

December 2011

Dear Brethren:

In the October *Monthly Letter*, we began to examine the role of *Anglo-Israelism* among the doctrines of the Worldwide Church of God. There is no doubt this concept played a major role in the spiritual orientation of that entire church, but what is not yet clear is *how* and *why* that became true.

If you are one who is seeking to test the potential validity of the basic principles espoused by Mr. Herbert Armstrong, then you need to understand. But if you are one who already accepts the legitimacy of Mr. Armstrong's work, maybe you do not need this history lesson? Maybe you are beyond the need of a "rehash" of the past? If you think so, consider this question: How sure are you that you understand how to defend the major tenets of your own beliefs? Can you give an adequate account of your faith (1 Peter 3:15)? If you cannot, the day will come when your confidence will be assaulted, and unless you have a firm basis for your own convictions, they may crumble. Therefore, it is valuable to study the doctrinal positions of those who oppose our beliefs for this particular reason. The purpose is not to immerse ourselves in debate—point and counterpoint—to feed a desire for controversy. The point is that the detractors of Herbert Armstrong provide *the very best material* with which to test the credibility of that very way we claim to love. Does your conviction require blind faith, or do your core beliefs have real substance supporting them? Herbert Armstrong challenged all to "prove" that Truth. Walking through this history lesson is one means of doing just that, so regardless of your background, it merits your time and consideration.

Last time, we defined what Anglo(British)-Israelism is all about, and saw that in spite of the claims of those who hate it, it really does have a basis of authenticity from a simple reading of the Bible. Although many radical and bizarre groups lay claim to belief in the existence of modern-day Israelites to justify their own twisted concepts, the basic historical foundation is sound. We also saw that God made specific promises which cannot be ignored. Since God does not lie, there must be a fulfillment of those promises. His assurances cannot simply be *spiritualized* away.

In seeking to marginalize Mr. Armstrong's credibility, Mr. Joseph Tkach, Jr.—his eventual successor as Pastor General of the Worldwide Church of God—claimed in summary that Anglo-Israelism is unbiblical, it contradicts the true gospel message of Christ, it was the central plank in the entire body of church doctrine, and that disproving that plank also proved that Sabbath-keeping is unnecessary.

We have already addressed the issue of what the Bible says. There seems to be no basis except for personal bias to claim it is unbiblical. But what about the other three contentions?

### **Is the Gospel of Jesus Christ Undermined?**

Does belief that there are modern-day descendants of the lost Ten Tribes of Israel playing a major role in world affairs today actually undercut or contradict the gospel of Jesus Christ? That all depends upon what you consider to be the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you have embraced a Protestant, Sunday-keeping, grace-without-obedience orientation to Christianity, then British-Israelism definitely gets in the way. If you believe "the gospel" is a message *about* the person of Jesus Christ—with the idea that He did it all so we have to do *virtually nothing* to become saved—then Anglo-Israelism is certainly an annoying thorn. But if you understand that the true gospel of Jesus Christ is *the proclamation which He Himself brought*—to reveal the good news of the coming Kingdom of God—then the role of Israel, both physical and spiritual, ceases to be an inconvenient annoyance, and instead offers a key to understanding God's master plan of salvation.

We have already covered a description of the key components of God's saving work with mankind. That program to offer salvation to all humanity begins with His particular work with Israel—His *peculiar treasure*. But as we have proved, singling out Israel was not an act of bias or racism on God's part. His work through Israel is the means by which *the entire world* will one day be blessed. And in reality, the physical nation of Israel has actually been the tool God has used to show us *how not* to do things. Their example consistently is one of failure. They never truly received the great blessings God promised originally because they could never actually follow through and do what God required of them. That history of failure was written as a lesson to all those who would be offered *true salvation* through the ministry of Jesus Christ. But that salvation process still requires becoming a spiritual Israelite!

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon *the Israel of God* (Galatians 6:15–16) [emphasis mine].

Paul was writing the above to a *Gentile church* in Galatia, and yet he called them "the Israel of God." Jesus Christ made plain that the *true Israelites* are not the ones who have a physical pedigree, but those who actually *respect God's law* and act in faith to obey it, even as did Abraham:

They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham (John 8:39–40).

The Apostle Paul was confirming the very same principle. It is not about who are your physical ancestors, but *what you do* to show honor and respect to God:

For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision [physical Gentiles] keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision [a member of Israel]? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God (Romans 2:25–29).

So the true message of the gospel of Christ is not that Israel ceases to be important, but a clarification of *who* truly represents God's favorites—His peculiar treasure. Salvation is still based upon being part of Israel, because the Church of God is *spiritual Israel*:

Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for *salvation is of the Jews*. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:22–24) [emphasis mine].

