

Harvest of the Gospel Age

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”

—Matthew 24:14

JESUS SPOKE THESE PRO-

phetic words to his disciples as his earthly ministry was drawing to a close. Taking them aside, he said that the message of Truth and the Heavenly Father’s invitation of the heavenly calling would

continue to be preached throughout this present Gospel Age to all who had an ear to hear. Furthermore, that his consecrated followers would be given the privilege to participate in dispensing this gospel message concerning his glorious future kingdom, and the part that his faithful followers would share in it.

The commission to his followers was, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”—Matt. 28:19,20, *New American Standard Bible*

The Master was thus preparing his disciples that he would soon be departing from them. He wanted them to know that he would be physically absent from them for a long time, even during the dark centuries of the intervening Gospel Age until his promised return. However, he also assured them that his spiritual presence and guidance would continue over them during that period of time. This was very evident in his reassuring words, 'I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'

FULFILLMENT OF TIME PROPHECY

Recorded history, as well as the prophetic words of scripture, indicate that the mid A.D. 1870s would point to the end of this present Gospel Age, and also mark the time that Jesus would return and be invisibly present with his people. The records foreshadowed a special time of revival and renewed interest in studying the Scriptures, and there would be an extensive harvest work conducted by the Lord's people. This would be done by way of the printed page, by word of mouth, and in other ways.

Jesus spoke of this special time when his disciples came asking him to explain the meaning of his teaching concerning the wheat and tares. (Matt. 13:36) The scriptural account records his answer and his reference to the end of the age. He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels."—Matt 13:37-40, *NASB*

SPIRITUAL FOOD

A special feature concerning the time of which Jesus spoke, clearly points to the giving of the blessed meat in due season. Truth on many subjects had been hidden from the worldly wise, and would at that time be received by the true followers of Jesus upon his return. The expression ‘meat in due season’ suggests that there was to be bountiful and rich spiritual food, and that our returned Lord himself would serve his faithful watchers at that time. He said, “Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.”—Luke 12:37

In connection with God’s prophetic Word, the Apostle Peter states that those who wrote the prophecies seldom understood their true meaning. “So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”—II Pet. 1:19-21, *NASB*

In his first epistle, Peter also spoke of this when he wrote, “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you.” (I Pet. 1:10) The apostle further stated that even the angels did not know the wonderful plans of the Heavenly Father. “It was revealed to them that they were not

serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.”—I Pet. 1:12, *NASB*

This had been acknowledged by Daniel earlier, when he wrote, “I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.”—Dan. 12:7-9

HIDDEN TREASURES

The Prophet Isaiah also proclaimed the wonderful blessing of Truth that God would give to his special people at the appointed time. “I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.”—Isa. 45:3

The wise admonition of Solomon provides further perspective for all who desire to look into the wonderful secrets of God. A proper heart attitude is necessary to receive the bountiful blessings that God has in store for his people. “My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea,

if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear [reverence] of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.”—Prov. 2:1-5

THE SPIRIT OF FREEDOM

True to the long-awaited promises of God at the prophetic end of this age, there were honest-hearted seekers for Truth who were searching the chronological records of the Scriptures in an effort to find evidence of the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus. After the dramatic and terrible events that had taken place during the recent French Revolution, a new sense of liberty was being experienced, not only in Europe, but especially in colonial America. A new-found sense of religious freedom led to a general awakening and interest in a study of the Scriptures. This liberty of thought gained momentum throughout the country during the nineteenth century.

THE ALLEGHENY CLASS

In about the year 1870, a small class of Christian believers began to meet at Allegheny, Pennsylvania for the purpose of studying the Word of God. Those who gathered together at that time and place were Charles T. Russell, his father Joseph, his sister Mae, William I. Mann, A. D. Jones, W. H. Conley and perhaps a few others.

