

Church of God, The Eternal

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Dear Brethren:

One question we have been asked repeatedly in recent years by new contacts concerns the prophetic office of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong. With all of the hundreds of groups extant today who share original roots in the Worldwide Church of God, it can be daunting to try and distinguish them, even by their doctrinal teachings. But it seems one of the emerging criteria now being used by many to delineate each group is the position taken on the role of Mr. Armstrong in Biblical prophecy. While at one time key distinctions among these Sabbath-keeping groups included their views on the Holy Days, church government, the calendar, and acceptance of sacred names or authority of the Jews, to these criteria have now been added the question, "Do you believe Herbert Armstrong was an apostle and the Elijah of the last days." Because so many new contacts seem very interested in this topic—and we have answered it so often on an individual basis—it makes sense to address the question comprehensively in this *Monthly Letter* for all who are yet seeking an answer.

But first of all, what are the most common ideas being generated from other sources about Mr. Armstrong's prophetic place in history? While there are as many potential opinions as there are human minds to reason, they generally fall into two broad categories. On one side are those who revere Mr. Armstrong and believe he was truly an inspired servant of God. These by in large believe he fulfilled the specific prophetic office of Elijah of the last days, as well as that of an apostle. On the other side are those who have come to loath and detest Mr. Armstrong and his accomplishments, and believe he was neither an apostle, nor did he perform an Elijah work. Therefore, new contacts who want to know what Church of God, The Eternal believes, are often seeking to know into which of these two camps we fall. But the truth is, we do not fit into either category.

To fully address what we do believe and distinguish that teaching from the others, let us consider separately both the apostolic office question and the identity of Elijah.

What Is an Apostle?

First, do we believe Mr. Armstrong was an apostle? The very basis of the existence of this remnant group is belief that God revealed Truth to the Church through a chosen servant in these last days. We believe the Bible shows clearly that whenever God has performed a work in any time in history, it has always been accomplished through the commission of a human instrument. When God separated Israel as a nation and gave them His laws, statutes, and judgements, he did so through Moses. In like manner, it was always through the judges and prophets of old—commissioned servants—that God spoke to and directed His people. He could have done it in any other way He chose, but He did not.

When Jesus Christ came in the flesh, He also came with power and authority to speak in the name of the Father, and was empowered by the Holy Spirit with a message that was not His own.

Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake (John 14:10–11).

So the Father accomplished His work through Jesus Christ, and as an agent of the Most High—an ambassador—that Christ brought the authorized message of the Father. Hearing Christ was counted the same as hearing the Father. Likewise, rejecting Christ was rejecting the Father who sent Him.

This Christ was an Apostle. "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Hebrews 3:1). The very next verse likewise confirms that Christ fulfilled His commission as an ambassador, even as did Moses fulfill his unique commission of God. "Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house" (verse 2).

The word translated as *apostle* in the New Testament is the Greek word, *apostolos*, meaning a delegate, an ambassador, a messenger, or one that is sent. What made Christ an Apostle was the fact He was sent from God with a divinely-inspired message and commissioned to proclaim it to those singled out by the Father. This Christ then—as an Apostle—brought God's message to men, but more specifically, to those *selected peoples* God chose to deal with at that time. "But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). An ambassador is always constrained by the limits of authority prescribed by the one commissioning the work. In this sense, Moses was also an apostle, because he certainly acted as a commissioned agent—one sent to perform a divine work in God's name—and was likewise limited to the bounds of that prescribed commission.

The other key attribute we find in any legitimate apostle is direct inspiration from God Himself. We know Jesus Christ received direct inspiration from the Father. And as Moses also received direct instructions from God—without a mediator—so were the prophets of old inspired directly by God to deliver their messages and even preserve those words in the Holy Scripture. By this simple definition, they were all apostles.

As Jesus Christ prepared to depart back to the Father, He likewise delegated authority to chosen disciples to perform the duties of apostles in His name.

And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Now the names of *the twelve apostles* are these. . . . These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matthew 10:1–2, 5–7) [emphasis mine].

