

“THE REAPERS” - ABSCO convention, 2022

Wes Cramer (speaker 1) speaking:

The distinguishing feature of the early Bible Student work was heralding the “Harvest of the Age”... that the second advent, so fervently anticipated for centuries, had now become a reality. Bible Students at the end of the 1800’s were convinced that Pastor Charles Russell was dispensing the Lord’s truth, and not man’s. This was then a time for seeking the honest of heart, and reaping the wheat.

A lot of time has passed, and the tendency with many in this late stage of the Harvest period is to lose that zeal of the early Harvest, and to feel that the reaping work is over. Some, not having experienced any personal persecution from their community over doctrinal issues, may even conclude that there is no need to carry on the activities of the past because there are now more tolerant attitudes in the churches, and that it is time to bury the past conflict with them.

Has our returned Lord finished the work on this side of the veil of gathering his jewels? Evidence from some of the Bible Student activities around our globe would suggest differently — that the Lord of the Harvest is still hard at work in completing his body, and he is using the remaining members — you and me — in witnessing with his sickle of truth — the Harvest Message.

Brethren, those that are awake to world events and social attitudes still proclaim that the “time is short,” that there is still a great separating work to do, and that the culmination of this age and the ushering in of the peaceful Kingdom depends on completing the Church.

We hope that this presentation will convey the loyalty and zeal of Bible Students in the Pastor’s day, and will encourage and reinvigorate you and all of us to the same level of excitement and dedication as fellow reapers.

(PICTURES START HERE)

This is how some of the brethren traveled to local conventions and meetings. Here we have a few of the Cramer Bible student ancestors, not all of them. They’re not all Cramer's. This is what some of the vendors sounded like...

(Song)

We want to take a look at the brethren's perspective, their inspiration, their activities in the world around them. Deep down in their hearts. What were the brethren of the 1912 to 1914 era appreciating the most? Maybe it was the excitement over escalating world tensions and the imminent meltdown of the present evil world. Or perhaps it was the excitement over natural Israel's restoration, which had gotten underway. We suggested all these points and many others were deeply appreciated by the brethren back then. But there was something more fundamental something that was actually underlying all these things and others. The brethren in 1912 to 1914, we suggest appreciated mostly their freedom, their liberty. First, the Jubilee Trump, the trump of freedom had sounded. By 1912, all six volumes of Studies in the Scriptures and Tabernacle Shadows had been written, published and widely distributed around the world. The Lord use the Studies in the Scriptures to liberate the brethren from the suffocating Dark Age creed's that had bound so many for so many centuries, using the sword of his mouth, that is to say the truth, the Lord began to smite every evil system and every evil custom. Let's watch and listen as the Lord essentially declares war on the creed's.

Bro Russell intro to part 3 of the PhotoDrama:

Real Bible study is only beginning. Heretofore, our reading and studies were hindered by our creeds. Now nobody would think of defending any of the creeds. But, as our faith in human creeds dies, our trust in the Bible as divine increases, because we understand it better. In the second century, the mistake was made of proclaiming apostolic bishops of equal authority with those twelve, chosen by our Lord. Bible were costly. Few could read. It was natural that the people should accept the teachings of the apostolic bishops without proving their doctrines by the Bible. As a result, there was no Bible study for fourteen hundred years! No wonder the "faith once delivered to the saints" was lost. Now we are returning to the Bible. The present pope urges all Catholics to study the Bible and warns all against modernism, higher criticism. After so long neglect of the Bible it is not strange that the twists and coloring of the creeds still gives us trouble. Errors and superstitions die hard. Part Third will help up to a broader view of the Bible's message. As our heads get straight, may our hearts respond loyally to God and His truth.

Speaker 1

One of mainstream Christianity's favorite creed's was hellfire and eternal torment, a fiery netherworld that concept was first conceived by ancient pagan philosophers. It was embraced by mainstream Christianity both

Catholic and Protestant, and it was popularized worldwide by Dante's Inferno in his epic poem called Divine Comedy written in the early 1300s. And most of the world accepted and believed in this evil doctrine. In the 1900s brothers such as Barton and Russell and others, gave discourses entitled, Where Are The Dead? In 1909, a book that was published using the same name, and in 1910 the Watchtower published a book bearing the same title. This title used the Bible to expose the origin and the fallacy of this diabolical doctrine. And the slaughter of this and other creed's friends was not just some academic victory, it was not just something they appreciated in their heads. It inspired the brethren to activity. Brethren of all ages.

