

Sunday School LESSON



Last week we read how four Hebrew youths became honor students in Babylon and became rookies on the king's team of wise men (Daniel 1:17-20). These young men not only had brilliant minds; they also had help from the Lord. With the aid of a revelation from God, Daniel was able to answer a question that had stumped all the senior wise men of the realm. Nebuchadnezzar then appointed Daniel chief of the wise men and ruler of the province of Babylon. His three friends also became important officials in the province.

Naturally some native Babylonians and older wise men were not pleased to have these foreign youngsters in authority over them. No doubt they watched eagerly for the young men to blunder, hoping to use the error against them. It was several years before they found a means to accuse the Hebrews.

Opportunity for such criticism came at a great celebration planned by Nebuchadnezzar. The centerpiece of this occasion was a huge image set up in the plain of Dura, somewhere near the city of Babylon. The image is not described in detail. The simple description given tells us only the material used to construct the image and its size. It was made of gold. Considering its great size, most commentators suppose that this means it was gold plated, not made of solid gold. The image was ninety feet tall and nine feet wide.

Some students think this image may have been a statue of Nebuchadnezzar. Others say this is not likely, for the king called for worship of his gods, not himself. So the suggestion has been offered that the image may have represented one of the Babylonian gods - perhaps Marduk, the chief god of Babylon. Again, others point out the references to worshiping gods - not one god - and so this interpretation is also questioned. Some have suggested the image may simply have been a large pillar or obelisk. Whatever the exact shape or image, bowing to it was clearly a test of one's loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar, to his empire; and to the Babylonian gods. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego recognized the pagan connection and refused to bow down.

To the celebration were invited officials from all the provinces of the far-flung Babylonian empire. A vast crowd gathered on the plain before the image. Then a herald shouted an announcement. At the sound of the instruments, everyone would be thrown into a blazing furnace. At this point the record says nothing about what the image represented, but we can be sure the people understood. Either the image itself made that obvious or the record is simply abbreviated and does not include all the explanations that may have been given.

Upon hearing the instruments, everyone in the vast throng immediately dropped to his knees and bent forward with his face to the ground - that is, nearly everyone. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remained standing. Jews worshiped Yahweh and no one else.

One of the ironies of this story is that there is no mention of Daniel. Where was he? Surely he was not bowing down to the image. Nor is it likely that he was away on business when rulers of all the provinces were summoned to Babylon. We simply have no information about where Daniel was or what he was doing. Unfortunately, we will have to content ourselves with that.

Some envious men were not too much engrossed in worship to raise their heads and see the Hebrews still standing. This was clearly an act of rebellion. At their earliest opportunity, these watchful Babylonians reported what they had seen to the king, and the king sent for the disobedient men. The king was furious, because he had been disobeyed.

Baptists take daily purse strings from Lyons

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MILWAUKEE - A Milwaukee clergyman who is helping review the financial affairs of the National Baptist Convention USA says the 117-year-old organization is overdue for new fiscal regulations.

The Rev. Fred Crouther, chairman of the organization's budget

committee since 1994, plans to meet monthly in Nashville, Tenn., with the convention's officers.

They include its president, the Rev. Henry Lyons of St. Petersburg, Fla.

Lyons' management has been under scrutiny since July when it was disclosed he owned a \$700,000 Florida home with

Bernice Edwards.

She was convicted of embezzlement a few years ago in Milwaukee after running a private school, drug counseling agency and other businesses with taxpayer funds.

Lyons had put Edwards on the convention payroll. He has maintained his role as president

despite questions about the use of convention funds.

"Something should have been in place long before now. We're trying to bring credibility and trust back to our convention," Crouther told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.