As a young man, Bro. Russell was very serious-minded, and had joined the group with the sincere desire to find scriptural answers and clarification to some of the doctrines that were then being taught by the churches. In those early days of the Truth movement and in the study of the Bible,

he came to the conclusion that our Lord Jesus had given his life in sacrifice for the entire human family that was under the sentence of death. Based on scripture, he was thus able to conclude that all who were in their graves would be granted the blessing of resurrection under the terms of the Heavenly Father's ultimate plan and purpose for the reconciliation of his human creation. Having attained a more clear understanding of the basic doctrines of ransom and resurrection, he was a few years later chosen as the ecclesia's elder and spiritual leader.

THE LIGHT OF MORNING

About that same time, Nelson H. Barbour had been publishing a magazine called *The Midnight Cry* in Rochester, NY. He later changed the name of the journal to *The Herald of the Morning* to more accurately address the disappointment that had occurred in connection with certain expectations that he had made and the changing times which were at hand. Having given serious study to Biblical chronology, Barbour determined and addressed the concept that they were then living in the foretold end of the age, and that our Lord Jesus' Second Advent was soon to take place.

Bro. Russell contacted Barbour to discuss the Scriptures, especially in connection with our Lord's Second Presence. Their discussion led to Bro. Russell's being further enlightened on the object and manner of our Lord's invisible return and other time prophecies. Later, Barbour, and Russell as assistant editor, published a booklet under the title *The Three Worlds and Plan of Redemption*. This treatise brought the teachings concerning restitution,

resurrection, and the Second Presence together. John H. Paton, who lived in Almont, Michigan, had also been an associate of Barbour's, and he and Bro. Russell contributed articles for the magazine and promoted the message of Truth by travelling in the ministry.

This arrangement continued until Barbour openly denied the ransom doctrine, and at that time Bro. Russell and Paton both left Barbour to go their separate ways. Later, Paton disagreed on the Lord's invisible Second Presence, and began to promote his beliefs in his book *Day Dawn*, and later in his own publication, *The World's Hope*. Bro. Russell was unable to agree with him any longer and they, too, parted company. During this time, there were several others who shared in the initial harvest work by contributing articles or preaching activities, but within a few years Bro. Russell became the most prominent and influential figure within the Bible Student movement, both in America and abroad.

FOOD FOR THINKING CHRISTIANS

In 1881, Bro. Russell wrote *Food for Thinking Christians* with the subtitle, "Why Evil was Permitted." He states that the design of the pamphlet was to supply what we believe to be 'meat in due season' to fully consecrated Christians who hunger and thirst after a fuller knowledge of our Heavenly Father and his plans. He thus directly addressed the scriptures that pointed to our Lord's return, and the added blessing of his serving his faithful watchers with the spiritual food of Truth. (Luke 12:37; Rev. 3:20) Later, this title was changed to *The Divine*

Plan of the Ages which became the first of six volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*. Although the message of Truth was substantially the same, its style was changed to make it more acceptable to the watchers and the general reading public, and that it would be more easily understood and appreciated.

TABERNACLE SHADOWS

To reflect his serious study of the spiritual lessons presented in the Levitical types, *Tabernacle Shadows of the Better Sacrifices* was also published in 1881. It served as an important awakening to the deeper meaning and significance that had never before been appreciated, but was at that special time made known to God's royal priesthood. "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."—I Pet. 2:9

This book revealed the fact that the Levitical types and shadows relate to our Lord Jesus' earthly ministry and sacrificial death, and also the life of sacrifice of the household of faith. Paul admonished, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."—Rom 12:1

A MAGAZINE OF TRUTH

The first issue of a very special Truth magazine appeared in July, 1879 under the title: *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*. It was accompanied with the appropriate and significant words of Isaiah who wrote, "Watchman, what of the night? . . . The morning cometh." (Isa. 21:11,12)

It was published in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with Bro. Russell as editor, and with five others who contributed on a regular basis. It started out as a monthly magazine with approximately 6,000 copies being printed.

