

June 2013

Dear Brethren:

In past issues of this *Monthly Letter*, we have covered several detailed aspects of the work of Herbert Armstrong through the twentieth century. But before going any further with detailed analysis, it is time to pause and go back to the beginning to provide a *synoptic summary* of key events which defined the life of Herbert Armstrong, as well as important benchmarks in the history of the Worldwide Church of God in general. Many who witnessed those significant events in early decades are now gone, and newer ones just learning about that history may never yet have heard the story expounded in a succinct manner.

It can be overwhelming to take mountains of facts and figures and make cohesive sense of it all. Reading Mr. Armstrong's autobiography will certainly tell the tale, but that requires digesting over one thousand pages of his writings. During the heyday of the church, members often heard stories repeated of how Herbert Armstrong first became interested in religion, how the Radio Church of God and Ambassador College were founded, and how that work grew over time. But as with all such history, it is easily forgotten, even by those who lived through part of it, let alone cloaked in obscurity for those to whom it is all so foreign. So here will be a relatively *condensed outline*, taken primarily from the *Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*, of key events in the life and work of the man we believe God used to reveal biblical truths—truths which we continue today to cherish most of all.

## Beginnings

Herbert Armstrong was born in 1892 in Des Moines, Iowa to parents who were Quakers. He regularly attended church with his family and was indoctrinated into the most common Protestant beliefs about the nature of God, salvation, and Christian duty, but as a young adult he showed little personal interest in religion.

In 1910, at age 18, his Uncle Frank encouraged him to pursue a career in advertising, rather than go to university. He landed his first job writing want-ads for the *Daily Caller* newspaper in Des Moines. Over the years, that advertising experience helped him change his objective from trying to use vocabulary *beyond everyone*, to learning to speak and write so that *all* could understand. He learned to eschew boring outlines and instead to make written concepts "pop" with interest. He applied himself with great ambition to become a successful businessman, educating himself, creating his own opportunities by *thinking big*, and working harder than anyone else. He sought to learn from those who had already achieved great

success, and he possessed great confidence in his own abilities to achieve anything he chose to master. More than that, this is how he described himself as a young man:

In those days I had developed a very excessive case of swelled-head. I was snappy, confident, conceited—yet *sincere*, and intending to be completely honest (*The PLAIN TRUTH*, November 1957, p. 4).

On July 31, 1917, Herbert married Loma Dillon, a schoolteacher his own age from a very small town in Iowa. In the 1967 revised autobiography, he elaborates that he was introduced to her as his *third cousin*, but also later states that Loma's father was first cousin to his own mother, which if so, actually made Herbert and Loma second cousins (*The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*, 1967, p. 186). He described Loma this way:

Also, from the instant when she first came *bounding* in at my aunt's farm, I had noticed she was almost something of a tom-boy—active, very alert. Whatever she did, she did it quickly. I learned later that her brothers dubbed her with two nick-names—"She-bang" and "Cyclone!" She was full of fun, yet serious—with the unspoiled wholesomeness of an Iowa country girl. And, most important of all, strength of character! (*The PLAIN TRUTH*, July 1958, p. 21)

They married in Chicago, where he was living and working at the time, but with the firm expectation that he would be drafted into the Army at any moment (the United States had just declared war on Germany on April 6). Although willing and eager to serve, he had been classified as "Class IV, Noncombatant," not only because he was newly married, but probably more so because they were already expecting a baby in May of the next year. Beverly Lucile was born May 9, 1918, and then Dorothy Jane on July 7, 1920.

The flash economic depression of late 1920 destroyed Herbert's flourishing advertising business. He was still determined to rebuild it, but had not yet grasped that his future would lead in a totally different direction. Of that time period, he wrote:

. . . For two years I stayed in Chicago vainly attempting to revive a dead business. I didn't know, then, that God the Eternal was intervening to take from me and destroy my IDOL—the god I was placing before HIM! That false god was the vanity of desiring to be considered "IMPORTANT" and to reap and accumulate a big share of this world's material goods. . . .

From that time on I became like King Midas in reverse.

Everything I touched, as a business enterprise, turned to failure, and always by causes totally outside my control! It was frustrating, humiliating, and exceedingly painful (*Ibid.*, November 1958, pp. 25–26).