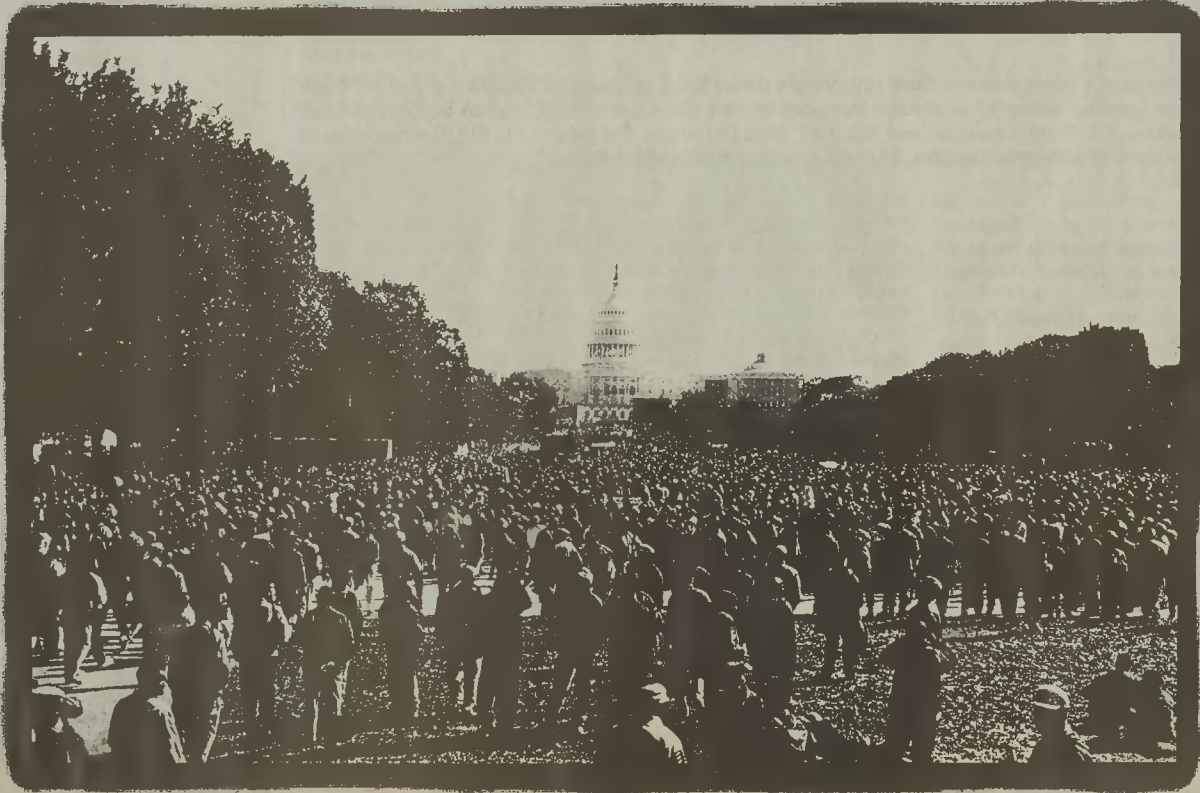
For the first time in the convention's history, its day-to-day oper-

ations are no longer in the president's hands, Crouther, pastor of New Covenant Missionary Baptist Church, said.

Financial donations to the convention will be placed in a fund recently established in Nashville.

"No funds can come out of that account unless they are voted on by the executive committee or the board of directors," Crouther said.

Atonement Day activities planned



PHOTOS/ OF RODERICK TERRY

Minister Lewis Farrakhan-led Million Man March drew a million men to Washington on Oct. 16, 1995 for first Day of Atonement. Several cities, including Charlotte, will be sites for 2nd anniversary.

Mosque sets rally for Million Man March Anniversary

By Jeri Young THE CHARLOTTE POST

The Nation of Islam will host a symposium next week to mark the second anniversary of the 1995 Million Man March, a mosque leader said Wednesday.

Minister Robert Muhammad said next Thursday will be a day of revival and atonement for the Charlotte community. The event, which will be held at the Tuckaseegee Road Mosque, begins at noon with an interfaith service and ends that night with a message via satellite by



Muhammad

Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. During the day, a documentary of the Million Man March commissioned by NOI will be debated.

Other events include African dance and music as well as a gospel showcase.

"This is part of the process of atonement," Muhammad said. "It's important to keep that in focus."

According to Muhammad, several events are planned, including an ecumenical prayer service and discussion. Interfaith worship is the key to atonement, Muhammad said.