These men were likewise taught directly by Christ, without a mediator. After receipt of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the Twelve continued to be taught and directed by Christ from the throne of His Father in Heaven, even as Christ had Himself been inspired directly by God during His own personal ministry. And these men carried the same authority Christ had wielded. "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops" (Matthew 10:27). "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me" (Luke 10:16).

Paul also became an apostle, even though he had never been instructed by Christ with the other disciples, or had ever seen Him in the flesh. "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)" (Galatians 1:1). Even as one born out of due time (1 Corinthians 15:8), Paul still met every criteria of an apostle, having been commissioned directly by God, and inspired personally with a divine message to be delivered to selected peoples. "For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:12). He had been taught personally in the Arabian wilderness for three years, and then sent to do a work in God's name.

Was Herbert Armstrong an Apostle?

According to the criteria outlined above, Herbert Armstrong certainly fulfilled the commission of an apostle in this era of time. Of course, this premise will be accepted only by those who believe that the things he taught were not of his own mind, but received by the

inspiration of Jesus Christ. Notice this is precisely the claim he made concerning his own ministry, and one that we absolutely accept and believe. From the November 29, 1954 *Co-worker Letter*:

And so I say to you, as the Apostle Paul said to those at Galatia: I certify you, brethren, that the GOSPEL which is preached of me is not after man, for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it but BY THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST. . . . When it pleased God, who . . . called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me that I might preach Him to the world; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood—neither went I to any sect or denomination or human theologian, but I went directly to the WORD of GOD, on my knees, corrected, reprov'd, and instructed in God's righteousness and TRUTH!

Each one of us must decide whether we accept or reject this claim, but this remnant body was founded in 1975 upon the belief that God *did* choose Mr. Armstrong, inspired him with divine revelation, and commissioned him to preach that gospel to the world, even as He had called and commissioned past historical servants to perform monumental works. Therefore, we are among those who revere the work Mr. Armstrong accomplished, not just for the sake of the man himself, but for the purpose of God and His divine operation in these last days.

The fact Mr. Armstrong always stated he had been taught by God in going "directly to the WORD of GOD, . . . corrected, reprov'd, and instructed in God's righteousness and TRUTH," has made some conclude he was never really inspired with special revelation at all, but merely compiled his doctrines according to personal Bible study. Many also erroneously conclude they are just as capable of gleaning truth on their own this way from the Scriptures. But as we have already shown, the men God used to perform a work were always selected by God, inspired, and then sent. Even while he was reading the Bible—searching for the truth—we accept God uniquely answered Mr. Armstrong's prayers for understanding in a way He had not given to any other man in this era. Many thousands have asked for divine revelation and sought it through personal endeavor, but this does not mean God is duty-bound to answer those requests. In most cases He has not and does not!

Many former members of the church lay great claim to Mr. Armstrong's challenge to "prove all things" from the Bible, and not believe something only because a man says so. But they misapply this concept by asserting it means they do not need a ministry at all, and can find God's revelation on their own. But which ones of us would ever have figured out the plan of salvation by ourselves through our own personal Bible study? We first had to *hear* that gospel preached through a chosen servant, and then God opened our minds to *verify* its authenticity from our own Bibles. But anyone who thinks he can figure out truth on his

own without the proclamation of a chosen human ministry is denying the very means through which God said He would work!

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and *how shall they hear without a preacher?* And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! (Romans 10:13–15) [emphasis mine].

Like it or not, the only ones who really possess God's Truth are those who were *called* and then *heard* that gospel message preached through a chosen ambassador—an apostle—sent by the authority of Jesus Christ. "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). If Herbert Armstrong were not such an apostle, then everything he taught about the Family of God and the times of salvation—which were totally unique doctrines and proclaimed by no one else in this age—were false, and should utterly be rejected. But anyone who accepts and holds dear the knowledge that we have the opportunity to be born into the very Family of God in the firstfruits harvest at Christ's return to rule this earth, must accept the authority of Herbert Armstrong as that chosen messenger of God. No one else proclaimed that message! Yes, other men certainly understood the identity of modern Israel and even the need to keep the Sabbath and Holy Days, but not a one of them knew *what those Holy Days truly pictured* for the future of humanity, nor was ever able to bring the books of the Bible into perfect harmony to substantiate that singular picture from Genesis to Revelation. If one insists on rejecting Herbert Armstrong as having been uniquely inspired, then one must also forsake the unique teachings proclaimed by him. You cannot take comfort in the hope of your salvation according to this knowledge and then reject the legitimacy of the voice who brought it to you. It must be one way or the other.

