

Berean Library

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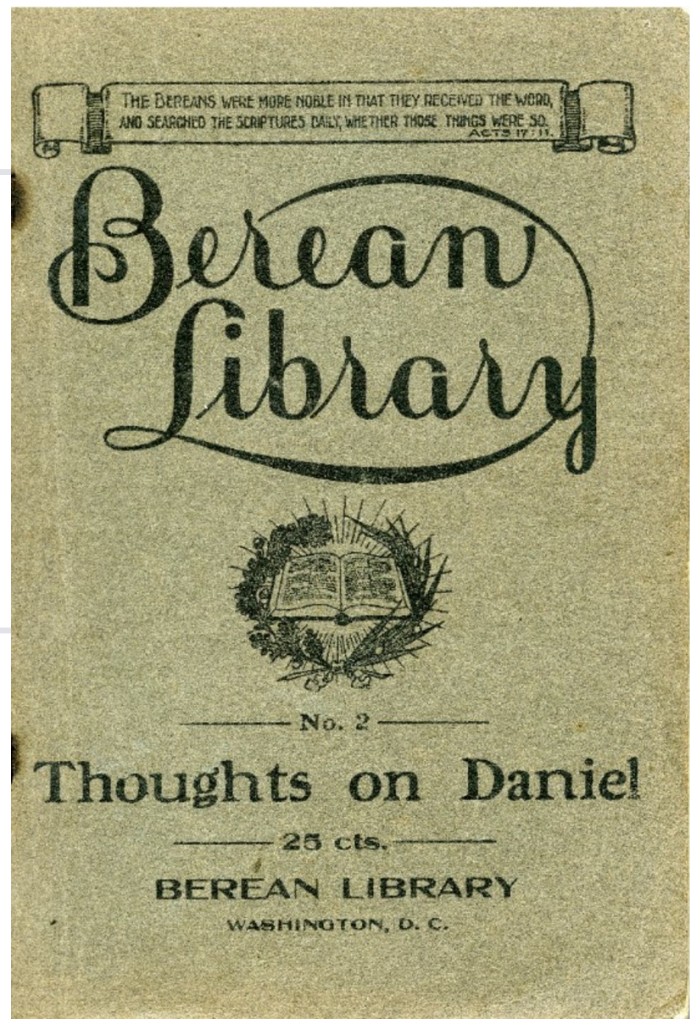
The Berean Library was a set of core denominational books issued as inexpensive paperbacks for use in reading programs intended to enhance members' understanding of and involvement in the mission of the church.

Reading Plans Converge

At a meeting of the Foreign Mission Board (FMB), July 31, 1899, the board's president, Irwin H. Evans, proposed promoting an enterprise that was recently conducted in Minnesota and other conferences. The

concept was for every Seventh-day Adventist home to establish a Missionary Reading Circle, using the *Missionary Magazine* as the source of information. The aim was to impart knowledge about the foreign mission work and to interest children, youth, and young adults in becoming missionaries in faraway lands.¹

Church officials at the General Conference (GC) and the Review and Herald Publishing Company (RH), at the same time as the FMB meeting, were making plans to issue a series of books in inexpensive format for the youth to study and equip themselves for mission work. Plans morphed into one reading plan, retaining the title Missionary Reading Circle and the *Missionary Magazine* as stimulus material, but with the addition of the book series proposed by the GC and RH. An annual subscription of one dollar for all the reading material could be ordered through the local church librarians. Outlines of study were promised so that "those with limited education can readily carry it."²



Thoughts on Daniel pamphlet

Photo courtesy of Adventist Heritage Centre.

The Berean Library Debuts

The first time the book series was advertised as the Berean Library was in the *Review and Herald*, August 8, 1899.³ The Ohio Conference, for one, was quick to adopt the project, voting in 1899 at their annual session “that we hail with delight the publishing of the Berean Literary (sic) and the establishing of the Berean Reading Circle.”