The *Watch Tower* has the distinction of being the first magazine published that was devoted to the announcing of the return and Second Presence of our Lord Jesus. The author stated that the object of the publication was to proclaim that we are now living during the closing years of this present Gospel Age. Further, he said that it was designed not only to awaken the Lord's people to a realization of this important fact, but also to assist them in putting on the whole armor of God that they may be able to stand in the evil day which would especially distinguish the closing features of this age—'the great day of the Lord.' Through the *Watch Tower* magazine, Bro. Russell was able to promote the fundamental doctrines of the Truth, with special emphasis on the ransom, restitution, and resurrection in harmony with the purpose of our Lord's return, and the establishing of his future kingdom.

THE HARVEST WORK

Although the harvest work had been carried out from a central point in the Allegheny, Pennsylvania area since the early days of the Truth movement, it was decided that it would be more functional to form a legally organized and centralized body for the managing, publishing, and distributing of the Truth message. In 1884, it was incorporated as Zion's Watch Tower Tract Society and brought

under the laws of the state of Pennsylvania. A few years later, it was changed to Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. It was a nonprofit corporation whose main purpose was to send out the Truth by way of magazines, books, pamphlets, tracts, and other religious material.

The harvest message was thus spread far and wide during the closing decades of the 19th century, and it increased dramatically when the 20th century arrived. This period in the history of the Truth movement witnessed a great interest in the message concerning the heavenly call and other important doctrines of Truth that had been made known by the Second Presence of our Lord.

THE BIBLE HOUSE

As the Truth activities grew, it became necessary to expand the existing facilities and, in 1889, a modern four-story building was erected in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. It served as the Watch Tower headquarters, and became affectionately known among the brethren as the 'Bible House.' It was outfitted with equipment necessary to carry on the work, living quarters for the permanent staff, and a dining room for serving regular meals to the workers. From that location, Bro. Russell oversaw all activities in connection with the harvest work.

As the classes of Bible students grew and became better organized, qualified speaking brethren were sent out from the Bible House to serve the various ecclesias with a message of Truth, and to conduct public meetings when necessary. This endeavor proved to be a wonderful way to keep in touch with brethren who were living in other areas, and it was

eventually expanded into a full-time pilgrim service with regularly scheduled speaking visits.

EXPANDING THE WORK

A major expansion of the harvest work took place in 1908 when the Mission Building, formerly occupied by the Plymouth and Congregational Church in Brooklyn, New York, was purchased. The building was completely renovated and became known as 'The Brooklyn Tabernacle.' There was ample room for shipping and storage facilities in the basement and offices on the first floor. The second floor contained a large auditorium with a seating capacity for about eight hundred people.

Members of the staff were housed in a nearby and separate facility formerly occupied by Henry Ward Beecher. It was a four-story building that became the home for many brethren who came there to serve the Lord, and was known as the 'Bethel Home.' It has been said that mealtime was a special event because of the inclusion of prayer, the singing of hymns, and scriptural questions and comments.

SENDING FORTH THE TRUTH

For more than forty years Bro. Russell was actively engaged in sending forth the message of Truth in every possible way. He made known the Heavenly Father's invitation during this present Gospel Age to those who would accept the heavenly call, and present their lives to God as a living sacrifice. (Rom. 12:1) Those who worked together as one family during this long period of time were richly blessed to share in this harvest work.

The truth concerning Christ's future kingdom as the only hope for the sin-sick world of mankind

was proclaimed throughout the world in many ways and in many languages. Countless numbers of people heard the comforting message, and learned about Christ's future 1,000-year kingdom that would bring promised blessings to all the families of the earth, including those who were resting in their graves.

THE LAST PILGRIMAGE

During his many years of proclaiming the harvest message, the Pastor never slackened his hand nor abated his energies in his faithful service to God. In October, 1916 he put the infirmities of his flesh aside, and started out on what would be his last pilgrimage. It was a transcontinental trip by train that would take him to the most distant parts of America.