Bro Ed Lorenz testimony:

I was in kindergarten there at Loveland when one of our little schoolmates died and the school teacher had mentioned to us in our kindergarten that little Mary, that was her name, had died and she went to heaven. So I went home and told mother. I said mother, you know this little girl died and the school teacher said she went to heaven. Well, mother said no, she didn't go to heaven, she's asleep waiting for the resurrection. So mother told me about it and I said to my mother, "Why does the school teacher say this?" Well because she doesn't know better. Well what can we do to help her? Now she said why don't we give you some booklets, so she gave me booklets "Where are the Dead?" and I remember going to school with enough booklets to put in the mailbox for every school teacher in that school. I still remember reaching up and putting those little booklets in the respective areas for the school teachers to receive.

Speaker 1

By 1912, the Truth movement or the Truth outreach was very mature. The parent corporation was the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, incorporated in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, on December 13 1884. The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society had two corporate subsidiaries. One was the People's Pulpit Association, and the second was the International Bible Students Association. It was chartered in Great Britain in 1913. Although these names People's Pulpit and IBSA had been used prior to the incorporation of these two entities. But the Lord use these three entities to preside over many dimensions of the Harvest work... Colporteur, Pilgrims, conventions, tours, numerous publications, the newspaper sermons, class extensions, volunteer extensions, Photo Drama, and others. The truth outreach started out as a work done in the continental US, but soon expanded well beyond the borders of the United States. By 1914,

the Watchtower through the people's pulpit Association, and the IBSA had a solid footprint on every continent. The Watchtower had branch offices in the UK, Australia, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Scotland, Jamaica, South India, South Africa, and Denmark. All of this and more constituted a global truth delivery system, and this system operated more efficiently than any other system on earth. Why? Because the Lord staffed this entire system with volunteers... volunteers, who had a passion for what they believed, and had a passion for wanting to share it worldwide. Time and space today permit us only to look at a small slice of these activities — this one of a kind system. In April of 1881, the Lord through the watchtower, proposed the idea of Truth Colporteurs — ordinary brethren going door to door looking for hungry sheep. One on One witnessing of the truth to those having hearing ears. A Colporteur is generally defined as a peddler of religious books. But the truth Colporteur was more than just a peddler of religious books. The truth Colporteur did two things. First of all, the Colporteurs gave an absolutely 100% free tract to every person that they called on. And second, for those who are more interested the Colporteurs offered for sale publications that were offered through the watchtower, such as Bibles, Watchtower subscriptions Studies in the Scriptures and other truth materials. Colporteurs were to be self supporting purveyors of the truth. No stipend, no salary. They kept only enough of the sale proceeds to defray their out of pocket living expenses. The rest if there was leftover, went back to the Watchtower office to be used elsewhere. The Colporteur quickly became and it remained the engine, it was the driving force, it was the locomotive that pulled along the global truth delivery train. In 1914, 47 million tracts were given out in the United States. Many, not all, but many of these were given out by the Colporteurs. 47 million tracts for the year computes to 128,000 tracts given out every day, 365 days in 1913. If only two people read each tract, those 47 million tracts preached almost 100 million sermons in one year. In 1914, alone, the Colporteurs in the United States sold 700,000 volumes of Studies in the Scriptures. That computes to 2000 volumes sold every day, seven days a week, and that was only in the United States. And 1914 was not unique. Other years in that era witnessed a similar level of activity. Our point is this... Colportering was the number one way that Studies in the Scriptures was distributed around the globe. You didn't find them in bookstores. Colportering was the number one way that the truth seeds were scattered around the world. By the 1890s. Brother Russell was getting many invitations to go, travel and serve many local Ecclesias everywhere. But his limited time and the enormous responsibilities he had at the Watchtower office did not permit him to visit these classes. Yet the LORD indicated that there was an important personal pastoral work that needed to be done. So on September the first

1894, the Watchtower announced a new branch of work. The Pilgrim work. Pilgrims were the ambassadors, we might say, of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

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Bro W.A. Baker testimony:

In 1914, I received a telegram. I resigned from my job and Bro Russell told me in a month I would hear from him. I got the letter and in it the route sheet with just a few lines from Bro Russell saying “I’m enclosing a route sheet from Portland to such and such an appointment. We trust as you enter the pilgrim service it will prove a blessing to you and the brethren whom you serve.”