We should also note that legitimate servants of God were not "spiritual volunteers." They did not covet an office or presume to run when they were not sent. There are many who certainly have arrogated that responsibility to themselves today, and God warns us strongly to beware of these false servants in the last days. "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:4–5). But this does not take away from the promise Christ gave that He *would* be working through *someone* in the last days, even until His Second Coming. "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" (Matthew 24:45–46). It simply means we must be able to discern between the true servants God raised up and the imposters speaking of their own minds. With all the counterfeits extant today, there is no wonder the majority have become skeptical to believe any man came in this age with the authority of God's inspiration.

Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, *though a man declare it unto you* (Acts 13:41) [emphasis mine].

Given then we believe Herbert Armstrong was the chosen servant—an apostle—raised up by God in these last days to proclaim His Truth, was he also the prophesied Elijah of the last days? Many make this an automatic conclusion. But to answer that question, let us first examine the works of the first Elijah, and then John the Baptist—who came in the spirit of Elijah—to see which attributes are required of any modern-day counterpart.

The Work of Elijah

Elijah was one of the most prolific men ever used by God to accomplish a significant work in witness against the corruption of God's Truth. His exploits are recorded in 1 Kings 17–21, and 2 Kings 1–10. He was counselor to kings, both of Israel and gentile nations, was zealous for the immutable laws of God, and was substantiated as a legitimate prophet of God through manifestation of many mighty miracles.

The thrust of Elijah's commission by God was to witness against the pollution of the Israelites—God's very own people—who had corrupted God's priceless and perfect way of life with the practices of Baal worship. Remember that the northern Kingdom of Israel—from whence Elijah had been born in Gilead—had never been faithful to God nor was ever ruled by a righteous king. Even from the beginning of Jeroboam's reign, he polluted God's commandments by incorporating heathen practices into the service of Israel's God, establishing two calves for worship in Bethel and Dan, changing the Feast of Tabernacles to the eighth month, and rejecting the Levites in favor of his own pagan priesthood (1 Kings 12:28–33). While still maintaining many of the trappings of God's commandments from the law of Moses, Israel had utterly polluted itself as a whore by changing God's revealed laws to mesh better with the religions of its neighbors. By the time of Elijah in the ninth century B.C.—during the reign of King Ahab—these sins had come to the full through the Satanic influence of Queen Jezebel, the pagan daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon and Tyre.

God used Elijah to perform a mighty work which left no doubt who was speaking with authority from the Most High, and who was serving a false god. Elijah used God's power to withhold rain for three years from the kingdom (1 Kings 17:1, 18:41–45), and then made witness of the true religion by calling fire down from heaven on the altar of God at Mount Carmel, in a showdown with the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:19–40). Although this great witness never did convict the majority of pagan Israelites to turn from their idolatry, God's work did preserve seven thousand faithful who kept themselves pure from the apostate national religion. "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not

bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18). What is certain is that after the work of Elijah, the people of Israel and surrounding kingdoms had no excuse for not recognizing the error of their ways. The penalties they later paid were totally of their own making.

John the Baptist a Type of Elijah

We next come to the ministry of John the Baptist, whose work—the angel told Zacharias—would parallel that of Elijah.

But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. . . . And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:13, 17).

Jesus Christ also confirmed that John came in complementary fashion to Elijah. "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:13–15).

The arrival of John was a very fulfillment of that which was prophesied by Isaiah.

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God (Isaiah 40:1–3).

This commission was confirmed by Matthew as well. "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Matthew 3:1–3).

So what were the key attributes of the ministry of John which are critical for identifying a last day counterpart?

