

# 12A

# RELIGION

Season of renewal

Complete listing of local revival services. See page 13A.

## Sunday School LESSON



**Devotional reading:** 1 Corinthians 1:1-10

**Lesson scripture:** Hebrews 10:19-39.

In our earlier lessons from Hebrews, we have seen the author's strong doctrinal emphasis. He was intent upon setting forth the superiority of Christianity over the Judaism that his readers had left behind to follow Jesus. He showed how the high priesthood of Christ is superior to the high priesthood under the Mosaic Law. He also showed how Christ's sacrifice of Himself is superior to all the animal sacrifices offered under the Law.

The first 18 verses of chapter 10 bring the writer's argument to a climax. He concludes his contrast between the Old Covenant priesthood and the priesthood of Jesus. He affirms that the Law was merely "a shadow of good things to come." The sacrifices it prescribed could never fully take away sin; only the "one sacrifice of Jesus could suffice to forgive all sins. Beginning with verse 19 the writer turns his focus to exhortations of a more practical and personal nature.

The writer shows his warm, personal relationship with his readers by addressing them as brethren. He then includes himself with them in his words let us draw near. This man is not some distant theologian setting forth his readers. Instead, he is dealing with practical spiritual matters that are as relevant to him as to them.

The writer first calls his readers' attention to the boldness, or confidence, that Christians are to have as they enter into the holiest, that is, the heavenly sanctuary. Under the New Covenant, this is the counterpart of the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and later the temple. Here the high priest could enter only once a year. Through the blood of Jesus, Christians are now granted a privilege that once belonged only to the high priest. Ours is the opportunity to "come boldly unto the throne of grace" and to "sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." The restrictions of the Old Covenant have been replaced by joyful access to God through a new and living way.

Through the veil refers to the veil, or curtain, that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The high priest had to pass through this curtain to present his annual offering of blood for the people's sins on the Day of Atonement. The words his flesh have created considerable discussion among scholars and commentators. Some take it to refer back to the way, indicating that the way by which Christians enter the true Holy of Holies is through the death of Christ's physical body. Others believe that flesh refers to the veil. They see the veil, not as a barrier to the Holy of Holies, but as a means of entrance into it. Both views recognize the significance of the rending of the veil in the temple, and of the rending of Jesus' body so that man might "enter...the holiest." With either interpretation, the intent of this passage is clear: Christ is the way to the Father, a truth that Jesus Himself clearly taught.

The writer then uses additional Old Covenant terminology to challenge his readers toward faithfulness to Christ. Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience is a blessing not possible under the old sacrificial system, which had no impact upon the evil within man. Being washed with pure water calls to mind the various instances in which water was prescribed for cleansing under the Law. Here the reference is most likely to Christian baptism.

The writer has already encouraged his readers to hold fast and to follow closely the truth that they have received. The same exhortation is given to them in this verse. Their stand for the faith must be without compromise, or without wavering.

## Salisbury ministers take message of unity to heart

By Brian Powe  
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

SALISBURY — Sunday mornings are perhaps the most segregated hours in America.

But, two Salisbury ministers believe now is the time make a change.

The Revs. Lawrence Lee and Sonya Ellerbe feel black and white unity is essential and must begin in the church.

Recently, Lee, who pastors predominantly white Salisbury Christian Center, invited

Ellerbe to preach at his church during the morning and evening services.

No big deal, right? Preachers exchange pulpits all the time.

But, in a city where racial friction is the norm, Lee inviting an Ellerbe, who is black, to share his pulpit is a pretty big deal.

Ellerbe, a veteran preacher and acclaimed musician, said she had no problem with preaching to Lee's congregation.

"I thought it a bit strange, preparing to preach in front of a 98 percent white congregation," she said, "But, I got a good reception and they were more than gracious to me. It's like they have adopted me into their fellowship, and they have a pastor who doesn't mind me coming in and utilizing my spiritual gifts and graces with them."