Speaker 1

The Pilgrims represented brother Russell personally in where they went. If brother Russell wanted to counsel or to pastor these local ecclesias, he did so largely through the Pilgrim brothers who traveled but yet there's an irony here, while the Pilgrim brothers represented brother Russell, personally, yet they were not to preach, brother Russell.

Bro W.A. Baker testimony:

Bro Russell used to write what he called Pastor Letters. And sometimes he would send these Pastor Letters to the pilgrims. I remember one, it was a short one, and I’ve never forgotten it. And it read “we regret that it again becomes necessary to call the attention of the pilgrim staff to the fact that there is too much preaching of Bro Russell and too little of Jesus Christ. I would recommend, brethren, that you preach Bro Russell less... better still not at all, and Jesus Christ more. Bro Russell told me of his experience on one occasion with the pilgrim staff that he never put anyone into the pilgrim service and he never put them out. That that was the Lord’s arrangement.

Speaker 1

Because of the profound influence that the Pilgrim brothers would have on the brethren, the Watchtower carefully screened each Pilgrim. Even though they were selected by the Lord, the Watchtower felt responsible to screen them. They had to possess eight qualifications. Interesting how it starts — Impeccable moral character, not understanding the truth, impeccable, moral character, me meek. Third, clear in the truth, especially clear on the doctrine of the ransom, ability to teach humble and not a novice. The Watchtower did assist with travel expenses, but the Pilgrims received no stipend or salary. The Pilgrims were generally not well known. And in some cases, some of the pilgrim brothers were not known at all in the areas where they were going to serve. So the Watchtower sent them with either a

certificate or a letter of introduction that was signed by the Watchtower president. This letter also served as a commendation or as an endorsement, if you will... and that they were competent to lead meetings, they were competent to conduct immersion services, and to serve the emblems and so on.

Pilgrim work was completely different from the Colporteur work. The Colporteurs were to find the hungry sheep in the Colporteurs followed up, and they will build and strengthen the sheep once found. The Pilgrim brothers generally stayed only one or two days in each area where they went to serve. The Pilgrims did such things as they taught the brethren how to organize a class, how to conduct a volume study, how to testify, or how to conduct a testimony meeting. Or they answered questions that the local ecclesias would have. The Pilgrims encouraged the local brethren to stay active in the work — to do such things as read the manna every day, to have Berean studies, and as much as possible read 12 pages per day in Studies In The Scriptures. The Pilgrim brothers were to try to help the weary sheep, the lame sheep, and the sick sheep. They did give limited public talks, but they were very limited because the primary purpose was not to find new interest. That was the job of the Colporteurs. The the Pilgrim brothers did give limited public talks in large cities, as a supplement as an encouragement to the local witness work being done. In 1913, there were 80 Pilgrim brothers traveling throughout the continental United States. They traveled 883,000 miles in 1913. Nearly a million miles were traveled by 80 Pilgrim brothers. They conducted 17,000 meetings at which 1.3 million brethren and others were served. A similar work was done in 1912, and in 1914. And of course, as we mentioned, these numbers include only the work in the continental US. Many Pilgrims, traveling many thousands of miles worked abroad. We have these brethren, many of us have these brethren to thank for the existence of our ecclesias.

Commercial radio broadcasting in the early 1900s, was only in its infancy. By contrast to the radio business, the newspaper business was mature. The Lord well knew the power of the press, and he caused the brethren of this era to take full advantage. By 1904, only three significant or large newspapers were publishing brother Russell's sermons. In 1912, a little over 1000 newspapers in the United States and in Great Britain, published brother Russell's sermons weekly. Brother Russell would deliver a sermon, for example, the sermon that he gave concerning Armageddon that he delivered at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, on November the third 1912. Newspaper reporters would be there. And they would report on this discourse, and they would in turn provide it to their newspaper syndicates

to distribute to each of the individual papers. At this time, there were 1500 newspaper editors in many countries that were supporting the newspaper sermon work. By 1913, 2000 newspapers spread across every continent published the sermons. These sermons were translated into over 30 different languages. They reached 15 million readers every week. The Press dubbed brother Russell, as the world's ubiquitous preacher. Ubiquitous, I had to look that up...it means everywhere. And 4000 newspapers worldwide reported on truth activity, which went beyond just publishing the sermons. Best of all, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society paid nothing to the newspapers, to report on the activities and to publish the sermons.