With that principle in mind, how then does it make sense that Anglo-Israelism undermines this spiritual truth of Christ's gospel message? It only does so within those groups which have warped and twisted the concept to justify partiality, selfishness, and racism. But is that what Herbert Armstrong was doing by embracing the belief?

Recall that Mr. Tkach went to great lengths to confirm that Anglo-Israelism was *the central plank* of the entire church built under Herbert Armstrong. And by attacking that single plank, he asserts that the whole ideology of the church came crashing down with it, being proved to be without substance. But is that true? What is the real history of that concept within the Radio Church of God, and what was its true relevance?

## Origin of British-Israelism in the Church

Remember that Herbert Armstrong began his road to conversion by questioning *everything*, and firstly, the very existence of God. Step by step, he put every assumption and theory to the test to seek to distill real truth from mythology. He studied evolution to see if it had any merit. He found that it did not. He proved to himself that there really was a Master Architect who created and sustained this universe, and he ultimately came to believe that the Bible was the inspired—holy—writing of that very Creator God. So how then did British-Israelism come to play any part?

As we have already noted, the entire Bible centers around God's work with and through His *peculiar treasure*—Israel. Those books are filled not only with the historical exploits of ancient Israelites, but many prophecies concerning their future. Other nations are chronicled in the Bible *only in so far* as they interface with or have some impact upon Israel. Herbert Armstrong recognized this fact. He was highly interested in those prophecies of the last days upon this earth before the return of Jesus Christ. He correctly identified Israel as the *continuing central character* in the play. While the majority viewed the Israelites as characters who made their exit from the stage during the second act, Mr. Armstrong understood that Israel was still very much the "leading lady" in that drama, and she would be just as prominent in the *Final Act* as she had been in the earlier scenes.

So why then did Herbert Armstrong embrace British-Israelism? It was not a desire to substantiate racism or any other arrogant claim of being "the chosen ones" by birth. All of these others who have coopted the concept seek to prove they have some "inherent right" to God's favor by birth. They do exactly what the Jews of Christ's day did—they use a *physical pedigree* to substantiate themselves carnally. It is nothing but human arrogance. But that was not the orientation of Herbert Armstrong, and that is easily proved. Here is the official statement of the Radio Church of God doctrinal position as published in 1948:

We believe the PROMISES were made to Abraham and his "seed," Christ, and that the Covenants (including the New Covenant), and the promises pertain alone to ISRAEL. That our white, English-speaking peoples of today are enjoying the national phases of the promises—that of MATERIAL blessings—called the "Birthright," which was handed down thru the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, whose descendants we are; but that the "Scepter"—the promise of kings, and the SPIRITUAL phase of the promises, including Christ and salvation thru Him—was given to and shall not depart from Judah of whom are the race we know today as the Jews. We believe eternal life is God's gift resting upon the promises made



to Abraham and his "seed," Christ, designating this earth (made new), not heaven, as our eternal home and reward. That salvation is thru Christ alone, and not inherited thru the Birthright (right of birth) and that salvation is freely open to Gentiles who, thru Christ, become Abraham's children and are adopted into the family of Israel and become heirs according to the promises.

This statement confirms there was no claim that physical descendants of Israel had any "inside track" to salvation. Quite the opposite, only those who become *spiritual Israelites* through conversion—and from *any and all* of the races of humanity—have real hope of salvation.

Why then does it matter whether modern-day descendants of Israel still carry the birthright promises of Abraham, if those physical blessings do not grant salvation? The answer has everything to do with the credibility of God and His assurances.

### **God's Credibility at Stake**

Recall that we have already examined God's specific promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and those long-range prophecies in which God said the descendants of Israel would hold great sway in world affairs *in the last days*, before the return of Christ (Genesis 35:10–12; 49:8–10, 22–26). Yet, if you believe the only remaining descendants of Israel are those identified as the Jewish people today, you have a serious problem. This is the basis of the challenge first posed by J. H. Allen.

Is it any wonder that skepticism is rampant, both in the church and out of it, since the common error of Christendom is to regard the Jews as the whole house of Israel? Is it any wonder that Tom Paine lost his soul while following the beaten path of this fallacy? For he did give the Bible up as a myth, and boldly states in his writings that he was led into infidelity because he saw that the Jews did not and never could verify the promises concerning Israel. . . . In 1898 B. Fay Mills, the one-time Spirit-filled evangelist, said, "In the fourth place, the prophecies of the Old Testament (to Israel) have not been realized. Today," he says, "the Bible is no more inspired than the Koran" (*Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright*, pp. 77, 340).