By June 1924, after some minor business successes but many more major setbacks, Herbert consented to Loma's request to make a trip to Salem, Oregon, to visit his parents and

younger siblings whom he had not seen since their move out west twelve years previously. He was viewing this as a short-term excursion, fully intending to return to the Midwest by that same autumn, but she was convinced they would not be returning at all (*Ibid.*, January 1959, p. 30). After staying with family a few weeks in Salem, Herbert began exploring advertising openings in Portland, Oregon, and Vancouver, Washington. For months he was greatly encouraged, and the business opportunities continued to multiply. He was moving quickly to surpass even his greatest past accomplishments in Chicago, with expectations of even more incredible income within two or three years. And then, once again, by the fall of 1926, the bottom fell out. Here is how he described it:

Now, with a new business of much greater promise, all my clients were suddenly removed from possibility of access, thru powers and forces entirely outside of my control.

It seemed, indeed, as if some INVISIBLE and MYSTERIOUS HAND were causing the earth to simply swallow up whatever business I started. And indeed, that is precisely what was happening! God was knocking me down! But I was not yet *out!* . . .

My morale was fast descending to subbasement. I was not so cocky or self-confident now. I was being "softened" for the unconditional surrender to God (*Ibid.*, February 1959, p. 17).

### **Challenged About the Sabbath**

During this very same time frame, Herbert Armstrong was already reeling at home because of his wife's *new discovery* from the Bible concerning the seventh-day Sabbath. This would prove to be the very beginning of a total life change for both of them.

Loma had met Emma Runcorn, who awakened in her an interest in meaty Bible study, rather than just the superficial, socially-focused religion of her Methodist upbringing. Mrs. Runcorn and her husband, O. J., were members of Church of God, Seventh Day, a "Saturday-keeping church," and through Mrs. Runcorn, Loma came to see from the Bible that there was no authority for worshiping God on Sunday. She could not wait to share her discovery with her husband who she was certain would respond with similar enthusiasm. Instead, this is how he reacted:

My wife gone into religious *fanaticism!* I was horrified, outraged! What would my friends—my business associates say? . . .

I had been humiliated, my ego punctured, by unpreventable business reverses. But this was the greatest humiliation of all. This seemed more than my vanity and conceit could take. It was a mortifying blow.

"You can't tell me that all these Churches have been wrong all these years and centuries! They all teach that SUNDAY is the day to keep and hold church services, all but one strange, queer, fanatical sect."

My wife was broken up, too, when for the first time in our married life I threatened divorce. She was sobbing.

"But I can't help it," she sobbed. "I have seen with my own eyes *in the Bible* that God made holy the hours between Friday sunset and Saturday sunset. I would be disobeying GOD if I gave it up now—I would be LOST!"

I was boiling with indignation and anger.

"I *know* that the BIBLE says we are to keep SUNDAY," I said sternly. "I don't know just *where*, but I do know that all these churches can't be wrong! I'm going to give you just one more chance, before your nonsensical fanaticism breaks up our home! I have an analytical mind. I've been trained in getting and analyzing *facts*! Now I'm going to research the Bible! I'm going to find *where* the Bible commands us to observe SUNDAY. I'll PROVE IT TO YOU IN THE BIBLE! Will you *then* give up this fanaticism?"

She agreed—*IF* I could prove it, and show it to her *in the BIBLE*. That was good enough for me! I was supremely confident. I knew it was there. I knew I could find it!

And so it came about that in the fall of 1926, with my business gone—with but one laundry client left, whose advertising required only some thirty minutes of my time a week, that I was goaded into my first real study of the Bible (*Ibid.*, March 1959, pp. 7–8).

Thus, what began as a strategy to defend his own personal pride and reputation in the world would boomerang into a series of events leading him in the opposite direction.

From his sister-in-law's goading during the same time, he also began a study of the theory of evolution, which prompted him to start at the very beginning to either prove or to refute the existence of God. After six months of intensive study, he found that evolutionary theory was a charade, supported only by circular reasoning which could never hold water. He also found no evidence whatsoever in the Bible for worshiping on Sunday. Much to the contrary, he discovered that the real crux of the issue was obedience to the commands of a Creator vs. man's incessant rejection of any authority except that originating from men's minds. Here is how he described the aftermath of his study:

It was humiliating to have to admit my wife had been right, and I had been wrong, in the most serious argument that ever came between us.

It was shocking, disillusioning, to learn, after intensive study of the Bible for the first time, that what I had been taught from a child in Sunday School was, in so many basic points, the very opposite of what the Bible plainly states! . . .