⁴ Members were encouraged to read the previous monthly issue of the *Missionary Magazine*, answer the set questions, and send them to their conference missionary secretary or the FMB.⁵

The first quiz was based on the life of William Carey, famed missionary to India, as published in the *Missionary Magazine*.⁶ As books in the series became available questions about their contents were published each week. For example, in April 1901 the *Review and Herald* published questions about Revelation 18 that were based on Uriah Smith’s *Thoughts on the Revelation* and Ellen White’s *Early Writings*.⁷ The onerous task of marking the answers fell to the mission secretaries but after a time the procedure was abandoned. The plan gravitated to the promotion of the series of books per se and members were left to read and learn without study helps.

Re-Purposing

The books were doctrinal in nature and suitable for an adult readership. They eventually served as items that could be sold or gifted to the public during homeland mission campaigns. In 1914 the North American Division mounted a campaign with the words: “In view of the nearness of the end and the urgent need for this message to be given rapidly and systematically in all parts of the field” we recommend a wide distribution of tracts and the Berean Library series. Church leaders advocated that members should purchase ten sets and establish lending libraries in their locality. At that time there were eleven books in the series, having a total of approximately four thousand pages. Boxed sets were offered at the low price of \$1.86 each plus freight.⁸ This price was virtually at cost, the RH office regarding the production as their missionary project. It was reported that 45,000 individual copies of the books were sold in 1914.⁹

In May 1916, the final it was widely advertised, the series was no longer available through local conference entities but only direct from the RH office.¹⁰ Alternative options for personal Bible study, such as the Morning Watch¹¹ and the Senior Bible Year promoted in the *Review and Herald*,¹² replaced the Berean Library.

Titles and Authors in the Berean Library Series

Steps to Christ by Ellen G. White

Thoughts on Daniel by Uriah Smith

Thoughts on Revelation by Uriah Smith

His Glorious Appearing by James S. White

Sabbath in the Scriptures by John N. Andrews

Sabbath in History by John N. Andrews

Conflict Between Capital and Labor by Edgar T. Russell

Here and Hereafter by Uriah Smith

Bible Footlights by William Granger

Our Paradise Home by Sands H. Lane

Religious Liberty in America by Charles M. Snow

The Coming King by J. Edson White

SOURCES

"A Morning Watch Calendar for Every Seventh-day Adventist." *ARH*, January 11, 1917.

"Berean Library Study." *ARH*, April 9, 1901.

Foreign Mission Board Minutes. General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, Silver Spring, Maryland. Retrieved from <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/Forms/AllFolders.aspx>

"Membership." *Missionary Magazine*, September 1899.

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"Supplies for the Missionary Campaign." *ARH*, August 13, 1914.

"The Berean Library." *ARH*, August 8, 1899.

"The Berean Library." *ARH*, Extra, May 8, 1916.

"The Missionary Reading Circle." *ARH*, August 22, 1899.

"The Senior Bible Year." *ARH*, January 11, 1917.

NOTES

1. Foreign Mission Board Minutes, July 31, 1899, General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, Silver Spring, Maryland, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/Forms/AllFolders.aspx>.

2. "The Missionary Reading Circle," *ARH*, August 22, 1899, 548.
3. "The Berean Library," *ARH*, August 8, 1899, 515.
4. E. A. Merriam, "Conference Proceedings," *Welcome Visitor*, September 7, 1899, 2-3.
5. "Membership," *Missionary Magazine*, September 1899, 422.
6. "Reading Circle Questions," *Missionary Magazine*, September 1899, 423.
7. For example, "Berean Library Study," *ARH*, April 9, 1901, 231.
8. "Supplies for the Missionary Campaign," *ARH*, August 13, 1914, 23.
9. E.R. Palmer, "For the Finishing of the Work," *ARH*, July 15, 1915, 2.
10. "The Berean Library," *ARH*, Extra, May 8, 1916, 4.
11. "A Morning Watch Calendar for Every Seventh-day Adventist," *ARH*, January 11, 1917, 23.
12. "The Senior Bible Year," *ARH*, January 11, 1917, 17.

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