It appears that Herbert Armstrong became compelled by this very pointed challenge of disheartened religious scholars, American patriots, and snide agnostics, all of whom had lost faith in God's promises:

This promise never has been fulfilled in the Jews. It cannot be "spiritualized" away by interpreting it as being inherited only through Christ. It could not pertain to the Church, for there is but ONE true Church acknowledged in the Bible, and it is not a nation, or a group of nations, but ONE Church of called-out individuals scattered through ALL nations. Yet this amazing promise MUST stand fulfilled, unless we are to deny the Bible and God's sacred Word!

Here is the enigma of the ages! Is this a divine promise unkept? Thomas Paine and Robert Ingersoll [a nineteenth century agnostic orator] lost faith in God and rejected the Bible because they believed these tremendous national promises were never fulfilled.

The very fate of the Bible as the revealed Word of God — the evidence of the existence of God — hangs on the answer to this momentous question. The Jewish people did not fulfill these promises. They do not refer to the Church. The world with its great church leaders does not know of any such fulfillment. Did God fail? Or has He made good this colossal promise unknown to the world? (*The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*, 1967, p. 32)

Herein lies the *real reason* that Anglo-Israelism became part of the doctrine of the Radio Church of God. Herbert Armstrong did not shy away from any philosophical challenge. He wanted to know the real truth, and if this question of God's promises made to Israelite descendants could not be answered, then it would indeed make the Bible no more inspired than the Koran.

Did he find evidence of the fulfillment of those promises in our day? Mr. Armstrong found that the assertions of J. H. Allen did indeed have merit. The only manifestation in our modern world of a migratory people rising up with power, might, and prestige in our time as *a nation and company of nations* was the United States of America and the British Commonwealth.

But what about Joseph Tkach's assertion that the whole theory depends upon "folklore, legends, quasi-historical genealogies, and dubious etymologies"? That only addresses attempts to produce bona fide historical "evidence" to link those ancient Lost Tribes through murky history to *a particular people* of this present day. It is true that such evidence is at best questionable. But again, if God is the One who specifically scattered them—intervening supernaturally *to cause them to become lost in identity*—how then is Anglo-Israelism discredited solely because man's documented history is sketchy? "I said, I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from

among men" (Deuteronomy 32:26). Therefore, if the recorded history were not sketchy, would that not imply that God failed to do what He claimed He would—hide them from view?

Regardless, that issue is actually a red herring. It does not address at all the more important question, that if it is not the USA and Great Britain, then *who else* could be the fulfillment of God's birthright promises to Joseph? You see, it is not enough just to pick apart evidence supporting a particular theory. Recall that the very basis for Herbert Armstrong taking up the issue was *to defend the credibility of the Bible as God's inspired Word*. So if you do not believe there is sufficient evidence to "prove" that modern Anglos are that fulfillment, you are still left to prove *how God has not lied!* The challenge of Thomas Paine, Robert Ingersoll, and B. Fay Mills is still outstanding. Joseph Tkach has never answered their challenge. Herbert Armstrong did.

It is not the intent of this piece to examine detailed elements proving that the USA and Great Britain match historically all that God said He would do in the last days to certify the birthright promises of Abraham to a modern people. That can be gleaned by reading directly from Mr. Allen's and Mr. Armstrong's books. But suffice it to say, you will be hard-pressed to identify any other nations who remotely fit those specific prophecies better than do the British and Americans. As a matter of fact, apart from a calculated orchestration on God's part, it is hard to see how else those particular peoples could so closely have come to emulate those very prophecies by coincidence. With or without the ability to "connect the dots" sufficiently through the genealogies of ancient history, what we see *before our very eyes* today is *a startling fulfillment* of all that God said He would perform. Mr. Armstrong summarized it this way:

Between them the British and American peoples had acquired more than two thirds — almost three fourths — of all the cultivated physical resources and wealth of the world! All other nations, combined, possessed barely more than a fourth! Britannia RULED THE WAVES — and the world's commerce was carried on by water! The sun never set on British possessions!

*NOW* THINK!

*Could* the British and American peoples be ignored in prophecies of world conditions that fill a third of the entire Bible — when some 90 percent of all those prophecies pertain to national and international world happenings of *our time, now?* (Ibid., p. 9–10)

And that leads us directly to the next very important reason that Anglo-Israelism became so important within the Worldwide Church of God.