The sermons and the truth reports were not advertising. They were news. And they were delivered as such. No religious outreach had ever been accorded such attention. The popularity of the sermons with the press was unprecedented. But why? Why did the newspaper sermons resonate so deeply and broadly with the newspapers and with their millions of readers? Many people began to reject denominationalism. There was a great falling away from the churches. Most of the ministers were preaching evolution, they were preaching higher criticism, they were preaching unbelief in the Bible. They could see that the minister's message was at odds with the Bible. And many no longer wanted to hear this kind of a message — this anti-Bible rhetoric and said the people wanted the Bible. The denominational pulpit had lost its power with the people. The Independent became the big congregation. The Lord raised up brother also as an independent. He rejected the creeds. He rejected the anti-Bible rhetoric. His message was different. It asserted a solid belief in the Bible, and this message appealed to the common man. It appealed to the Christian and appealed to the Jew, it even appealed to the honest hearted skeptic. He was affectionately styled the people's favorite preacher. The truth message was the perfect fit for the press. Every week, newspapers published the truth to their millions of readers. For many, the newspapers sermons were the only sermons that many of these people heard because they had left the churches. Now as expected, the church was opposed the newspaper ministry. But the watchtower was undaunted, they steadfastly encouraged the brethren to write to the editors of your local newspapers — brethren everywhere. Encourage the editors to continue publishing your sermons despite the opposition and faithfully subscribe to the papers publishing the sermons to support them. Zions Watchtower was essentially a newspaper or perhaps today we would call it a news magazine, a religious news magazine. But the Watchtower, Zions Watchtower never had more than about 45,000 subscribers at any one time throughout its history. Interestingly enough, the Lord used secular newspapers to preach the truth

in over 30 languages to a global audience. In September of 1911, the IBSA sponsored a 10 day convention in Mountain Lake Park, Maryland. An average of 6000 brethren... yes, 6000 brethren attended the convention each day of that convention. At this convention, the IBSA appointed a committee. It was a committee of seven brothers to tour the world. Now the seven are sitting in the front row. It does not include the brothers standing in the rear. The IBSA wanted the committee to conduct a global evaluation. What is the true condition of affairs? Primarily in the Far East and the Oriental lands? Are there any saints there? Should the IBSA budget money to spread the gospel there? In 1912, some 1500 newspapers around the world were preaching the truth as we mentioned. So they arranged for this 1912 World Tour —the newspapers, arranged for this tour. And they arranged for many other prominent tours such as the 1912 European tour, the 1913, trans-continental tour, and the 1913 Southern convention tour and others. The tour was created news. And news drew attention to the sermons. And so the IBSA cooperating with the press, the truth was further served world wide. Stops were made in Hawaii, Japan, China, Malaysia, India, Egypt, Greece, Italy, France, England, and of course, then back to New York. So this tour went westward all the way around the circumference of the globe.

Part of the tour included the IBSA brethren, the committee, visiting the Great Pyramid. The uniqueness of the Great Pyramid was of interest to the world, it was of interest to the newspapers. And again, the press wanted the IBSA's thoughts on the Great Pyramid, to in turn share with the millions of newspaper readers. After arriving home, the committee reported that the people will the Orient are not heathen savages. You see that was a misconception at that time. Few Christians dwell there, recorded the committee, because there's so much religious darkness and many of the lands that they visited. Yet the truth message that was delivered during the tour was well received and should be continued. So the IBSA arranged for free literature to be published in the principal languages and distributed in India, China, and Japan. So with this trip, more global attention was brought to the truth. And the IBSA served the world by helping to correct misconceptions about Orientals.

