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RELIGION

Choir concert

Queen City Mass Choir to perform. See Church News page 11A.

Sunday School LESSON



In this next unit of lessons, we turn to the book of David for another look at that period of history when Israel was under the rule of Babylon. This domination began when Nebuchadnezzar and his army besieged Jerusalem and forced King Jehoiakim to surrender (Daniel 1:1,2). The defeated king was allowed to stay in Jerusalem and rule his people, but he had to pay tribute to Babylon. At that time only a few captives were taken away. Among them were four brave and faithful young men, who realized that, although they were now dwelling in a foreign land, they still had a responsibility to obey God.

The few captives taken to Babylon in 605 B.C. may have been used to try to teach King Jehoiakim a lesson. Perhaps he would think, twice about rebuilding if some of his sons and his country's prominent young men were held prisoners in Babylon. Their captivity, however did not mean punishment, menial work, or any kind of mistreatment. They were to be students in a special "honors" program, and were to be treated very well.

The officer sent to select from the captives was the manager of the king's household and court, the chief of his court officials. The King James Version here calls him the master of the king's eunuchs. Many royal attendants were emasculated, both to make them more submissive and loyal, and to prevent any misconduct with ladies of the court. As used in the Old Testament, however, the particular Hebrew word rendered eunuchs is used to describe any royal official, whether he was literally an eunuch or not.

The captives chosen were to be young men of the upper class: from the royal family and the nobility, men from the king's own family or otherwise holding high places in government.

A careful selection process took place for the most attractive, talented, and capable of the captives. Personal appearance was important in ancient Babylon as well as in our culture! Beyond that, these men had to be able to learn new things quickly, to understand difficult concepts, and to analyze new situations.

They had to be able to speak in the Babylonian language and be familiar with the Babylonian culture. This would qualify them to serve in the king's place as his advisers.

Obviously Nebuchadnezzar meant to take the best and brightest young men of Israel and make them into highly trained and loyal Babylonians. Then he would have among his advisers some men who were thoroughly acquainted with.

Hebrew ways of thinking and acting. Such men would be a valuable asset in dealing with the Jews, whom he intended to keep as a permanent part of his empire.

Verses 6 and 7 (not in our printed text) name four of the Hebrew students. In order to sever their ties with their Hebrew heritage and culture, the prince of the eunuchs gave them Babylonian names that contained references to Babylonian gods. For example, Daniel's new name, Belteshazzar means, "O Bel, protect the king!" For some reason not explained, the record continues to call Daniel by his Hebrew name; but the others more often are called by their new names; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Nothing is said about the organization of the "school" attended by Daniel and his friends, but we can imagine what it was like. Probably Nebuchadnezzar had brought bright young men from other conquered countries as well as from Judah.

For economic reasons it would have been wise to house them in a common residence, feed them in a common dining room, and teach them in common classrooms as much as their languages would permit.

Board debates changing Bible school ruling

By Estes Thompson
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHAPEL HILL - The policy board that oversees the University of North Carolina system says it no longer wants to vote on exempting bible colleges from state licensing rules.

Members of the Board of Governors and the former UNC

system president have said their votes imply that the board approves the schools' programs. Some board members say the law should be changed.

"It implies that the University of North Carolina board approves," said former system president C.D. Spangler Jr. during a discussion at a June board

meeting. The board voted in September to eliminate the exemption chore, which is required by law, to its staff.

But one bible college administrator, Tamra Wood of Vintage Bible College in Winston-Salem, said it's clearly understood that the exemption isn't an approval of the college's curriculum quality.

Vintage teaches courses like the Book of Acts, the Life of Christ, Dynamics of the Holy Spirit, Biblical Leadership, Church Administration, Introduction to Missions and Bible Prophecy.

"It's strictly Bible courses," said Wood, wife of the interdenominational college's founder. So far this quarter, 54 students have

enrolled.

Vintage opened in January, 1996 and offers an associate's degree in biblical studies and a bachelor's degree in theology. Because the school is exempt from state licensing rules, it doesn't have to teach such basics as English, math and science. The college, which isn't accredited, can offer whatever religion courses it

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Baptists end alliance

Controversial deal with white funeral home ends

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. - A large cemetery corporation has pulled out of an alliance with the National Baptist Convention USA and turned over its files to Florida prosecutors.

The Loewen Group, second largest operator of cemeteries and funeral homes in North America, told the convention this month it was ending its two-year business relationship with the group, the St. Petersburg Times reported Saturday.

The conglomerate had paid an organization created by the convention to market cemetery services to the 8.5 million convention members.

Pilot projects in Detroit, Washington, D.C., and St. Petersburg generated between \$1.5 and \$2 million in sales since 1995, the newspaper said it learned from an unnamed convention official.



Lyons

The Rev. Henry Lyons, under fire for personal and financial transactions, is president of the convention and survived several attempts to oust him at the group's annual meeting earlier this month.