## Relevance of That Knowledge

Besides showing evidence that God did indeed keep His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Herbert Armstrong claimed that this knowledge had even more far-reaching application. Identifying who were those modern descendants of Israel today would provide the basis for applying long-range Bible prophecies concerning the last days to our present time. He called that knowledge the "master key":

This very eye-opening, astounding IDENTITY is the strongest PROOF of the inspiration and authority of the Holy Bible! It is, at the same time, the *strongest proof* of the very active existence of THE LIVING GOD!

An exciting, pulsating, vital *third* of all the Bible is devoted to PROPHECY! And approximately 90 percent of all prophecy pertains to OUR TIME, now, in this latter half of the twentieth century!

It is a WARNING to us — to our English-speaking peoples — of immediate and life-and-death import!

The prophecies *come alive* once their doors are opened by this now-discovered MASTER KEY! (Ibid., p. 4)

And what was the overriding message he claimed had been recorded by God for those end-time descendants of Israel? Was it a big *pat on the back*, confirming *their rights* as being the favorites of God? Was it a message to justify racism, professing that white, English-speaking peoples had reason to look down their noses at all others? Was it a message encouraging Americans and Britains to sit back and enjoy the fruits of their inherent favor with God because they deserved it? This is precisely what most radical groups have preached who have coopted Anglo-Israelism as a tool to moralize their hatred and personal arrogance. But that is not how Herbert Armstrong used that knowledge.

On the contrary, Mr. Armstrong's real thrust with British-Israelism was another unique doctrine taught by no other religionist. Oh yes, J. H. Allen understood the *underlying principles* of the separate houses of the Israelites and the difference between the Birthright and Sceptre promises. But even Mr. Joseph Tkach acknowledges that Mr. Armstrong's take was very unique indeed:

Previous Anglo-Israelites emphasized God's blessings to Israel. Nobody said anything about the curses. Herbert Armstrong noticed the curses (*Transformed By Truth*, p. 127).

Yes, indeed. Herbert Armstrong actually used British-Israelism as a vehicle to carry a *warning* to the nations—not a pat on the back. We have already seen that he never claimed physical Israelites had any inside track to spiritual salvation. Neither did he

encourage smugness among those he believed were literal descendants of the lost Ten Tribes. Quite the contrary, he emphasized that because they were *apostate* Israelites—not showing proper respect at all for God—they were soon to reap the very fruits of their rebellion and hardness of heart.

But if they were promised riches and power nationally, and that is exactly what they were enjoying, why would any of them worry about the future? Is not God duty-bound to keep them "on top" in perpetuity? Hardly. And that is the greatest key of all.

Mr. Armstrong makes the point that God was "duty-bound" to bless the modern descendants of Israel—whether they were "good people" or not—because His promise to Abraham was unconditional. However, God never promised that those children would *retain* their blessings forever. No, to the contrary, He made plain that the day would come when those rebellious children would have all of their wealth, might, and influence taken away from them. Even as God had intervened supernaturally to promote them above all peoples upon the earth in the last days, so would He at some point bring them low, breaking their pride and humbling them before the world. This is the essence of the events prophesied to occur before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It is not just a generalized work to deal with all humanity as if they are in one big pot, but a *targeted work* to humble specific nations at the hands of others. And unless you know the identity of *the major players* in this drama, you will lack the keys to recognize what is transpiring on the world stage. This was the unique interpretation which Herbert Armstrong offered, and the reason that Anglo-Israelism became such an important doctrine of the church:

The Birthright, once we received it, was stupendous, AWESOME! —  
unequaled among nations or empires!

But *what have our peoples done* with that awesome blessing?

They were still ISRAELITES, even though they themselves knew it not!

They were still rebellious, "stiff-necked," stubborn!

Once the British peoples, and the Americans — the "lost" Israelites now supposing they are Gentiles — found themselves basking in the pleasant sunshine of such wealth and power, they were less willing than their ancient forefathers to yield to their GOD and HIS WAYS. They felt no NEED of Him, now! It seems few ever turn to God until they find themselves in desperate need or trouble.

But after God had withheld the Birthright 2520 years, and then, when our peoples deserved *nothing* from God, He has *suddenly* bestowed on us national blessings unparalleled in history — the unconditional PROMISE to Abraham had been KEPT! *No longer* is God obligated by His Promise to *continue* our undeserving peoples in world prestige, dominance, wealth and

greatness. Once we had been *given* such unrivalled position, it was up to us whether we should keep it. . . .