They had originated, as research in history had revealed, in paganism. Numerous Bible prophecies foretold it. The amazing, unbelievable TRUTH was, the SOURCE of these popular beliefs and practices of professing Christianity was, quite largely, paganism and human reasoning and custom, *NOT the Bible!*

I had first doubted, then searched for evidence, and found PROOF that God exists—that the Holy Bible is, literally, His divinely inspired revelation and



instruction to mankind. I had learned that one's God is what a person OBEYS. The word "Lord" means MASTER—the one you OBEY! Most people, I had discovered, are obeying *false* gods, rebelling against the one true CREATOR who is the supreme RULER of the universe.

The argument was over a point of OBEDIENCE to GOD.

The opening of my eyes to the TRUTH brought me to the crossroads of my life. To accept it meant to throw in my lot with a class of humble and unpretentious people I had always looked upon as inferior. It meant being cut off from the high and the mighty and the wealthy of this world, to which I had aspired. It meant the final crushing of VANITY. It meant a total *change of life!* (*Ibid.*, April 1959, p. 6)

Finally making the choice to embrace that new path in 1927, Herbert Armstrong became baptized (in either May or June; *The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*, 1967, p. 311) and then sought to pursue something that had true meaning in his life.

It is interesting to note what many others have failed to remember or to emphasize in reciting this history. Notice how Mr. Armstrong speaks of the role his wife continued to play in his spiritual growth:

From the time of my conversion Mrs. Armstrong has always studied with me. We didn't realize it then, but God was calling us *together*. We were always a team, working together in unity (*The PLAIN TRUTH*, May 1959, p. 10).

This fact will become much more significant in later years as the story unfolds.

### **Where Is the Church?**

It is all very good to acknowledge a Creator God and a need to obey Him, but where to go from there? The very same Bible which Herbert Armstrong came to accept as God's Word also spoke of an assembly of true believers. Where was this "church"?

For some time, he fellowshiped with those families through whom he and Loma had first learned about the seventh-day Sabbath. These people were affiliated with an organization headquartered in Stanberry, Missouri, named Church of God, Seventh Day. But this group's doctrines were not all satisfying to Herbert, which is why he states emphatically he never became an official member:

Meanwhile, what was I to do? I was not at all convinced this was the one and only true Church. Yet, if it was not, *which one was?* This one came *closer* to the Bible qualifications than any I knew.

Therefore, I began to fellowship with their scattered and few members in Oregon, while at the same time refraining from acknowledging membership. . . .

And so it was, in this detached fellowship, that Mrs. Armstrong and I continued the first three and a half years of my ceaseless night and day STUDY of the Bible—of history, especially as connected with Biblical history and prophecy—and of pertinent allied subjects (*Ibid.*, August 1959, p. 15).

It was this continued personal study—and then writing his findings in article form—that first catapulted Herbert into greater visibility within that little church, eventually leading to his role as a teacher among them. Ironically, it is also this very same tenacity to study and to "prove the truth" that would eventually annoy those church leaders enough to solicit his expulsion.

### Trying to Be a Big Shot?

Once Herbert Armstrong began to focus upon religion, what was his new personal mission, really? Detractors will argue that he simply coopted religion as a new outlet to make himself rich and famous. His own account is much different. He describes a sincere and heartfelt desire to get to know the true Creator God and to learn the real truth about man's purpose for existence—to apply himself to something more rewarding than the vanity of the world. His voracious study and writing of his findings was *foremost* an instrument for his own learning, but would lead him nonetheless into the spotlight. He also states that his education took many years, one teaching at a time:

But, as mentioned before, all this study and research had to be approached a single doctrine at a time. I was to be some years in getting to the very TRUNK of the tree of the very PURPOSE for which mankind was placed on earth, and getting clearly straightened out with a right understanding of God's PLAN.

Nevertheless, having been a trained magazine article and advertising copy writer, the results of these studies were written up, purely for my own benefit, in article form. My wife began showing these articles to some women members of this Church of God who lived in Salem. Soon they began to urge me to preach before them. But becoming a preacher was the very *last* thing I had ever wanted to do. I felt an instinctive aversion to the idea.

Meanwhile, on their urging, a few of these articles had been mailed in to *The Bible Advocate* in Stanberry, Missouri. These articles began appearing on the front page (*Ibid.*, August 1959, pp. 15–16).