"If we had to depend on the Nation of Islam to make the Million Man March a success, we would have been about 2 million short," he said. "We are actively seeking the participation of all groups. If you have a talent, we need you."

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Promise Keepers vow change at home

By Donna Abu-Nasr THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - Joseph Scott plans to start communicating better with his girlfriend and try to see things from her perspective.

Cecil Parrack, a 54-year-old teacher, wants to start a men's ministry in his hometown of Pueblo, Colo.

Lloyd Mongold, 45, who works in a poultry plant in Petersburg, W.Va., intends to pray more to become a man of God.

Buoyed by Saturday's Promise Keepers mammoth rally, which attracted hundreds of thousands of evangelical Christian men to Washington, many like Scott, Parrack and Mongold returned home eager to make a difference in their lives.

"The gathering is not a period at the end of a sentence. It's a nice

paragraph in the middle of a book," said Scott, 36, an audio engineer from New York City.

Promise Keepers founder Bill McCartney said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press" that the six-hour assembly on the National Mall was "a tremendous display of hunger for God that exists in men today."

To appease the hunger, McCartney plans to replicate the experience nationwide on Jan. 1, 2000, with rallies at every state capitol to "take roll call" for Jesus Christ.

He also wants to take his ministry worldwide.

"I believe God is showing us now that he wants us to go global," he said. "How that unfolds is anybody's guess."

But he said his movement has

already started doing research and is bringing in people from around the world to "teach us how to be culturally sensitive so that we can communicate effectively and advance the gospel of Jesus Christ."

The Promise Keepers have won an endorsement from Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan.

The Promise Keepers held a rally Saturday at the site of Farrakhan's Million Man March two years earlier. Farrakhan said that while Promise Keepers is a "mostly white" organization and the Nation of Islam is led by blacks, the groups hold similar ideals.

"Any call that brings men in particular back to God and makes

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AP PHOTO

Promise Keepers strain to see at weekend rally in Nation's Capital. Thousands attended Christian rally.

Prisons can take gifts

By Randi Goldberg THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DETROIT - Under pressure from Congress and religious groups, federal prison officials Monday lifted a ban on gifts of religious items that was imposed last month under a strict interpretation of new ethics rules.

The rule had threatened to prevent inmates from having the prayer books and other ritual items needed for their observances.

The order, signed by Attorney General Janet Reno last month, said no employee of the Department of Justice "may solicit gifts or encourage the solicitation of gifts to the Department," unless she approved the donation in advance.

Federal prison chaplains interpreted the order to include religious donations intended for inmates, according to the Aleph Institute, a Surfside, Fla. group that represents Jewish federal prisoners.

"Of all the groups in this country, inmates are the one group that definitely needs structure and spirituality," Isaac Jarosawicz, the Aleph Institute's executive director, said Monday. "We're not talking about weightlifting equipment or pornography."

One week before Rosh Hashana, the Jewish new year that fell last Thursday and Friday, he said he was inundated by phone calls from chaplains telling him they had to return prayer books and ritual materials they had previously ordered for Jewish inmates to use during the High Holidays.

The 112,000 federal prison population includes about 1,400 Jewish inmates, according to Jarosawicz.

"Absent a directive countering it, chaplains would've been hard pressed to get material to fulfill a specific prisoner's religious needs," said Deborah Phillips of The Justice Fellowship, a Baptist prisoner rights group in suburban Washington.

That reverse order was issued Monday, Bureau of Prisons spokesman Todd Craig said.

"During the last two weeks, the issue has been under review and today, authority has been re-delegated to wardens to accept donations, whether educational or religious in nature," Craig said.

Prison wardens can accept donations worth up to \$250. Beyond that, the assistant attorney general must review the donation, Craig said.

The original order was intended for Department of Justice officials so avoid the appearance of any conflict of interest by accepting gifts.

"I'm glad that this has been worked out. The policy that was previously in place was threatening to inmates and made no sense in the context that it was being applied," said U.S. Rep. Charles Canady, R-Fla., a member of the House judiciary Committee.

"I think it was just something they didn't anticipate," Canady said.

He and another committee member, U.S. Rep. Jerrold

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