

Ed Heidelbach - Welcome Address

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Well, if my information is correct, the first general convention was held in Lake Webster, Indiana, 85 years ago in 1939. It was actually a year after my mother consecrated, and had I known this a few weeks ago, I would have asked her if she was there. Lake Webster, Indiana, was only about 225. Yeah, about 225 miles from where they live.

When she was 101, I thought, you know, she's getting up there in years. Maybe I should put a video camera on her and get a little family history of her. Well, during that time, she told me that she was able to go to a lot of conventions at a young age. She said to me that in 1938 her parents bought a new 1938 Dodge to use to go to conventions, and I said, wait a minute, Mom.

I said, do you mean to tell me that your parents bought a new 1938 badge? And she said, yes. She said it was only \$640 at 101, 84 years later, and she probably never pulled that out of that brain in all those years to recall how much the car cost. Now, I would venture to say that no one here attended the first General Convention in 1939.

But I know many of you have been coming for a long time. I can remember some of you attending back in the Bloomington days, back in the late 50s and early 60s, and yes, I was there in Sunday School watching the same Frank and Ernest films that you did. Sister Sally always said, well, I never remember you being there in Sunday school. I said, yes, I most certainly was.

That is, we're not hanging out at the Pizza King or the custard thing. Those who've been coming to the General Convention for years, I'm sure, have had a lot of fond memories of attending. Our memories go back to listening to many of the pillars in the Bible student community over the years. Those that have made their change long ago. Valuable lessons learned that have carried us through times of joy and times of sorrow.

Lessons that have opened our spiritual eyesight to a greater appreciation of God's plan, his character, blessings that have carried us through each successive year. However, some of you, this may be your first General Convention. Some may be new to the truth, some may be here just to understand who these Bible students are. Well, you've come to the right place. We might even start with a little bit of Bible student history.

The history of the Bible students go back to a young man named Charles Hayes Russell, born in 1852, who was raised by a strict Presbyterian mother. Strict in that she did not want him to end up in hell. Brother Russell was a consecrated child of God for some years, a member of the Congregational church in the YMCA. After his mother's death at the age of 16, he warned others to repent as well or they would fall victim to eternal torment. But the more Brother Russell thought about that, the more he lost faith and belief in Christianity to the point that he began to look at other so called heathen religions.

Then he began to wonder who the real heathens were. Further investigation led him to realize there was a difference between the creeds and teachings of men versus the teachings of God's Word found in the Bible. Brother Russell recalls for us in an article entitled Harvest Gatherings and Sick Beans reprint 3820 how he stumbled upon Adventism seemingly by accident. One evening he dropped into a dusty dingy hall, as he describes it, where he heard religious services were held. He did so to see if the handful of those that met there had anything more sensible to offer than the creeds of these great churches.

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There, for the first time he heard a preacher by the name of Mr. Jonas Wendell presenting the views of the Second Advent. Though Mr. Wendell's scriptural explanation was not entirely clear and far from what we're blessed to understand today, it was enough in God's providence to re establish Brother Russell's faith and the divine inspiration of the Bible and to show that the records of the apostles and the Old Testament prophets were firmly linked. What he heard sent him to his Bible to study with more zeal and care than ever before.

Brother Russell states that Adventism didn't lead to any single truth, but it did help him greatly in unweaning errors prepared him for the truth. He soon began to see he was living somewhere near the close of the Gospel age and near the time when the Lord stated in Scripture that the wise watching ones of his children would come to a clear understanding in the knowledge of his parents. At that time he and a few other truth seekers in Pittsburgh Allegheny formed a class for Bible study. He tells that the time from 1870 to 1875 was a time of constant growth in grace and knowledge and the love of God in his word.

Brother Russell tells us that at that time they were just getting the general outline of God's plan and unlearning many long cherished errors. The time for a clear understanding of the details is yet to come. Brother Russell says that it was not until 1872 that he gained a clear view of our Lord's work as the ransom price and found strength and foundation of all hope of restitution embedded in that doctrine. It was then that he came to examine the subject of restitution from the standpoint of the ransom price given by our Lord Jesus for Adam and consequently for all lost in Adam. It finally settled the matter of restitution completely and gave him the full assurance that all all must come forth from their graves and be brought to a clear understanding and knowledge of the truth and to a full opportunity to gain everlasting life in Christ.

