

13A

RELIGION

Revelations
of warfare
for saintsSunday
School Lesson

Devotional reading: Revelation 19:1-10.

Lesson scripture: Revelation 19, 20.

Last week's lesson from Revelation 7 dealt with God's "sealing" or identifying His people to protect them from the coming judgment. They are described as having emerged from "great tribulation," which is part of the continuing warfare between God and Satan. Chapters 8-18 depict that warfare in dramatic visions that are puzzling in detail but very clear in showing the ferocity of the conflict. Chapters 19 and 20, from which today's lesson comes, depict the end of that warfare through Christ's coming in glory and judgment. The outcome is eternal joy for His people and the consignment of His enemies to the eternal lake of fire.

Chapter 19 opens with thunderous hymns of praise by the multitudes in Heaven (verses 1-8), followed by the grand announcement of the marriage supper of the Lamb and His bride (verse 9). It then depicts the victorious Christ coming forth to judge the earth.

That John saw heaven opened signaled that something dramatic and climactic was about to unfold before him. Ezekiel 1:1 speaks of the heavens being opened so that the prophet might see "visions of God," and Matthew 3:16 says that "the heavens were opened" to Jesus at the time of His baptism.

As John watched in amazement, there appeared before him a white horse. The color white is a symbol of both righteousness and purity (see Revelation 7:9-14 and 19:8). The horse is associated with conquest and the capability of making war (see 6:2). The primary focus then turns to the identity of the Rider, and the horse is quickly forgotten.

Faithful and True are such essential characteristics of the living Christ that they are such essential characteristics of the living Christ that they serve as His name. Jesus is described in John's initial greeting to the seven churches as the "faithful witness" (1:5). He later refers to Himself as "true" (3:7) and as the "faithful and true witness" (3:14); these are the qualities of divinity, for God eternally faithful (Deuteronomy 7:9; 1 Corinthians 10:13) and true (Revelation 6:10).

The ability to judge and make war with righteousness is one that is sadly lacking in today's world. Only Jesus possesses such an ability. In one of Isaiah's numerous Messianic prophecies, he declared, "With righteousness shall he judge of the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his lips shall he slay the wicked" (Isaiah 11:4). Jesus' parables of judgment, such as those recorded in Matthew 24 (verses 45-51) and 25 (verses 1-30) echo the same theme. The era grace and reconciliation will end when Jesus returns to hold both Satan and the sinner accountable for their endless rebellion and to pronounce judgment (Matthew 25:41; Hebrews 9:27). God's righteous judgment is as real as His love and mercy; Hell is as real as Heaven.

The description of eyes...as a flame of fire calls to mind Jesus' first appearance to John on Patmos (1:14) and his later introduction to the church Thyatira (2:18). Such eyes as these could penetrate the dark recesses of the human mind and perceive what is normally invisible. They are fully capable of rendering final judgment.

Churches hitting Information Highway

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALINA, Kan. — A group of Methodist ministers spent part of the weekend wandering through the wilderness of the Internet, learning how to use computers to lead their churches into a new era of technology.

A half dozen pastors attended the workshop Saturday that covered ways of conducting routine church business and tapping a wealth of religious information through computers and the Internet.

"I knew it was available, but I had no idea where to go looking," said Pastor Roger Winn of Marquette.

The workshop was sponsored by the Salina and Concordia District Councils on Ministries and Kansas Wesleyan University.

"You've heard the saying that the church is 10 years behind on everything," said the Rev. Kris Brinlee, pastor of the Talmage and Industry United Methodist churches and the Salina District Mission Coordinator for the

denomination. "We have to start teaching people how to use computers so the church will come into the new age."

Computers can do the obvious, such as link networks of pastors and churches by electronic mail. And the Internet contains large amounts of obscure resource materials for use in sermons, group discussions and other church functions.

Ministers can check out the latest debate about Jesus of Nazareth. They can also compare a passage in the King

James Version of the Bible with a newer translation, or with one in Greek or Latin.

"All translations in all languages you can think of, all the great masterpieces, are on-line," said co-presenter Paul Bube, Kansas Wesleyan professor of religion and philosophy.

But Bube was worried about problems that computers might create for churches.

"The downside is who has the technology and who doesn't," he said. "What will it mean for

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Christian Coalition denounced

By James Franklin
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BALTIMORE — Christian Coalition members said they gathered Saturday to promote spiritual and financial aid for impoverished black communities.

But on the same floor of a posh Baltimore hotel where the religious and political group held its event, critics gathered to denounce the coalition as hypocritically trying to promote its conservative agenda.

The meeting's purpose was not political, but to simply unite Christians regardless of their race or party affiliation, said coalition executive director Ralph Reed.

He also told the overwhelmingly black crowd of critics that the Republican Party has ignored blacks' vote, while the Democrats have "taken it for granted."

"We come here not with a sense of righteousness but in repentance," he said.

Later that evening at a predominantly black church, Christian Coalition founder, CEO and President Pat Robertson said his organization's "Samaritan Project" is strictly nonpartisan.

Robertson also made a prediction.

"We will see the elimination of racial prejudice in this country," he said. "I'm not going to carry your burden, but when that burden gets too heavy, I want to be the one that comes along and helps you lift it."

This year, the coalition has been lobbying for school vouchers, school prayer and banning late-term abortions.

