and the kind of growth (trees) that normally bears the brunt of destructive storms.

The next angel appeared from the east, as does the rising sun. His mission was one of light and preservation. He carried the evidence of authority from God Himself - an official seal such as that identifying the ambassador of a nation and serving to authenticate his message. This angel demonstrated his authority by delivering his message to the four angels with a loud voice.

The angel's cry kept the effects of the four winds from being felt by the earth, sea, and trees. His words also reveal why the opening of the seventh seal had been delayed. The pause was a pause, of grace, allowing the angels to seal the servants of our God in their foreheads. Revelation 14:1 and 22:4 also refer to this marking as an important means of identifying the faithful.

Testaments: Bible said nurture mom's spiritual needs

By David Briggs
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

On this Mother's Day, preachers across the nation will turn to the 31st chapter of Proverbs and speak glowingly of the perfect woman described there: One who rises while it is still night and cares for the poor and her family late into the following night.

And most of the mothers in the pews, those whom many clergy will idealize that day, will want to run for the back door, screaming, "I can't do that!"

So says Elisa Morgan, president of MOPS International, a Christian organization that supports mothers of young children.

Despite an increasingly crowded market of specialty Bibles, Morgan has helped adapt one for mothers. She wrote the reflections for the new Mom's Devotional Bible, published by Zondervan Publishing, in Grand Rapids, Mich.

A heart icon marks every Scripture passage that relates to mothers, and devotions targeting mothering topics, from

fatigue to monsters in the closet, are integrated throughout.

Motherhood, along with adolescence and old age, is one of those special periods of life when people confront issues of faith, Morgan said. Becoming a mother forces a woman to think about the spiritual values she wants to pass on to her family and to re-examine her own faith.

In the Mom's Devotional Bible, Morgan, mother of two, tries to relate Scripture to the real world of contemporary mothers.

This is a Bible for the mother

who sometimes yells at her children, argues with her husband, gets jealous of neighbors and holds grudges.

"Moms live in the trenches," Morgan said in an interview. "My goal is to speak hope in the trenches, joy in the trenches."

Instead of measuring up to the woman in Proverbs 31, Morgan said mothers might find more nurture in passages such as Isaiah 40:11, where God is shown as one who pays special attention to moms:

"He tends his flock like a shepherd:

"He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart;

"He gently leads those who have young."

In reflecting upon the passage, Morgan encourages mothers to lay their heads close to God's heart.

"When it's 10 at night and we've been up since 5 in the morning and we still have three more loads of wash to do and bills to pay, we need a God who gathers us in his arms and offers comfort," she wrote.

Fight for ministry



Benjamin Chavis Muhammad is fighting loss of Christian ministerial commission after he joined the Nation of Islam. He is a United Church of Christ minister, pending a final decision by UCC board expected this summer.

Chavis fights loss of ministry

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES - Saying "There's only one God," former NAACP leader Benjamin Chavis criticized a Christian church commission that recommended his removal as a minister because he joined the Nation of Islam.

"The God who called me to the Christian ministry is the same God who called me to the ministry of Islam," said Chavis, who took the name Benjamin Chavis Muhammad after announcing in February that he had joined the black Muslim sect.

A North Carolina commission of the United Church of Christ voted Thursday to recommend his termination as a minister, saying the Islamic faith is incompatible with his standing as a Christian minister.

ter.

Chavis, who was ordained in North Carolina in 1980, made his case before the Church and Ministry Commission of the UCC's Eastern North Carolina Association before it voted in Durham.

The church temporarily suspended Chavis last month from preaching, administering the sacraments or performing other pastoral duties for the 1.5-million-member denomination.

The association's board of directors will make the final decision on Chavis' status in May or June.

Chavis said Friday that he never left the Protestant faith and did not need its permission to join Minister Louis Farrakhan's sect.

"There's only one God," Chavis said. "The God of

Judaism and the God of Christianity and the God of Islam is the same God."

The Rev. Madison T. Schockley II, a longtime friend and pastor who invited Chavis to speak at his church, said Chavis will not be "preaching" but engaging in a "dialogue" with congregants.