From 1872 to 1876, Brother Russell continued to grow in grace and knowledge on the part of a handful of Bible students with whom he met in algae. In an article entitled the Harvest Movement written by Brother Charles Rediker for a special Bible student history issue of the Herald of Christ Coming. I'm sorry, Herald of Christ Kingdom, he wrote how the birth of the Bible student movement may be traced to the year 1876 when Brother Russell was elected a pastor of a small study group that had been meeting in the north side of Pittsburgh, then called allegheny. That's only 76 miles from here.

Brother Russell aroused a lot of interest in the study of the Bible by topically connecting Scriptures into logical harmonious truths centered on the ransom of our Lord. It soon became apparent for the need to distribute the truth in various publications. Shortly thereafter he published Tabernacle Shadows of the Better Sacrifices, for which he states in the preface. The first edition of this little book was published in 1881 and under the Lord's blessing seems to have been very helpful to the class for which it was specifically intended. The Royal Priesthood.

Many of this class have confessed that as the finger of the Lord it pointed out to them meanings in the Old Testament types never before appreciated and that it has guided them in the way of self sacrifice by leading them to see the true significance of the scriptural declarations. Present your bodies a living sacrifice. Fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ. If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him. Let us go to him outside the camp bearing the reproach of him.

And besides many other scripture statements which associate the Lord's people with himself both in the sufferings of the present time and glory to follow.

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As the light of the truth began to grow, it became apparent that Brother Russ will write a comprehensive topical study guide to harmonize the entire bark. His first book, called Food for Thinking Christians, approached the subject by first exposing prevalent errors and then outlined the truth on the subject. After realizing that this wasn't the best approach, he later introduced The Divine Plan of the ages. In his 1916 forward, brother Russell writes, the author and the publishers desire to publicly acknowledge the favor of God, which was permitted then to be identified with the circulation of this volume and with the results. Light, joy, peace, fellowship with God to many hungry, thirsty, bewildered souls.

The first edition in its present form was issued in 1886. Since then one edition has followed another in rapid succession and in 20 different languages. Until now there are nearly 5 million copies of it in the hands of people all over the world.

And that was 1916. This introduction was the first of what became the six volumes of Studies in the Scriptures written between 1886 and 1904. Brother Russell published a wide variety of booklets and tracts. In 1896, let's say the scriptures about hell. 3 million copies.

In 1897, let's say the Scriptures about Spiritism. A half a million copies and numerous others each distributed in the hundreds of thousands. The Bible students were growing exponentially. The monthly subscription to the Watchtower magazine surpassed 10,000.

Regular conventions were held to feed the new creatures of our brethren. In 1893, the first national convention was held in Chicago for five days with 360 in attendance. Now you might not think that 360 is many. However, in 1893, unless your last name was Daimler or Benz, you didn't drive there.

Brother Russell also recognized the prophetic fulfillment of favor returning to The Jews in 1878 and their regathering back to their land of promise in Palestine. In their interest, he encouraged them to recall God's promise to Abraham and that it was time for them to be restored as a nation in fulfillment of blessing the nations of the world in the earthly days of God's kingdom. In 1910 he spoke to a Jewish audience of 4,000 at the Hippodrome in New York, earning him the title of Christian Zionist.

As a point of interest, we'll mention that you'll be able to gain further insight into the role of Israel in prophecy as we will be blessed with a panel discussion on that tomorrow afternoon at 4:15. So be sure to mic your program so you don't want to miss that.

Brother Russell traveled all over the world spotting the truth. Culminating. Culminating. Sorry. In 1911 and 12 when he went on a round the world cruise tour.

Yeah, I guess they did. Cruise ships. He went on a round the world tour to China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, India, the Near East, Greece, Italy, France and England. Brother Russell's sermons were published Weekly in over 2,000 newspapers throughout the US and Canada. In Europe with a combined coverage of over 15 million.