First of all, like Elijah before him, John came with Truth as a divine revelation from God—nothing polluted by the false wisdom and scholarship of human beings.

If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth (John 5:31–33).

John the Baptist spoke truth and nothing but the truth, and he did not mince words when faced with those espousing false doctrine. He knew he had received irrefutable Truth by revelation, and he was not about to soften or mollify that message to make anyone feel better about themselves or their private concepts.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy [Spirit], and with fire: (Matthew 3:7–11).

John also held nothing back when speaking to the pagan rulers of the land. The very reason for his execution was boldly telling Herod he was living in adultery because of divorce and remarriage. "For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife. For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her" (Matthew 14:3–4).

The true servants of God speak dogmatically, because they carry that authority from God Himself. Recall that one of the shocking things about Christ's own ministry was that He spoke with authority. People were not used to this. "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matthew 7:28–29). The intelligentsia of Jewish society taught as our scholars do today, citing their opinions from personal study, but seeking to allow room for other schools of thought. Only the mentally unbalanced laid claim to a divine commission from God and spoke dogmatically. But when John the Baptist came speaking with authority, and then Jesus Christ followed in like manner—with signs to back up that claim—this was something extraordinary. It was also the thing that caused them both to be hated and killed.

So John the Baptist, like Elijah, spoke the Truth, and nothing but the Truth. Over the course of time neither one ever changed what God had first revealed to him using a false concept of "growth" or "new knowledge."

Like Elijah, John also was sent specifically to the people of God—Israel. Recall verses one and two of the Isaiah 40 prophecy we read previously. Since he came to prepare the way for Jesus Christ, and we have already seen Christ was limited by the Father to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24), it is certain John was likewise sent to prepare the same people to whom Christ would be ministering.

John's work—in the spirit of Elijah—was preparatory for something much greater to follow. He understood his ministry was not the focal point, but merely the vehicle to usher in something monumental immediately afterwards. When Jesus Christ finally came on the scene, John's disciples were concerned he might feel slighted to be losing the limelight. But John confirmed he knew his God-given role, and was joyful for his part in that overall plan.

And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease (John 3:26–30).

Will There Be Another Elijah?

Before we analyze the characteristics of a last day Elijah, we must first answer those critics who claim there is no such person prophesied to come in the last days. They claim the angel who spoke to Zacharias—as well as Christ Himself—confirmed John the Baptist alone fulfilled these prophecies, and there is none other we should look for to do a future work.

They refer to passages already quoted, including Matthew 3:3 which says of John, "For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, . . ." and Matthew 11:14 where Christ stated, "And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come." Most importantly, they use the following text to make their point:

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. . . . Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist (Matthew 17:11–13).

They conclude these references prove John the Baptist was the sole fulfillment of these prophecies. But is that really so? Was John the one who truly restored all things? Let us now notice some of the most compelling prophecies concerning Elijah that will answer this question.

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts (Malachi 3:1).

Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse (Malachi 4:4–6).

Could John the Baptist really have fulfilled these prophecies? The entire book of Malachi actually contains prophecies for the very time of Christ's Second Coming. It is a book written for the end times. Note from above that the Elijah referenced in Malachi 4:5 will arrive, "before the great and dreadful day of the LORD. . . ." The first coming of Jesus Christ was *never* referred to as the great and dreadful day of the Lord. No, the timesetting is none other than Christ's return to make war with the nations of the earth and take possession of His Kingdom.

And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come (Acts 2:19–20).

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 19:11–16).

Notice also another portion of the original Isaiah prophecy concerning Elijah:

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. *Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together:* for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it (Isaiah 40:3–5) [emphasis mine].

For further understanding, notice how this same passage was quoted in Luke:

As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; And *all flesh shall see the salvation of God* (Luke 3:4–6) [emphasis mine].

Were all of these events fulfilled at Jesus Christ's first coming? Were mountains brought low, rough places made smooth, and did all human beings on the face of the earth see His coming—receiving access to salvation—two thousand years ago? Not at all! Yet these events involving Elijah are precisely the things prophesied to occur when Christ comes the *second* time! Read Isaiah 35:6–7, 41:15, and Revelation 16:20. Notice also that the only time all humanity will see Christ is when He comes as a conquering King. "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, . . ." (Revelation 1:7).