After the national Birthright had been withheld 2520 years, and *then* bestowed — *after* God *gave* our peoples that national POWER, and has now, because of our national rebellion against His Laws *broken* the pride of our power — *after* He shall have punished us with unprecedented DROUGHT and epidemics of disease in its wake — then IF the British and Americans still continue in their evil ways — still refuse to repent and turn to their God, then: ". . . I will bring seven times more PLAGUES upon you according to your sins," says GOD. (Ibid, pp. 181, 189)

### **Was British-Israelism "The Central Plank"?**

If, therefore, that teaching was so important to the church, as we see that it was, is Mr. Tkach correct in his assessment? We are asked to believe that British-Israelism was "the central plank" of the Worldwide Church of God, meaning the foundational principle upon which all other doctrines were dependent, including the seventh-day Sabbath. But is that true?

We have just established why that doctrine is a "major key" to understanding what the Bible says *has already happened* and *will happen* in the future. But does that make it the central plank of all doctrine? Not at all. If anything, the true *central plank* of "Armstrongism" is defined by all that we have examined concerning what made his beliefs truly *different* from all other churches. This includes his teaching about the nature of God, the nature of man, the reason for man's very existence, and the real plan being carried out for the salvation of humanity. As we previously documented, this "take" upon the gospel of Jesus Christ was *totally unique* from any other religion. And that interpretation of the gospel was truly the heart and soul of the church. Anglo-Israelism is merely *a single piece of the greater puzzle* which adds dimension in explaining *how* God is bringing His great purpose to fruition. But even without that special knowledge to allow us to interpret current events in this world, the basis of our opportunities and responsibilities in God's salvation plan is still intact. If we did not understand how God had fulfilled His promise to Abraham, the faithful—those nonetheless believing in the veracity of God's character—would still act in faith to confirm God's honor. But being able to see *the reality* of God's fulfillment of His promise to modern-day Israel is simply an additional blessing which allows us to answer the naysayers like Thomas Paine, Robert Ingersoll, and any others who would assert that God is either a liar, or non-existent.



## Does the Sabbath Hang Upon British-Israelism?

Is it really true that by discrediting Anglo-Israelism, the validity of the seventh-day Sabbath is simultaneously undermined? We are told that Mr. Armstrong concentrated his warning message to the USA, Britain, and the northwestern democracies of Europe because—believing that they were the literal descendants of Israel—they were obligated above all other peoples on earth to keep the Sabbath. But if they in fact were not the descendants of Israel, then they would not need to worry so about the Sabbath.

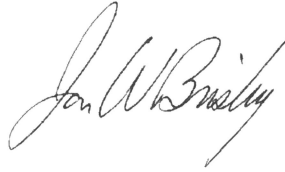
The problem with this theory is that it once again presumes the validity of the Protestant—law-done-away—version of Christianity. If you believe that God only mandates keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath by physical Israelites, then proving that none but those recognized today as Jews are actually Israelites is an excellent way to nullify Sabbath-keeping for all of the rest of us. But that is not what Herbert Armstrong taught. Regardless of your views about British-Israelism, the issue of the Sabbath is totally separate. The Radio Church of God professed that God made the Sabbath for *all mankind*, regardless of race, creed, or national origin. So proving that white, English-speaking peoples were not actually the progeny of Israel would hardly nullify the teaching that we should all be keeping the Sabbath. It would merely discredit the prophetic assumptions made about what the immediate future holds for those physical nations. Claiming that Anglo-Israelism was the central plank, and that discrediting it likewise destroys any basis for Sabbath-keeping, simply does not hold water. It defies simple logic. The reason Mr. Tkach makes the claim however, is fairly clear. If your true objective is to discredit the Sabbath, why not try to tie it to a teaching which seems more radical and hard to substantiate. By attaching the Sabbath to Anglo-Israelism as a "straw man," then destroying that straw man brings down the Sabbath along with it in one easy and convenient stroke.

As emphasized throughout, you must decide for yourself which assertions have merit, if any. But an honest assessment of the historical facts about what Herbert Armstrong actually taught shows that it was not so flimsy as his detractors would like you to believe. There is a reason that thousands responded to his message and that church grew by leaps and bounds from the 1930s through the 1960s. And there is also a reason *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy* was the most requested book in the history of that church. That work gave context to the Bible for our time and made world events alive with relevance for the future.

If it is true that God is still dealing dramatically with those *physical* descendants of Israel, then much of what transpires in the future will center around His fulfilling very specific promises of blessings and cursings for their behaviors. But most importantly, the true Israel of God—those called to be part of the Body of Jesus Christ, His *peculiar*

*treasure*—will at the same time receive either blessings or cursings based upon their response to or rejection of His divinely revealed Truth.

Yours with love and devotion in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and elegant, with the first name "Jon" being the most prominent.

Jon W. Brisby