His first "sermon" in the summer of 1928 was a Sabbath lecture to a small group near Salem about a new "discovery" of truth concerning the Covenants. Although amateurish (according to Mrs. Armstrong's critique), it was well received and he was asked to speak on a regular basis to this little group who were without a local minister. Opposition came from Stanberry as church leaders worried that Armstrong was trying to create his own following from their members. But an attempt to silence him and to cease publishing his articles met

with a significant backlash from the local people. Even though the ministerial leadership acquiesced under this pressure, the spirit of jealousy, competition and distrust among those leaders would be enduring.

### Induction Into the Ministry

In November 1930, many members of the church in Oregon came together in the town of Jefferson to form the Oregon Conference of the Church of God, for the purpose of holding tithes in the local area, rather than sending them to the "General Conference" in Stanberry, MO. Although the Armstrongs were not official members, Mr. Armstrong was asked to be the secretary of the meetings leading to this new organization. (It was this Oregon Conference which would eventually ordain Herbert Armstrong as a minister the following year, not the Stanberry General Conference.)

After the Oregon Conference was formed, Herbert was asked by the new leadership to hold a public evangelistic campaign in December 1930. Designing a circular to advertise the meetings to be held in Harrisburg, Oregon, was the first time he began to use his twenty years of advertising experience in God's Work (*Ibid.*, November 1959, pp. 8–9). The results of this campaign were meager, but four new individuals were converted. They wanted to be baptized. But Herbert was not yet an ordained minister. With approval of a young minister of the Church of God sent out from Stanberry headquarters, Herbert Armstrong performed his first baptisms.

Here is how he describes the result:

This brought stern criticism from "authorities" higher up in the church. There was criticism because the Conference paid expenses when I was not even a member. In fact, from this time I was to meet continued criticism, opposition, persecution, and political maneuvering to discredit and remove me from the active ministry (*Ibid.*, November 1959, p. 31).

Every person has his IDOL. God cannot receive and convert a human life until his idol has been smashed or torn from him. My idol had been an egotistical sense of self-importance—a cocky self-assurance—a passion to become successful in the eyes of the material world. God is creating in those He calls a righteous character which can be developed only through *experience*; and experience requires TIME. God has a lot of time—He is Eternal—He has always existed—He always will.

It took *time* to eradicate from my heart the love of the praise of men. God gave me, instead, the false accusations, the unwarranted oppositions, the scheming persecutions of people. It required *time* to bring me to a place where I

no longer set my heart on material possessions and the finer things of this material world.

This process required not one or two years—not seven—but *four sevens!* For 28 financially lean and humiliating years out of *the very prime of life*, God continued to root out of my life and character this vain idolatry!

From the first and for many years I was the *least* of the ministers. I was the green-horn tail-ender among the ministers of the Church of God (world headquarters then Stanberry, Missouri). And I was never permitted to forget that fact! *God knew I needed this* (*Ibid.*, December 1959, p. 7).

It was Robert Taylor, a minister formerly of the Seventh Day Adventists from California, who began teaching the Oregon brethren in 1931 and who advocated ordaining Herbert officially into the ministry.

Mr. Taylor's suggestion meant a complete change in my life. In former years the idea of becoming a minister was the very *last* thing I should have wanted to do. But by June, 1931, I had been preaching a great deal for three and a half years. By this time my whole heart was in it. . . .

The decision was not difficult. God had now brought me to the place where I really "heard" the voice of Christ as if He were saying, "Come, and follow me, and I will make you a fisher of men" (*Ibid.*, December 1959, p. 9).

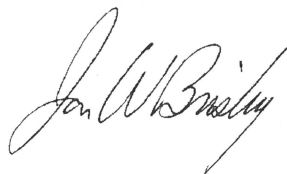
So, in an outdoor meeting in the rural area of Jefferson, Oregon, in June 1931, ministers and laity alike laid hands upon him:

I am sure it was the weight of the *experience*, from a spiritual and emotional standpoint, rather than the physical weight of hands and arms—but it seemed I was entirely weighted down with the heaviest load I had ever stood up under, as one of the ministers asked God in prayer to ordain me into the ministry of Jesus Christ and His Gospel.

To me this was symbolic of the tremendous responsibility that now came down upon my head and shoulders (*Ibid.*, December 1959, p. 9).

In future segments, we will continue our synopsis of the life and work of Herbert Armstrong, the instrument by which we all received the true faith from Jesus Christ.

Yours with love and devotion in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jon W. Brisby