Almost from the beginning of the trip difficulties arose, including delays, lost baggage, missing telegrams, and many other incidents that taxed his physical strength. Within a few days it was realized by some of the brethren who were travelling with him that he was not well. Later, it became even more evident that his physical condition had worsened, and the suggestion was made that they should return to New York City, but Bro. Russell was determined to continue on with his pilgrimage.

After having served the brethren for the last time at Los Angeles, California, the Pastor and his traveling companions boarded their train for the return trip to Bethel. His physical condition worsened continually, until he finished his consecrated course in death in the state of Texas on October 31, 1916. Bro. Russell's earthly remains arrived at the Bethel Home in Brooklyn, New York on November 4th.

DIFFICULT TIMES

Profound shock and sadness was experienced by great numbers of brethren and in Bible Student classes throughout the world when it was learned that Bro. Russell had died. They had lost their beloved pastor and were suddenly faced with confusion and major concerns for their spiritual future. Others soon took control over the Society, but no one could possibly assume the work that Bro. Russell had been responsible for during his many years of service. There was a growing lack of acceptance with the new management, and many longtime brethren began to feel uncomfortable with the new arrangements and began leaving to establish new groups or to remain isolated.

It wasn't until many years later, in 1929, that the brethren in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania arranged a reunion convention in October of that year in memory of Bro. Russell. It was well attended and from that time forward other classes began to arrange for additional conventions. A new spirit of revival intensified and brethren were blessed with new opportunities for fellowship, study, and the desire to continue in the harvest work.

THE DAWN

After the success of the 1929 reunion convention, it was decided to hold one every autumn in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This also led to further interest to continue serving in the harvest work. Bro. Norman Woodworth had worked at Bethel with Bro. Russell and encouraged the brethren in the Brooklyn, New York ecclesia to sponsor a thirteen-week radio message in 1931 over station WOR

in New York. For the format, they used the “Frank & Ernest” program that he had developed for the Watchtower Society in the 1920s, which they discarded. Dialogues of the program were printed and offered as a four-page *Radio Echoes* tract to interested listeners. When the radio contract expired, the program was discontinued from lack of funds, but the tract continued to be sent to those who had been receiving it.

The following year the *Radio Echoes* tract was enlarged and renamed *The Dawn* magazine. It was published at the beginning of each month, starting with October, 1932. The original four-page radio tract was still sent out on the 15th of each month under the name *The Dawn* thus making it a bi-monthly magazine. This arrangement was continued until the end of 1933 when the mid-monthly tract was discontinued. *The Dawn* magazine has been published uninterrupted since 1932, and celebrated its 75th anniversary with the October 2007 issue. Throughout this time it has proclaimed the message of Truth, and the invitation to the heavenly call to all who have an ear to hear.

From this small beginning, the Dawn Bible Students Association was established with Bro. Woodworth assuming responsibility as managing editor. The brethren had been eager to share in the harvest work that began in the early days of Bro. Russell. His Truth writings were reprinted, including the six volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*, *Tabernacle Shadows* and many other publications. The “Frank & Ernest” radio work was greatly expanded, and the Dawn pilgrim service brought many isolated and scattered brethren together again since the

pastor's death. In later years, TV programs were prepared, and now Internet is also being used as a means to proclaim the Truth.

Many of Jesus' faithful followers have labored in the Lord's vineyard during the course of these past 77 years. They have thus shared in publishing the heavenly call message that has gone forth during the harvest period of this present Gospel Age. We believe this work will continue until the final number of the Christ will have finished their course in death. Let us strive more faithfully to make our-selves ready for the great hope that lies before us.

The revelator has given us a glimpse of those faithful brethren who have heard the heavenly call and have prepared themselves for the heavenly inheritance. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God."—Rev. 19:7-9 ■