

13A

## RELIGION

## God's plan revealed to John

### Sunday School Lesson

Devotional: Revelation 4:1-11  
Lesson scripture: Revelation 4, 5

During his exile on the rocky island of Patmos, John was given a series of messages and visions to convey to the seven churches in Asia (Revelation 1:11). First came the letter to the churches (Revelation 2 and 3). Chapter 4 begins with the opening of a door in Heaven, after which John hears a voice: "Come up hither, and I will show thee these things which must be hereafter" (verse 1). The rest of the chapter then presents a description of the glory of God seated upon His throne and of the response of reverent worshipers to His glory. Our lesson text for today is taken from Chapter 5, which introduces God's worthy Lamb.

The one holding this book is referred to as him that sat on the throne. He is the One who has just received worship and adoration in chapter four, and before whom the elders have cast their crowns. The book that He holds should not be thought of as the kind to which we are accustomed. This was a scroll, rolled together and sealed with seven seals.

Rolled documents of papyrus, parchment, or vellum (a more durable form of parchment) were usually inscribed on only the smoother face of the material, which became the inside of the scroll as it was unfolded and read. Only if a great amount of material had to be recorded would the back side be used as well, and this would become immediately evident to even the casual observer. Clearly, there was much to say in the book that John saw! The prophet Ezekiel was offered a similar scroll, also with writing on both sides, and was commanded to eat it (Ezekiel 2:9-3:2).

Seals, commonly of wax, were affixed to important documents to: (1) indicate ownership, (2) assure genuineness of authorship, (3) protect against any change or abuse of contents, and (4) conceal the contents until a properly authorized person was present for the opening. The use of seven seals indicates complete and perfect security against such tampering. The seven seals seem to have been immediately visible, which suggests that they were aligned along the outside of the scroll. This would lead one to believe that all the seals had to be broken before any of the contents could be read.

However, the impression given in the following chapter is that as each seal was opened, a new vision was revealed to John. It appears more likely that the scroll consisted of seven separate sheets, and that when a seal was opened, a sheet was unfolded before John. At any rate, this document was secured in a manner appropriate for the mysteries of God that it contained.

The business of one of God's messengers (an angel) is not a work for weaklings. An angel rolled the huge stone away from the entrance to Jesus' tomb (Matthew 28:2). Another angel is seen tossing a "great milestone" into the sea (Revelation 18:21). The angel introduced here may have been Michael or Gabriel, but his question is more important than his name. The candidate for breaking the seven seals and revealing its mysteries had to be worthy in every way: Ability, character, and standing with God and man.

Strong repetition of the negatives in this verse emphasizes the hopelessness John felt in the search for one qualified to receive, open and examine the scroll extended by the Ruler of the universe.

## Dieters find divine inspiration in prayer

By Mary Beth Smetzer  
FAIRBANKS DAILY NEWSMINER

FAIRBANKS - Take a nutrition plan, some Bible study, add a prayer journal, Scripture and cookbook. Combine faithfully with a commitment to Christ, mutual support and weekly exercise.

Those are the main ingredients of First Place, a national Christian-centered weight control program.

"The ultimate goal of First Place is not just to lose weight but to get closer to the Lord and Christian people," said Ellen Harney, who has been leading the women-only interdenominational meetings at the Seventh-day Adventist school since September.

Harney had never considered including prayer in her efforts to

lose weight until she saw an ad in a Christian woman's magazine last summer. Praying to shed pounds seemed trivial, she said, when there are so many larger problems in life and the world to pray for.

Still, the ad was intriguing. She called the 800 number, sent for the First Place materials, liked what she saw, and held an inaugural meeting last fall.

"Unlike drugs or alcohol, you can't stop eating. You have to eat," Harney says. Bible study helps participants focus on keeping track of their eating and asking for help in changing their habits.

A typical First Place meeting starts with 15 minutes of private weigh-ins, followed by 15 minutes devoted to nutrition. Bible study, led by Harney, takes up the next 45 minutes and the

meeting concludes with 15 minutes of prayer requests.

Group members commit to prayer, Scripture reading, Bible study, a nutrition plan, exercise and filling out daily fact sheets. They also agree to make one supportive call to another member each week or drop them a postcard.

Anyone having a problem resisting temptation is encouraged to call the group leader or a prayer partner. The program, developed by a Texas Baptist church in 1979, offers four 13-week sessions. Costs range from \$2.50 a week to \$5 a week.