Yes, we know that John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah as fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, but what is also clear is this prophecy was twofold! But did not Jesus Christ then contradict Himself when He referred to John in Matthew 17? Notice it again:

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, . . . Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist (Matthew 17:11–13).

Even though Jesus did not elaborate, He was speaking of two different aspects of the Isaiah prophecy. He first spoke of the Elias who would come immediately before His Second Coming, but then changed to address the first fulfillment right in their midst in John the Baptist. Most Biblical prophecies have a type and an anti-type. This one is no exception, especially since it contains elements that could not have been fulfilled by John. All these things were certainly not fulfilled, and are even yet to be fulfilled in the future. John the

Baptist spoke the very same kind of twofold prophecy to his disciples concerning Christ's coming:

And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy [Spirit] *and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable* (Luke 3:15–17).

Since John was announcing the arrival of Christ—coming within a very few months—did he mis-speak by saying Christ was coming to judge mankind, separating the wheat from the chaff, and sending the guilty to the lake of fire? Christ did none of those things at His first coming. But even though these things were not to be fulfilled at His first appearance, it was part of the twofold prophecy God inspired John to utter, foreshadowing the *Second Coming* of Christ as the Righteous Judge. This is precisely the thing Jesus Christ did when uttering a twofold prophecy concerning the appearance of Elijah.

What Will the Final Elijah Be Like?

We have already seen the character of the original Elijah and his work, as well as the key attributes of John the Baptist and his work in the spirit of Elijah. From these historical examples—and the prophecies concerning the final Elijah—we can now provide a synoptic profile of that last day Elijah and what this individual will be like:

- This Elijah will receive a divine commission from God to warn His people to renounce their idolatry and perversion and return to the uncorrupted Truths of God. Elijah is not the one by whom knowledge of the Truth was first revealed—like Moses was—but who came to *restore* that revealed way of life after the people departed into error (Matthew 17:11).
- This Elijah will know *the Truth*, and it will not be a mixture of God's Word with the concepts of men through human scholarship—Baalism (John 5:33). His message will be precisely the same one delivered to Moses, the prophets of old, and the same gospel spoken by Jesus Christ, the Twelve, and the Apostle Paul. It was always the very same message throughout antiquity! Anyone who claims truth changes—meaning Christ changes—will never represent Him in that prophetic office. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

- This Elijah will fearlessly preach the Truth concerning Jesus Christ *by name*, and will not spare for sake of political correctness or to make that warning more palatable for politicians and sovereigns of this world. Even as Elijah told King Ahab the blunt reality of his sins (1 Kings 18:18), and John the Baptist told Herod he was living in adultery (Matthew 14:3–4), so will this final Elijah spare no words to make clear the law of God in contrast with humanism. "For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26).
- This final Elijah will perform his work *directly before*, and leading up to the Second Coming of Christ, even as the work of John the Baptist *immediately preceded* and was terminated only by the first arrival of Jesus Christ.

Did Mr. Armstrong Fit the Profile of Elijah?

We have already confirmed Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong fulfilled the office of an apostle—a man given divine inspiration directly from God to understand and deliver that priceless gospel message of Jesus Christ's soon coming Kingdom to those called out of this world as part of the firstfruits harvest. But did he likewise fulfill the office of that end-time Elijah? The answer is no.

First of all, Mr. Armstrong died in 1986—more than sixteen years ago—so his personal work did not directly precede and lead into the Second Coming of Christ. We still do not know how much time is left before the cataclysmic events of Revelation begin to occur and Christ is revealed in power and glory. But even as John the Baptist handed the baton to Christ as his ministry was being completed, so will that final Elijah complete his commission even at the threshold of Christ's triumphant return and emergence as King. Remember, the Elijah prepares the way for Christ. An apostle who died more than sixteen years (and still counting) before that event cannot have been the one God gave this particular commission.