Silent movies had become quite popular in the early 1900s. And so the Lord quickly capitalized on the people's newly found interest, and on January 11, 1914, the Photo Drama debuted in a first class theater in New York city.

(Charles Russell PhotoDrama Intro to Part 1)

The Photo Drama of Creation is presented by the I. B. S. A., the International Bible Students Association. Its aim is public instruction along religio-scientific lines, and in defense of the Bible as the inspired Word of God.

Speaker 1

The entire program was eight hours long. It was shown in four separate parts. One part and only one part was shown per day in the large cities. Now the format of the Photo Drama was twofold. A portion of the show was presented in terms of slides, or in the format of slides, using a slide projector essentially. The other portion of the Photo Drama was presented as motion pictures.

PhotoDrama movie narrator:

(music) Nebuchadnezzar's dream interpreted: Daniel a young Israelite taken captive to Babylon with others, later became God's prophet. The dream and its interpretation interests and concerns us today as much or more than it did Nebuchadnezzar. In his dream, the kings are a great image — its head was gold, its breast and arms silver, its belly and thighs brass, its legs iron... (music)

The "peace on earth goodwill to men" prophecy has not yet been fulfilled, but it is nearing. The birth of the babe was one step toward it, the death on the cross was another, the glorious resurrection and the ascension of the Logos again to the spirit plane. What are the steps?... the selection of the Church as Messiah right is another... nearly completed. And the Messianic Kingdom will complete the blessed prophecy.

Speaker 1

Part 1 of this Photo Drama, explain God's mighty power in creating the earth and in creating man. Part 2 dealt with the reign of sin and death. Part 3 focused on God's promise to eradicate sin and death through the Christ. And Part 4 looked mostly to the completion of the Church and the Millennial age blessings to follow. 1912 to 1914 was an era rampant with skepticism and evolution and higher criticism as we mentioned, the Photo Drama was designed in part to be a counter attack. It was not designed to convert the world but rather the Lord use the Photo Drama to help especially the consecrated — to reassure them that three things: the Bible in history and science are all in harmony. After the photo drama debuted in January 1914 in New York City, it spread like wildfire. Within two months of its debut, 12,000 people per day, were seeing the photo drama in the large cities.

The brethren, made not one full Photo Drama system, but 20 of them. 20 teams of brethren would move around from city to city rotating the Photo Drama equipment. Remember, it's only one part per day. And its height, the photo drama was shown in 60 to 80 large cities every day. And anywhere between 100 and 3,000 people showed up at every showing. But the demand for the Photo Drama kept increasing. So a truncated or an abbreviated version, called the Eureka drama was designed for rural areas where there was no electricity in these rural areas —and oftentimes at that time, they was not. Interesting enough, acetylene gas from an automobile gas tank was used to fuel a burner that illuminated the slides. The brethren were very creative. But the demand increased yet further. Even the Eureka drama didn't satisfy the demand. And a further truncated version of the photo drama was created called the Family Drama, and it was developed for home use, you can invite your neighbor over and listen to the Photo Drama. Meanwhile, the demand to show the Photo Drama overseas steadily increased. The Photo Drama was eventually translated into Spanish, Italian, Greek, Polish, Armenian, French, German, Finnish, and Swedish. At every showing seats were free, no collection was taken, and free literature was passed out. One of the free handouts was called the Scenario, and essentially was a printed summary of the Photo Drama.

(Charles Russell - End of PhotoDrama Part 2)

We exhort you to study the free scenario, the printed copy of this lecture. Turn up its Bible references at home with your family. The story will double your interest in the things of God, your desire to serve Him and to do good unto all men.

Speaker 1

One of the most unique features of all the things we could mention... one of the most unique features that appealed to our mind, is that this work of this era was not about just one man. The truth outreach of that era had a place for everyone who wanted to serve. The Lord reserved a place for every single heart that wanted to serve. We leave you now friends with some one Wonderful admonitions from one of the Lord's saints of the 1912 1914 era.

(Sr Norby testimony)

Looking back over a century, my advice to anybody younger is to fill their minds with the good things of the truth, because they're going to need them when eye sight goes and health goes. Dear brethren, I urge you to use

your time, talents, privileges, and opportunities so you can look back with joy, and not with regret. God be with you till we meet again.