Chavis became executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1993 and was fired the next year after disclosing that he had allocated more than \$330,000 in NAACP funds to settle a sexual discrimination case against him.

Chavis also organized the 1995 Million Man March and January's Black Monday observance to protest the shooting of unarmed black motorist James Willie Cooper.

United Methodist congregation ousts exuberant pastor

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAUCIER, Miss. - The Rev. James McKeithen found more than spiritual renewal at the Brownsville Assembly of God revival in Pensacola, Fla.

The revival - an emotional, free-worship event that has drawn more than a million people over the past two years - gave him a new worship style and a new joy in preaching.

It also divided his church and cost him his job.

In a conflict that has appeared in churches more and more recently, McKeithen's free style of worship - including hand-waving and shouts of praise - upset many members of Saucier United Methodist Church, where he had been a minister for four years.

His insistence that church members experience the Brownsville Assembly revivals, either on tape or in person, also upset members.

In March, the church's pastor-parish relations committee asked him to leave, citing his new style of worship.

"If I am crazy for believing that people are filled with the Holy Spirit, it's OK because experiencing what the Lord gives us sure is fun," McKeithen said.

For the 46-year-old McKeithen, the free-worship style inspired by Brownsville generated new energy. After attending revivals over a six-month period, he began to preach differently.

"My sermons were longer," he said. "I told people about our very own John Wesley and how he had visible manifestations."

And, he said, he came to accept physical manifestations of spirit, such as fainting, dancing, speaking in tongues or shaking.

But members of the congregation complained that the sermons and worship style conflicted with their styles, which were quieter and rooted in the traditional Methodist order of service - a long-used schedule of prayers, hymns and other elements of worship.

A majority of the congregation, which has fewer than 100 active members, complained to the pastor-parish relations committee, which asked him to step down.

"The decision was based on strong philosophical and religious differences, including strong repeated attempts to impose an Assembly of God-type of worship upon our congregation," the committee said.

Gardens recreate Biblical foliage

By Leigh Ann Laube
THE KINGSPORT TIMES-NEWS

KINGSPORT, Tenn. - Billee Moore thinks she's probably the only person in the world who has actually planted dandelions.

To most of us, they're nothing short of ugly and annoying to have in our yards. But to Moore, they are a bitter herb with an important role in the biblical garden she helps maintain at Preston Hills Presbyterian Church.

The goal of the garden is to give visitors an idea of the vegetation that existed on the hillsides and in the valleys traversed by Christ. And dandelions, Moore explained, were used during Passover.

Moore and others began the garden a few years ago as a way to make use of the church grounds. The boxwood garden, found behind the church, is laid out in a triquetal pattern, a three-sided bowknot favored by early gardeners.

Moore found several resources on biblical plants.

"People who have researched the areas in that part of the world have gone through the Bible and gotten the information and the Bible reference together," she said.

"Some of the biblical references were judged to be a matter of translation, in other words, it was determined by experts that the apple tree in the Garden of Eden must have been an apricot tree because there were no apple trees in that area at that time," she said. "We have an apricot tree in our garden instead of an apple tree."

Not all the plants mentioned in the reference books will grow in this area, but a healthy number will.

"What makes it an easily maintained garden is a lot of them are herbs that require really no maintenance, and most are perennials," Moore said.

Plants to look for include anemone, apricot, boxwood, chamomile, chicory, cyclamen, dill, fennel, fig, grape, hyacinth, iris, ivy, lavender, mint, narcissus, olive, pennyroyal, rose, rosemary, rue, snapdragon, sorrel, star of Bethlehem, thyme, tulip, turk's cap lily and wormwood.

Of those, chicory, dandelion and sorrel are bitter herbs. Dill, mint, and rue are tithing herbs. "Tithing herbs were herbs people could use to pay their tithes. They were cultivated herbs. They grew them," Moore said.

Moore has had mixed results with the plants and says the garden is a work in progress.

Many of the plants are labeled for visitors' convenience. "Where there are quotations that apply to a plant, a direct reference from Bible passage to plant, we've tried to put those on nearby at least so people can see the connection."