Yes, we are aware Mr. Armstrong believed he and the church were fulfilling that Elijah commission. But in hindsight, we can now easily verify what God really intended to accomplish through Mr. Armstrong, and what He saved for a future fulfillment. We can glean that information by the fruit of his actual accomplishment! What he accomplished was raising up the end-time Church—the firstfruits in God's plan. That was a monumental achievement! In *that* he was entirely successful, and that is proof it was backed by God. But the idea that Mr. Armstrong was doing the Elijah work was predicated on belief Christ would be returning in 1975, or at least by the early 1980s. When the church believed Mr. Armstrong would live to see the return of Christ, it made perfect sense to think he would be

the one God would use to do that final warning to the entire world. After all, Mr. Armstrong was certainly doing a global work—proclaiming the Truth to nations around the world with the *World Tomorrow* radio broadcast and *The Plain Truth* magazine. But Jesus Christ did not return in 1975 as many early church writings anticipated (even if they did so with reservation). And Mr. Armstrong did not live to carry his ministry to the literal return of Christ.

The Difference Between Doctrine and Prophecy

What is clear is that Herbert Armstrong was not a prophet. He was an apostle—inspired with God's divine revelation of Truth—but he was never given the gift of future interpretation of specific names, dates, and events which would transpire. How can we say that? God provided the very yardstick by which to verify those given such divine prophetic gifts:

And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him (Deuteronomy 18:21–22).

We proved the value of *the doctrines* Mr. Armstrong taught *by living them*. For those who had their lives changed by that priceless knowledge, there is nothing that should make us doubt the truth of God's plan of salvation which we received. But claiming the gifts of a prophet—the ability to interpret specific fulfillment of future events—is something altogether different. God recorded that He gave different offices within the church. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11–12). We had an apostle in God's last day Church, and we also had evangelists, pastors, and teachers. But we never had a *certified prophet*, because no one ever stood up and manifested *the credentials* needed to substantiate that God-given gift. Every man who presumed to speculate on specific future events became embarrassed when those predictions did not come to pass. And that very failure is the *proof* God gave us He *did not* inspire those predictions! A legitimate prophet of God *never* has *one* of his assertions fail. Where then does that leave all these men who have presumed to tell us who, what, when, and where long-range Biblical prophecies will be fulfilled? In spite of their convincing schemes, supported by slick colored charts and time-lines, they have all gone down in flames, or back to the drawing boards for revisions. God's true prophets never need to revise their predictions.

Unfortunately, such failed prophetic speculations were instrumental in destroying the faith of many within the Body of Christ. Had the people truly loved God's revealed doctrines—that which God *did* miraculously reveal through Mr. Armstrong—they would not have allowed prophetic speculation and overreaching by the ministry to destroy their confidence in God's work. But this too was allowed by God to see who would value what He *had* given us by revelation. Most of the failed prophetic schemes were not even the creation of Mr. Armstrong to begin with. In many cases, other men reasoned these things out and then submitted them for Mr. Armstrong's review. What has certainly been demonstrated is that no other man besides Mr. Armstrong had been given any divine revelation, and even that given to Mr. Armstrong was limited to doctrine, apart from special intuitive abilities about specific future events. Attempting to interpret his personal commission as the fulfillment of the Elijah work was part of a *presumed* prophetic gift which simply was not backed up by God.