The London Press called Brother Russell the ubiquitous preacher, meaning widely traveled omnipresent, saying of him that he quote, he had the world for his congregation. Brother Russell pointed to 1914 for many years at the end of the Gentile times and the judgment upon those nations affiliated with Christendom when the First World War broke out in 1914. It's been said that Brother Russell turned as white as a sheet when the war started because the time had come. It was sad when Brother Russell made his change to his heavenly reward on October 31st of 1960

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when his work was finished. He accomplished the work necessary during the Gospel harvest following our Lord's return in 1874.

Brother Russell made no claim of having any direct revelation from God. He simply brought together various related lines of truth into topical form. He described himself simply as an index finger used God to help others trace the wonderful plan of God reported in the Scriptures. He said, neither is this clear unfolding of truth due to any human ingenuity or acuteness of perception, but to the simple fact that God's due time had come.

The majority of the Bible student brethren, including myself, are convinced that Brother Russell filled the role of our Lord referred to in Matthew 24:45, 47, when our Lord said, who then is a faithful and wise servant whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you that he shall make him ruler over all his goods. It was meet and it was at the right time.

What remains for us Bible students today is to be faithful to our covenant of sacrifice until death. The door of opportunity to the high calling is still open for us after all these years due to some losing the crown allowing for a replacement, and that will continue until the full number of the 144,000 is going beyond. As a reminder, we're told in Revelation 3:11 to hold on to what you have so that no one takes your crown, and that's the same crown promised to us in Revelation 2:10 Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Now the fact that the this door of opportunity is still open to us tells us that if we are going to hang on to our crown, it's going to take some work diligently. Second Peter 3:14 says, Wherefore, beloved brethren, seeing that you look unto such things, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace without spot and blameless. Then in verses 17 and 18, he says, you therefore, beloved, seeing you know these things before, beware, lest you lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your steadfastness, but grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom be glory both now and forever, and isn't that why we've come to this convention? You know, in the business world, business and legal, it's often said it's wise to do your due diligence before making a decision or taking action.

In other words, do whatever is necessary to ensure that whatever you do or about to do, that it doesn't fail. We don't fail, and the apostle Peter gives us that Same advice in 2nd Peter 1:10, where he says, wherefore the rather brethren, give diligence to what to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things, you shall never fall two weapons those things he mentions in the previous verses, second Peter 1:3:8. According as the divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue, whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises that by these that by these that we that you and I might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust and besides this giving all diligence add to your faith. Virtue.

And to your virtue, knowledge, and to knowledge Temperance, and to temperance, patience, and to patience. Godliness.

And to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity for love. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why is this important? Go back to verse 11.

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So an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Grace Dear brethren, if it's your heart's desire to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we need to study. We need to study God's word. We need to feed our new creature in Christ. Feed it with the meat that's been provided for us by our southern penis this week you'll be spiritually fed by many of your brethren that have spent countless hours in study and preparation on a variety of subjects to feed our new creature in Christ.

And all of you who have spent those countless hours of preparation, we thank you. This would not be a convention without the Sacrifices that you have made.

The Apostle Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, 2nd Timothy 2:15, tells us, to study, to show ourselves approved unto God. A workman that needeth not to be ashamed. Rightly dividing the word of truth. Why is this so important? Why is it so important to study, to show ourselves approved of God?

Do we need another reason?

All that study is to help us rightly divide the Word of Truth. What does this mean? We divide the word of Truth when we search to understand how, when and where Scriptures apply. Which scriptures belong to the present, which scriptures belong to the future. We divide to see which Scriptures apply to natural Israel and spiritual Israel.

To make a prayerful study of the Word of Truth will enable us to place things where they belong and further harmonize God's Word. Having the mind of Christ allows us to think like God.

You might be thinking that in the next few days you'll be inundated with this meet and do season, and that it will be impossible to remember all of it, let alone rightly divide it. But we needn't worry. Our Lord comforts us in John 14:1, when he said, Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe in Me also. Then in verse 16 of John 14, he says, I will pray the Father give you another comforter that it may abide with you forever.