Lee, who started the Salisbury Christian Center a year ago, said he has a teaching

ministry that will have to cross some barriers to reach people of different races.

"We have to combine all races and nationalities in worship if we're to serve our Lord the right way," Lee said. "We really don't serve God at all, if it matters that much about the race of the person sitting next to you on Sunday morning."

"The bottom line is that we are all equal and we worship the same God. Color should not be the defining factor in all of

this." Ellerbe says she the unifying of churches will not be easy, but is essential.

"It's hard adapting to their style of worship," the Jerusalem Baptist Church assistant minister said. "Because their culture is different than ours, but besides that the Word of God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow."

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## Kee opens annual convention



PHOTO/SUE ANN JOHNSON

Tuesday's opening ceremonies for the Victory in Praise Music & Arts Convention brought about 200 emotional worshippers to the Sheraton Airport Plaza. Services continue through Saturday.

John P. Kee and New Life Productions will host their annual Victory and Praise Music and Arts Festival through Saturday.

The festival ends Sunday with worship services at 1 p.m. All services will be held at the Sheraton Airport Plaza, I-85 and the Billy

Graham Parkway. For more information, call 392-1200.

### Thursday

- 9 a.m. Morning worship
- 9:45 a.m. — noon Workshops
- 1:15 — 3:30 Workshops
- 4 — 6 p.m. Choir rehearsal

7:30 Evening worship service. Speaker, the Rev. Claude Alexander of Charlotte.

### Friday

- 9 a.m. Morning worship
- 9:45 — noon Workshops
- 1:15 — 3:30 Workshops
- 4 — 6 p.m. Choir rehearsal

• 7:30 p.m. Evening worship. Speaker, the Rev. Brian Moore, of Charleston, S.C.

### Saturday

- 10:30 a.m. Youth Live Recording.
- 1 p.m. Mass Choir Live Recording
- 8 p.m. Concert, cost \$20.

## Groups fight for rights in Congress

By Richard Carelli  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Still stinging from a Supreme Court defeat in June, a broad-based coalition of religious groups is seeking a balm in Congress.

"Religious freedom is too sacred a right to be left on the floor of the Supreme Court chambers," says J. Brent Walker of the Baptist Joint Committee, a coalition member. "I'm confident Congress will act swiftly to once again pro-

tect such freedom."

Marc Stern of the American Jewish Congress, another coalition member, shares Walker's confidence.

"There is a commitment in the Congress to reassert its authority," he says.

That authority was weakened when the nation's highest court said Congress had unlawfully enacted the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The 1993 law made it harder for government to interfere with how Americans

practice their faith.

It had been aimed at overcoming a 1990 Supreme Court ruling that said laws otherwise neutral toward religion can be valid even if they infringe on some people's religious beliefs.

The 1993 law required that any federal, state or local law imposing a "substantial burden" on someone's religious beliefs must serve a "compelling" government interest in the least intrusive way.

That standard would let govern-

ment protect health and safety, but also give religious minorities far more protection.

For example, the now-invalidated federal law was invoked by a group of Jehovah's Witnesses in California to win their fight against taking a loyalty oath as a condition for state employment.

In passing the law, Congress had relied on a portion of the 14th Amendment that lets it "enforce by appropriate legislation" the

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## Lyons to take brief sabbatical

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Amid calls for his resignation, the Rev. Henry J. Lyons is taking a break from preaching and severing business ties with the convicted embezzler he hired as the organization's public relations director.

After weeks of battling allegation of adultery, Lyons announced in Bethel Metropolitan Church's Sunday bulletin that he planned to "take a moment of rest and reflection during the month of August" — a leave from preaching.

Speaking shortly before preaching Sunday's sermon, his wife Deborah at his side, Lyons also said he is severing business ties with Bernice V. Edwards, although he said the couple has a strong personal commitment to

her.