Under the voucher system, governments would give subsidies to families that send children to private schools. Some community leaders say vouchers would only channel needed resources away from public schools.

"Vouchers only mean we will get inferior public schools," said Charles Stith, a Boston pastor and board member of the civil liberties group People for the American Way. "They are not working in our interest."

As part of its Samaritan Project, the coalition has pledged to award 1,000 scholarships in 100 school districts with high crime rates, Reed said.

Some audience members, many of them black clergy, said they agreed with the coalition on a number of issues, including abortion and homosexuality.

"We want to promote the biblical model of the family," said Rev. Earl Jackson, the Samaritan Project's director.

"(Gay) lifestyles need to change," said Alveda Celeste King, niece of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King. "But we welcome everybody. This is not about condemnation."

But gay activists argued that by touting traditional families, the coalition was trying to polarize blacks and homosexuals.

"They're not only driving a wedge these communities, but between gay African Americans and their churches," said Val Tava, co-chairwoman of the Free Justice Campaign, an organization that seeks to end discrimination against Maryland's gays. "Homophobia is preached in these churches."

Meanwhile, some pastors said they were drawn to the Saturday event because of much more than the coalition's stand on moral issues; they said they were attracted by the coalition's massive financial resources and political clout.

In its eight years, the coalition's budget has swelled from \$200,000 to \$27 million.

Who has right to preach?

Readers
debate UCC's
controversial
decisionBy Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The United Church of Christ's decision to end the ministerial standing of Ben Chavis Muhammad has caused quite a stir.

The ruling handed down April 24 by the 12-member Church and Ministry Commission of UCC's Eastern North Carolina Association stated Chavis Muhammad's standing should be "terminated without prejudice."

The ruling ended debate brought on by Chavis Muhammad's conversion to the Nation of Islam in February.

The decision suspends Chavis Muhammad's right to preach, administer sacraments or perform other kinds of pastoral leadership in the 1.5 million-member denomination.

The motion goes before the Eastern North Carolina Association Board of Directors later this month.

The Rev. Rollin Russell, a long time friend of Muhammad said the decision was difficult "because Ben is a friend and has been a friend for many years."

But he added the commission's decision was correct.

"Our confession is that Jesus Christ is the son of God, Savior and Lord," Russell said. "If I could sum up the feeling of many on the commission, it is that there needs to be no other name."

"We understand that he has become a member of another world faith."

Chavis Muhammad has said that he will fight the ruling, which he says violates the tenant of both religions that there is only one God.

"The God who called me to the Christian ministry is the same God who called me to the ministry of Islam," Chavis Muhammad said in a press conference shortly after the ruling.

Many of you share Chavis Muhammad's view.

The Post took the debate to the Internet last week. We asked readers, via our web page, what they thought of the decision.

We received numerous responses.

Many of you felt the ruling violated Chavis Muhammad's right of free speech.



Ben Chavis Muhammad, who joined Nation of Islam in February, says the United Church of Christ is wrong to take away his ministerial license.

"This is a violation of the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution," wrote Tim McCormac, of New Jersey's Rutgers University (@eden.rutgers.edu.) "Congress shall make no law, prohibiting speech, religion, or expression."

Respondent Kenneth Hasty agreed.

"Dr. Ben Chavis has the right to join any religion he would like to, this is our inalienable right as an American," Hasty

wrote. "And the sooner we all learn and respect that; the better off we all will be. More power to you Dr. Chavis."

Others felt the decision was correct.

"I don't think Ben Chavis was kicked out of the United Church of Christ (if that's what the acronym represents - I thought it was the Church of God)," Margaretta G. Rose (mrose@wpo.hcc.com.) said. "I think

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New black Bible to hit stores this week

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The African American Devotional Bible is produced by blacks for blacks.

And that makes some store owners nervous.

The new Bible, published by Zondervan Publishing House in conjunction with the Congress of National Black Churches, is the first devotional Bible directed at the African American market.

Retailers have ordered a conservative 25,000 copies of the Bible.

The book marks the first collaboration between CNBC, a coalition of eight historically black denominations which represents over 19,000 congrega-

tions and Zondervan, the largest producer of Bibles in the world.

"There were two forces at play," says CNBC project director, the Rev. Alicia Byrd. "CNBC had an interest in publishing and Zondervan had an interest in reaching out to the African American community and having more African American writers in its publications."

Zondervan has become known for its commitment to product development and distribution within the African American community and with other churched people of color," Thomas Mockabee, vice president and publisher of Zondervan's Bible group. "We're excited to establish this relationship with the Congress of

National Black Churches. We look forward to working together to create a Bible that meets the real needs of black Christians seeking spiritual growth."

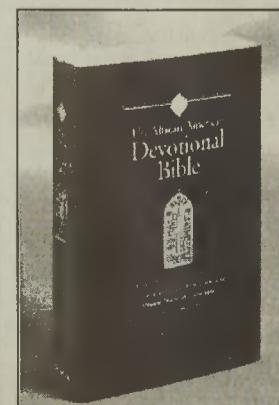
According to Mockabee, Zondervan estimates first year sales of around 90,000.

Zondervan has ordered an initial shipment of 60,000 King James Versions of the Bible which will hit bookstores over the next week.

An additional 30,000 New International Versions will be in stores later this year.

The book features 260 daily and 52 weekend devotions tailored to African Americans. Devotions touch on issues central to the African American

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The African American Devotional Bible