Did you catch that? Forever, he says, the comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, the Father will send in my name. It shall teach you all things and bring all things to remembrance. Whatsoever I have said unto you. The Holy Spirit will bring all things you have heard at this convention of him to remembrance.

As we grow in grace and in the knowledge, we also grow in His Spirit, and it's this Holy Spirit that helps us to rightly divide the word of truth.

If you are begotten of the Holy Spirit, you are a new creature in Christ. You have the mind of Christ again. You have that ability to think like God, reason like God. However, to keep that creature alive and healthy, it must be kept fed. Sister Molly always used to say, you must keep that new creature fed or it will die.

And she certainly was an excellent example of doing that throughout her 86 years of consecrated life.

So for those of you who've come to this convention to feed your new creature in Christ, you will not be disappointed. In fact, you will be richly blessed. One reason you'll be blessed is that that same Holy Spirit has been working in the minds of those that have been preparing to serve you at this convention. If you look at your menu for the Week. I mean, I'm sorry.

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Program for the week, you'll be fed several courses discourses throughout the week. Today, the first day of convention, to whet your appetite, you'll be served with four discourses, followed by an evening symposium on the faith of Abel, Enoch and Noah. Throughout the week, you'll be spiritually fed numerous discourses. However, since many of the titles were not on the program, I'm not able to share those with you. But for those that were, we will.

We'll go over that on Sunday. Our theme discourse, Christ in you, the Hope of Glory by Brother Rich Sarasi. Later that afternoon you'll be blessed by a panel discussion on Israel and prophecy and with what's going on in Israel today, you won't want to miss, and then the evening will end with the best persons. On Monday you'll be blessed again with several discourses throughout the day, ending with a dialogue between Brother Nathan Austin and Brother Obi Albert on hastening the day found in second Peter 3:12.

One of the highlights of any convention is to witness and welcome our newly consecrated brethren into the household of faith, and on Tuesday we'll be able to do that during the baptismal service that morning. Later that afternoon we'll witness a dialogue between Brother Ernie Kinsley and Brother Tom Gilbert on being in the world, but not of the world.

Those words were one of our Lord's most beautiful prayers for His Father as he was praying on behalf of us, the church that's found in John 17. Wednesday morning you'll be able to participate in the convention business meeting chaired by Brother Stephen Yike. Then that evening I was pleased to see a discourse entitled Enduring to the End By Brother Richard Dr. Since our ability to endure is the key to our success in this narrow way, then what better way to end the day of convention than with a rescue service? On Thursday, the final day of convention will be blessed with a dialogue between Brother Mark Davis and Brother John Trezio on the scriptural application of the phrase for my name's sake.

During the remainder of this banquet provided by our Heavenly Father, we will be served with the discourse each by Brother Michael Castelli. Brother George Balco. In closing, Brother Jonathan Benson, and of course we could not on our way without the emotionally charged melodies of praise to top off this feast of love.

Now, one thing I didn't mention is that scattered throughout the program there are five praise and testimony meetings for you to participate in. Sunday at 2:00 by Brother John Humboldt. Monday 2:15 by Brother Mark Willow. Tuesday at 2:00 by Brother John Koenas, Wednesday 3:15 by Brother John Grisonk and with the last opportunity to testify on Thursday at 9:15 by Brother Tim Malinowski. However.

However, please do not wait for the last praise Prayer and Testimony meeting to share your recent experiences and your faith strengthening experiences and how the Heavenly Father has recently blessed you. You may not get the chance. It's only 45 minutes. So there are five testimony meetings throughout the convention. Take advantage of that.

Testimony meetings are considered the most important meeting among those of Like Precious Faith. Why? It's an opportunity for you to share a recent experience you've had where you spiritually benefited by our Heavenly Father's providential care over you on your behalf. These experiences are designed to increase our faith and our Heavenly Father's care for us and by sharing this it increases the faith of everyone our fellow brethren. We too can benefit from each other's experience.