The Elijah Will Not Allow Doctrinal Corruption

The next reason Mr. Armstrong could not have been Elijah is that he allowed the church to depart into doctrinal error in his old age. As many of our articles, *Monthly Letters*, and sermons over the last quarter-century demonstrate, if the Worldwide Church of God were ever the true Church of God in this age, it was so because God gave us *the Truth* by divine revelation from the beginning. That includes a Monday Pentecost, and the original teachings on marriage and divorce, the nature of man, divine healing, and many others which were changed beginning in 1974. After almost forty years of keeping these doctrines which Mr. Armstrong vehemently asserted were God's revelation, he finally capitulated under pressure from his son and other ministers who had no real love for Christ's gift to the Church. As late as 1973, while the liberal doctrinal committee of human scholars was drafting its changes, Mr. Armstrong was yet resisting their pressure and asserting the authority of the original teachings. He even published a comprehensive booklet called *Marriage and Divorce* that year to reconfirm the original marriage doctrine, and stated in a taped Bible study that if he ever allowed that change, God would spew us out of His mouth! During the same time he also thundered that God would *never* have begun His church on Satan's pagan day of worship—Sunday. Yet, within months he had signed off on both changes. Why? Was it truly because he came to see we had been wrong for forty years and needed to "change" to have pure doctrine? Or was he trying to pacify a restless ministry and laity who were clamoring to have the "burden" of God's laws lightened, seeing we had not fled to a place of safety as expected in 1972, and the end was not really imminent? No one can say for sure, but the fact remains the church went into apostasy on the watch of Mr. Armstrong. The church was then told that God's apostle had the authority to change doctrine, and God would back it up. Yet this was totally contrary to what Mr. Armstrong had said for decades before (Galatians 1:8–9). Those who believe the apostasy began after his death should think again. The stage for all the doctrinal perversion we have witnessed in the WCG during the last

fifteen years was made possible by the changes instituted in 1974. Once the church rejected Jesus Christ as the Revelator of Truth from the beginning—turning instead to the wisdom of deceived human scholars—the die was cast, and the prophesied destruction of the church was set in motion.

A False Start for the Elijah's Work?

The very time these doctrinal perversions were being sponsored in God's Church in the 1970s was the time Mr. Armstrong's visits to world leaders began to accelerate. The *World Tomorrow* radio program and *The Plain Truth* magazine had fulfilled God's purpose to reach those He was calling to a knowledge of the Truth. But by contrast, the entire purpose of visits to world leaders was to fulfill the Elijah commission to warn the world in preparation for Christ's imminent return. But was that endeavor successful? Hardly.

Did those national leaders receive a bone-chilling warning about the imminent return of Christ and His government soon to dethrone those current kings and presidents? Did Mr. Armstrong speak to them the way Elijah and John the Baptist spoke to Ahab and Herod? Was the entire world warned with mighty signs and miracles about their national sins and the need for repentance? Was there ever really a witness comparable to that God prophesied to occur before the arrival of His Son? Such a warning message was never proclaimed by Mr. Armstrong. Instead, diplomacy was the order of the day, including expensive gifts to these world leaders, with only a veiled message about Jesus Christ, and without even using His name! Is that really what we saw from Elijah and John the Baptist? Is that truly the way we think God is going to make final preparation for Christ's return?

As we have already noted, Jesus Christ did not return soon after these years of state visits, so this is proof of itself those visits to kings and presidents by Mr. Armstrong were not the Elijah work. And as we have also noted, God is not going to allow any man who has corrupted His immutable Truth to speak in His name, or by His authority. From the time the Worldwide Church of God began to change doctrines, it ceased to be approved or backed by God. Although it continued for several years on the glory of past accomplishments, it was no longer inspired or blessed by God. In his last article published in the July 1985 *Worldwide News*, Mr. Armstrong even lamented the destruction of the church by the liberals in the 1970s, although he stopped short of saying we should return to the first teachings entirely. Yet, we think it very likely he may have personally repented before he died of allowing other men to apply pressure to change God's Truth. No one knows his heart and mind, but we still respect the work he accomplished in the service of God to raise up the Church of the last days, and we will ever be grateful for the powerful way God used him for over forty years to that purpose.

Elijah to Restore All Things

What truly is to be restored by the final Elijah? "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things" (Matthew 17:11). Those believing Mr. Armstrong fulfilled this role focus on the unique doctrinal teachings he delivered to us which had not been taught for centuries, including the plan of salvation and knowledge of the reason for human creation. It is certain he was the only man in this age to proclaim that Truth. But was this proclamation of truth in the last days what God considered a restoration?

If one recognizes Mr. Armstrong could not have been Elijah as shown above, what could be the real fulfillment of this prophesied restoration? Is there something significant at this time that needs to be restored? There is indeed!