"We have been reviewing the whole program, and we have basically made the decision that we don't want to continue," said David A. Laundy, a spokesman for Loewen in Vancouver, British Columbia. "Our position is that because of the investigation that has been undertaken by the (Pinellas County) State Attorney's Office, we're not going to be in a position to say much. I can tell you that we have terminated the agreement," Laundy told the Times.

Laundy told the convention of the decision at the Denver meeting, he said in a letter dated Sept. 5, the last day of the convention meeting.

Laundy said Loewen has been asked by prosecutors to "supply documentation and information" about the arrangement as part of an ongoing criminal investigation of Lyons.

He said the company has cooperated fully with authorities.

The deal with the white-owned Loewen group had been controversial for Lyons. Some black undertakers had complained that Loewen was trying to run them out of business and viewed Lyons' partnership with Loewen as a betrayal, according to the Times.

In a document, Lyons told convention members Loewen paid a total of \$800,000 - \$300,000 of which went to the convention.

He didn't say where the rest went, according to the newspaper.

Legacy of worship



Throng of believers gather at the House of Prayer on McDowell Street. Holy Convocation continues through this weekend. Band competition will be held Saturday at 2 p.m. Baptism is Sunday at 11 a.m. Closing worship services begin at 8 p.m. Sunday. All events will be held at the Mother House of Prayer, 2321 Beatties Ford Road.

Convocation a time for celebration

By Jeri Young
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Every fall for more than 50 years, Charlotte's black community lined the streets of Brooklyn.

They watched as hundreds of uniformed members of The United House of Prayer for all People marched down Brevard, Caldwell and McDowell streets.

Nurses and ushers wore white. Grace Soldiers sporting navy blue. Brass bands played "When the Saints Go Marching In."

Near the end of the parade came C.M. "Daddy" Grace, the charismatic leader and founder of the House of Prayer. Surrounded by a bevy of church members, Grace's float slowly wound through downtown to the cheers of thousands.

To some, Grace was a charlatan. But to millions of others, he was a tonic. He was a sight to behold, his hair blowing in the breeze, his four-inch rainbow-painted fingernails flashing as his threw candy to the throngs.

The parades ended 20 years ago, but the holy week Grace created still brings thousands to Charlotte each year for Holy Convocation - seven days of healing and renewal for the 4.5 million members of the House of Prayer for All People.

Charlotte and the surrounding area boasts 14 Houses of Prayer. Membership is in the thousands. Each fall they gather to worship and celebrate.

"Convocation comes from a biblical concept," says Apostle C.B. Gibson, who heads the Mother House of Prayer on

Beatties Ford Road. "It's a celebration of God's goodness and blessing."

Although Grace died almost 40 years ago, his traditions are carried on. Current House of Prayer Bishop, the Honorable S.C. Madison, will baptize several hundred believers Sunday. House of Prayer bands from around the country will perform Saturday. And of course, church members will gather to worship and pray.

"It's a time to put away all of the trials and tribulations of the past 12 months," Gibson said. "It's just a time to give thanks."

Humble beginnings

Grace was on a mission in 1926.

He went from state to state along the Eastern Seaboard drumming up support for the church he formed in 1919 in

Needham, Mass. His was a simple faith that appealed to masses of downtrodden blacks, as charismatic as the man that brought it. Music and spirited sermons that left "shouters" spent in the aisles dominated Grace's services.

"I'm a Bible man from the Bible land," Grace proclaimed in a 1957 interview. "I'm preaching the last and everlasting gospel."

Grace said he appealed to people because he supplied something they didn't have - hope. The early 1900s were ripe with religious revivalists. Father Divine was preaching in New York. Drew Ali had begun preaching a black nationalist religion that would eventually become the Nation of Islam.

"My people call me Daddy because I treat them like a father," Grace said in an early interview.



PHOTOS/PUBLIC LIBRARY OF CHARLOTTE AND MECKLENBURG COUNTY

The McDowell House of Prayer shortly before demolition. The church was bought by the city for less than \$240,000 - almost \$60,000 less than it cost to build it ten years earlier.

In the summer of 1926, Grace rolled into Charlotte. He pitched a tent in the heart of Charlotte's black community, near the corner of Third and Caldwell streets.

"Bishop Grace came teaching Jesus is soon to come," Olivia Harvell said. "And the people just started to come."

Harvell, then in her early teens, was among the thousands who attended the tent worship services. Raised by her grandparents, she was looking for spiritual fulfillment.

There was something special about him, she said. When Grace called for believers, Harvell gave her hand.

"He was a different person," Harvell, 86, said. "He just seemed to be concerned about the welfare of people. He wanted to help people. He was just a father to a lot of people."

At that time, Grace held mass baptisms in the "colored" swimming pool on Beatties Ford Roads as well as in the Catawba River, Harvell said.

Grace performed miracles during those services, believers say, Harvell said she saw them.

"He had us to line up, he would put his hands on you," Harvell said. "You'd be healed. Crippled people would throw down their crutches and start walking. I saw that with my own eyes."

Harvell was baptized in a pool behind Charlotte's first House of Prayer on Long Street. The small wooden structure was finished in 1927 for less than \$200. Church members erected the building after spending hours laboring

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