"Mrs. Edwards has three children and Sister Lyons and I have agreed that if something were to happen to her we would take them and raise them," Lyons said. "That's how close we are. There's nothing going on. Nothing illicit. Just family friends."

The relationship between Lyons and Edwards was called into question July 6 when Deborah Lyons was charged with setting fire to a \$700,000 Tierra Verde house owned by her husband and Edwards. Lyons, married for 25 years, listed himself as unmarried on the property deed.

Sheriff's deputies say Deborah Lyons told them she suspected her husband was having an affair with Edwards. Nothing could be further from the truth, she said

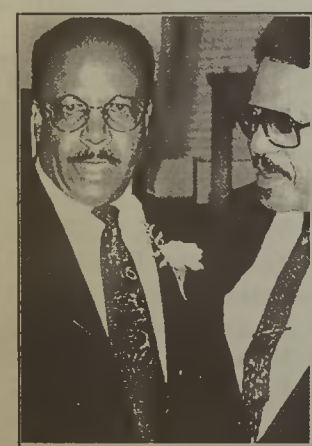
Sunday.

"Mrs. Edwards and I have a close relationship. We are friends. We go out to dinner and talk on the phone all the time," Deborah Lyons said. "It's sad that the St. Petersburg Times has turned this into something dirty."

The pastor did not elaborate on what he meant by his decision to sever business ties with Edwards.

In addition to her job with the National Baptist Convention USA, Edwards, of Milwaukee, also holds a position with a National Baptist Convention affiliate that markets cemetery services. In 1995, Lyons entered a deal with the Loewen Group, Inc., one of the nation's largest funeral services providers to endorse Loewen as the "death care

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PHOTO/AP

After a month of speculation, Dr. Henry Lyons announced Sunday that he would take a break from the ministry.

## Flake chooses church

By Kathleen Sampey  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — The Rev. Floyd Flake told his followers Sunday that he had chosen them over Congress, saying at an early-morning church service: "On Oct. 15, I will bid adieu to the United States House of Representatives. Then I'm yours."

Flake, D-N.Y., in the middle of his sixth term representing southeast Queens, is the second member of Congress from New York City to leave politics to pursue other interests. Susan Molinari left her seat from Staten Island to join CBS News.

"I have never taken a step that the Lord didn't bless," Flake told an audience of 2,500 at the Allen African Methodist Episcopal Church in Jamaica, explaining that his decision came after many months of prayer and deliberation. "I will work full time as your pastor here."

The congregation responded to his declaration with sustained and thunderous applause.

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, every candidate for mayor, and other elected officials were among those attending services.

Gov. George Pataki can call a special election 30 to 40 days after Flake's seat becomes vacant on Oct. 15, or he could leave the seat unfilled until the next round of Congressional elections in 1998. The Sixth Congressional District is heavily Democratic and it is likely that if a Democratic primary were held, the winner would end up in Congress.

Flake said his main reason for resigning before his term was up was directly tied to the opening of Allen AME's new \$23 million cathedral.

He said financing of the new building would convert from a construction loan to a permanent mortgage on or near Oct. 1.

"I do not want to take the risk of being out of here for 12 to 15 months," Flake said at a press conference following services, "and not have the time to build the kind of infrastructure and foundation necessary for this congregation to carry that obligation. This is really tied to the needs of the church."

Flake met privately with President Clinton Friday and said the president expressed regret at his decision, but "we both agreed that our relationship is beyond politics. It's a friendship that will continue to grow."

Flake said he wanted to focus his energies on nurturing the church's growing ministry and commitment to the economic revitalization of the predominantly black community where it is based.

He has been Allen AME's pastor since 1976. When he took on the additional job of congressman 10 years later, the combined roles considerably broadened his sphere of influence, and his achievements were cited again and again by congregants and city officials alike.

After services, Giuliani told reporters that Flake's ability to rise above partisan politics might be his greatest accomplishment.