What needs miraculous restoration is none other than the very truths of God, which have been repudiated and maligned by the very people who received them in this age! Even as God gave His priceless Truth to Israel through Moses, so He gave it to the last-day Church through Mr. Armstrong. And in the very manner Israel invariably corrupted God's gift through human wisdom and incorporation of pagan practices, so has spiritual Israel of the last days done precisely the same thing.

By rejection of God's true day of Pentecost—Monday—in 1974, the church rejected Christ and His Holy Spirit as the source of all knowledge, preferring to seek knowledge from deceived human scholars. And months later, the change of the doctrine on marriage and divorce opened the floodgates for the destruction of hundreds of families. While the people and ministry alike clamored for relief from God's true ways—which they viewed as a burden through their lust—by rejecting the law of marriage they opened Pandora's Box and brought upon themselves every evil as a consequence. That change which was touted as such a blessing was actually the one that created massive fracturing and division of families. Over the last few decades, the people of God who were once so blessed and protected from many evils in the world, became prey like their pagan neighbors to every penalty and heartache that comes from violation of God's immutable laws. They can justify it by any means they choose, but the fruit of those changes has been destruction, splintering, and estrangement, both within physical families as well as the church as a whole. The end result of those changes was the total destruction of our parent body, with only confusion, heartache, and misery as its children. Is this the way God wants His church to end? Or, as He so many times brought the Israelites miraculously to repentance out of their idolatry, is such a plan on the horizon for spiritual Israel as well? That is the very restoration God will accomplish through the work of an end-time Elijah.

That final Elijah has not come on the scene yet. But the work of that true Elijah will be to restore the original doctrines of God within the Church, and provide the means for legitimate reconciliation of families.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse (Malachi 4:5–6).

How is that reconciliation going to be accomplished? The apostate people of God will be humbled and brought to repentance, even by a required tribulation.

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. . . . For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes (Revelation 7:13–14, 17).

In the time of that great tribulation to soften the hardened hearts of Israel, there will also be chosen servants of God who will come on the scene to truly accomplish that final warning message to the world in preparation for the arrival of the new King.

And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will (Revelation 11:3–6).

Notice these two men are given the very same powers that the original Elijah manifested—the ability to cut off all rain, and to call fire down from heaven. When God sets His hand to recover His own people out of error, and simultaneously to warn the pagan nations of the impending change in world government coming, rest assured it will be accomplished with great works and magnificent signs.

Those men who now presume to ascribe that work of Elijah to themselves as an extension of Mr. Armstrong's commission—believing their radio programs and magazines

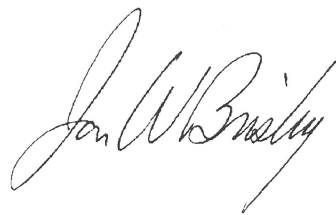
are fulfilling this end-time prophecy—are kidding themselves. Even the greatest of these works is still making little to no impact on this world. The true Elijah work will make a *monumental impact* on the entire world *from its inception*. Remember also, God will never use a man to do that work who has embraced the corrupt doctrines of apostasy. No one making compromise with Baal will ever represent the Living God. So the works of those men who have accepted a Sunday Pentecost, perversion of God's marriage laws, and corruption of the original teachings on the nature of man, tithing, and divine healing, can automatically be ruled out as carrying any authority from God. They are imposters.

We do not speculate on the identity of the true end-time Elijah. It is not necessary to do so, and in fact God has kept us from knowing it until His time of revealing. And we will certainly not travel that same road to destruction like those hundreds who have presumed to impose themselves into God's will. God is very capable of calling whom He will to do that work, and we know it will be accomplished right on time. The responsibility of the faithful remnant in the meantime is to hold fast to the original doctrines we first received through God's end-time apostle, even as did seven thousand in the days of Elijah. Those who refuse to embrace the corrupt perversions in doctrinal changes manifested in 1974 and beyond are those who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle (2 Thessalonians 2:13–15).

We wait patiently for God's perfect work of recovery and restoration of His spiritual nation. That day may not be too far hence. Until then, may we all stand fast in that faith.

Your devoted servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and stylized, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Jon W. Brisby