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We too can be strengthened by what our brethren are going through.

Your testimony may be exactly exactly what another brother or sister might need to hear. Be a witness to each other. Remember, we're all in this together.

One of the greatest benefits of this convention, in fact critical to the continuation of the Bible Student Movement is our young brother. Hopefully you've noticed the outline and link to the detailed youth programs being held during the convention prepared by several very dedicated brethren in an email sent out a couple of weeks ago that covered the program. I'd like to share some of that with you regarding the young people's program. The email starts off Dear Brethren, a hearty welcome awaits our young people with a program for each age focused on Israel, the Land of Promise. Each age group will learn the history of notable heroes and scriptures and where Israel and other Middle Eastern countries are located on the maps of the world.

I was really impressed with that focus, especially in the time we're living in and it's to be covered by all the age groups.

Included for some of the age groups will be lessons on behavior and decorum at the convention, life skills, and an age appropriate discussion on how to properly use social media how important that is today, and then it adds for more details please see the abbreviated descriptions below and the full descriptions and class schedules on the 2024 General Convention website, and then the link was included. Now when you click on the link you'll find six individual age groups with a program for each there's a 3 to 4 year old group, a 5 to 7 year old group, 8 to 10 year old, 11 to 13 year old, 14 to 17, and an 18 to 25 year old young adult group. A separate program has been prepared for each age group dealing detailing their lessons for each day. I looked at that and I thought this is like six conventions planned for the week with each age group and the old adults in addition to the young adults.

And then one other thing there were that's going to be covered for the young, our young brethren, is because of the escalating tension in the world, there will be a conscientious objectors meeting.

And of course no general convention could go without providing a way for our young people to relax and bond with each other. So several hours each afternoon has been set aside for a variety of activities, group sports and swimming, and let's not forget the pizza night on Thursday. Tuesday. I'm sorry, Pizza party on Tuesday.

So we welcome all our young people and trust they will enjoy their time here as well. Now we briefly outlined the Feast of Fat things our Heavenly Father has prepared for you during this week. But if you want to squeeze more out of your time here, we have some suggestions. After all, you spend a considerable amount of time and money to be here. Why not get the most from your investment?

One of the benefits of being here in person is having the fellowship between the discourses during the meals and in the evenings. Oh, and let's not forget the ice cream socials. This fellowship time provides you an opportunity to get to know your brethren. I'm going to challenge all you extroverts to seek out all you introverts to strike up a conversation. Someone you haven't met with.

You cannot meet or find any nicer friends than those you meet here.

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You may have heard something during a discourse that you'd like to get some additional thought on it. So use that to start the conversation for you younger brethren. You may find it interesting to hear some of the experiences of your elder brethren. Sit down with someone. Ask them how our Heavenly Father has directed them throughout their consecrated walk.

You may be pleasantly surprised and amazed at the stories they tell. We had the opportunity to do that when we served on the board at the Bible Student retirement center, the bsrc.org in recent years. You know, we've known many of the brethren there, but never really knew them. After taking the opportunity to talk to our brethren, we were amazed at the stories they had to share and the experiences of how our Heavenly Father worked in your lives and in the consecrated water. In fact, as one of the elderly myself, I too have an experience that might be of interest to you younger brethren.

It goes back a few years when I was young. Newly consecrated brother in truth, and I know you might find it hard to believe, but yes, I was young. Once. We, my parents and I were at the 1972 Labor Day convention in Jackson Michigan when I happened to notice a very young, attractive sister standing by herself. I casually worked my way over to begin to converse.

About a year and a half later, In May of 1974, we married and recently celebrated our 50th anniversary. So you see, lasting relationships can be established while at a convention. So don't feel that you need to confine yourself to conversing with the elderly. Take advantage of making friends, good friends for life. Once again, brethren, we welcome each of you, including those online, to the 2024 General Convention and pray the Lord's blessing on your time here.

Finally, brethren, while you're at this convention, whatever you find to be true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, if it's virtuous and worthy of praise, think on those things and remember to thank our Heavenly Father for them.