Valerie Isaacson has dropped 18 pounds at First Place. "By going through the Bible study, you learn your body is the temple of the Lord and he wants you to keep it healthy and beautiful on the inside," she said.

The small group promotes spiritual, mental, emotional and physical well-being, participants say.

Mary Kuhn, one of Harney's original Wednesday night group members, said she made a commitment to follow the program until she lost 20 pounds. She is just one-half pound from that goal and intends to continue on the 13-week program cycle for maintenance.

Bible study becomes an important addition to the dieters' daily routines.

"I set my alarm clock a half an hour early and do my Bible reading first thing in the morning," Kuhn said. Writing in journals provides extra focus as well.

First Place members count food exchanges - or portions - instead of calories.

## Blacks denying HIV/AIDS dangers

By Jeri Young  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

African America is in a state of denial about HIV and AIDS, says the Rev. Gwen Curry.

And the faith community needs to step up efforts to halt the epidemic.

"Here in the African American community we're in state of denial that it is a disease that is affecting us," Curry says. "It's not just a disease of homosexuals. That's the myth that we must contend with."

Curry is the North Carolina coordinator for the African American Faith Initiative. The group, an offshoot of the HIV/STD Control Section Division of Epidemiology, North Carolina Department of Environment Health and Natural Resources will host a free conference Tuesday at Walls Memorial AME Zion Church. The initiative is designed to certify church leaders to educate about the impact and prevention of AIDS. Dr. Janet Wise, assistant section chief for the Control Section, will be the instructor.

"This is an invitation to Christians and Muslims to come together," Curry says. "They will be certified as prevention educators. Through the churches we can reach a larger percentage of the African American community."

According to the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control, 56 percent of reported female AIDS cases were among black

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## Twice lynched Muslim to speak here

By Jeri Young  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

When Minister Abdul Bey Muhammad sees police brutality on TV, it bothers him.

Muhammad cringes when he sees the videotapes of the beating of Rodney King or other African Americans. He can identify with the victims - he was beaten and hanged by Louisiana police.

"They strung me up by my tie," Muhammad said. "But the tie broke. I just thank God for that."

As a young minister, he spent several years organizing a Nation of Islam mosque in tiny Monroe, La.

"They (the police) didn't like that we had a newspaper," Muhammad said. "They made it difficult for us to sell papers. They put fear in the hearts of the people we were selling papers to."

According to Muhammad, he and his group were harassed and arrested for no reason.

"There were never any charges," he said. "Just intimidation."

Muhammad was arrested and sentenced to six years in prison on charges ranging from attempting to overthrow the government to inciting a riot and desecrating the American flag. He served three years, during which his case was appealed to the Supreme Court, which dropped the charges.

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## Convocation a success



PHOTOS/SUE ANN JOHNSON

Worshippers celebrate the closing of the AME Zion's Quadrennial Evangelistic Convocation in April. The event, sponsored by the Bureau of Evangelism brought hundreds of worshippers to Fort Mill, S.C. for three days of lectures on improving church ministries.

## Chavis loses UCC ministerial license

By Jeri Young  
THE CHARLOTTE POST

A United Church of Christ group recommended the termination of the Rev. Benjamin Chavis Muhammad's standing with the denomination last week.

The 12-member Church and Ministry Commission of UCC's Eastern North Carolina Association ruled Thursday that Chavis Muhammad's standing be "terminated without prejudice."

The ruling ended months of speculation 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 as a minister of the 1.5 million member UCC, although he could technically seek ministerial standing with another UCC association.

Chavis Muhammad, former chief executive officer of the NAACP, was ordained by the group in 1980.

The commission reached the decision "painfully and with much discussion," said CMC chair the Rev. J. C. Cheek, pastor of Durham's Mount Calvary UCC.

The Rev. Rollin Russell, Conference Minister of the UCC's Southern Conference said the decision was difficult "because Ben is a friend and has been a friend for many years." But, Russell 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 be no other name.'"

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

The group commended Chavis Muhammad for his years of service and for his efforts "to bring people together across racial and religious lines and to bring reconciliation among all people," the formal motion released by the group read.

But a majority of commission members felt his work with the Nation of Islam "is not a ministry that requires UCC ministerial standing," Russell said.

The motion will go before the Eastern North Carolina Association Board of Directors in May or June.

The board voted in March to suspend Chavis Muhammad pending a final ruling.

Chavis Muhammad has been

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PHOTOS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Chavis Muhammad says he will do what God tells him. Above, pictured during January's Black Monday protest.