

November 2018

Dear Brethren:

In the course of documenting the history of the life of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God over the past few years, we have already summarized key events at the end of the 1960s. In the June 2018 *Monthly Letter*, we covered the importance of Mrs. Loma Armstrong *in particular* in the overall work and ministry of her husband. Very few today recognize how critical *he always claimed that she had been* in the success of his ministry.

With that fact now well established, is it true that the church got stronger, not weaker, after Mrs. Armstrong died in April 1967? Was there really no dangerous vacuum that ensued? As Mr. Armstrong *expected* to occur, did her death become a "wake-up call" to the whole church, marking a *positive turning point* for ministers and laity to finish God's work with renewed *unity of purpose*? Or did it become something else instead?

Our summary of the events of the 1960s and early 1970s from Mr. Armstrong's *Autobiography* (June 2016 *Monthly Letter*) cited key events that began to transpire in the late 1960s. But it is worth asking if perhaps the death of Loma Armstrong was *a catalyst* for some of those key events which followed. Here is a restating of those events with that particular question in mind.

1968 in Prophecy

One of the booklets written by Herbert Armstrong—first published as an article in 1956 and creating a real stir concerning expected catastrophic future events—was entitled *1975 in Prophecy*. It highlighted Bible prophecies of great tribulation to befall human beings before the return of Jesus Christ, and it speculated upon the possibility that many of those events might coalesce by the mid-1970s. Because of such writings, the eyes of most church members became focused like laser beams upon the 1970s, waiting to see what God would do.

But what if the very most critical events affecting that church had already transpired before the 1970s even began, occurring with little fanfare or recognition? What if the stage had already been set (unknowingly) for prophesied tribulation *within that church*, and what if the very seeds of that institution's own destruction had already been planted? What if the truly most decisive turning point occurred in 1968, not in 1975?

What were these key events, and what did they have to do with the death of Loma Armstrong in early 1967?

A Corporate Name Change

Perhaps this is merely a superficial consideration with little real significance, but changing the name of the Radio Church of God to the Worldwide Church of God in 1968 *did* have relevance, even if only a symbolic one. Large corporations make changes to their names for reason. In most cases, if they are not trying to communicate something important through this action, they would not bother to do it. It is expensive and tedious for any large organization to change its legal name. In many cases, a name change signals a desire to change *the public image* of the enterprise.

One of the first *observable changes* that took place after Loma Armstrong's death was a change in the name of the church. Oddly, in this case, unlike the kind of fanfare that typically accompanies such organizational rebranding, renaming the Radio Church of God to the *Worldwide Church of God* was introduced to its members with very little hype. Is that because this change was not being made with current members (customers) in mind, but perhaps in order to affect the impression among outsiders?

As noted previously, a document entitled, *1968 Certificate of Amendment of Articles of Incorporation of Radio Church of God*, confirms that the name change was approved in a meeting on January 5, 1968, and signed by Mr. Armstrong and corporate Secretary, Mr. Albert J. Portune. Anecdotal accounts assert that Mr. Armstrong felt the church had outgrown the original name. It was no longer just a "radio church." The church needed a name that reflected the fact that it was now "grown up" into a *worldwide* operation.

After that change, did the church still hold its same philosophy and mission, or did this *seemingly symbolic change* actually portend more significant organizational shifts to come?

A Whole New Commission

Recall that 1967/1968 was the time period when Herbert Armstrong was thrust accidentally into personal contact with several world leaders for the first time.

The first was a meeting with King Hussein of Jordan in the summer of 1967, soon after Mrs. Armstrong's death (*Co-Worker Letter*, July 31, 1967). The second was a meeting with King Leopold III of Belgium in February 1968, which would bloom into a long-standing personal friendship. The third event occurred in September of 1968, with Mr. Armstrong's meeting with five high-ranking Israeli government and university officials in the Knesset (*Co-Worker Letter*, May 28, 1971).

How did he interpret these unexpected opportunities? Were they merely tangential occurrences in the course of executing his long-standing strategy for spreading the Gospel? No, these new interactions with renowned men caused Mr. Armstrong to conclude that God was now opening "a new door" for his Work *through* visits with world rulers.

GIANT doors have been opening before me, one after another, with invitations for personal conferences with heads of state -- presidents, kings, prime ministers -- and many others in high offices of POWER, in many countries around the world. The remarkable thing is that I did not seek or initiate these meetings -- not once! I was invited. . . .

Even though the time has come, in this great Commission, when it is necessary for me to have these personal meetings, there is absolutely NO WAY I could have taken it into my own hands and accomplished it. It had to come like a continuous chain of MIRACULOUS occurrences. And it is having TREMENDOUS SIGNIFICANCE to the finishing of this most important Commission on earth in 1900 years!

Of course you've been reading, in The PLAIN TRUTH, of some of these meetings with the world's rulers. And many more such articles and reports are coming in future issues. Then later, I will take you into my confidence and give you the exciting facts of the incredible circumstances, and the surprising providential manner in which these giant doors have opened before me, one after the other in time order.

These very important meetings have suddenly catapulted the entire Work up onto a new and higher plateau! The Work has moved suddenly

into a TOTALLY NEW PHASE! These providential new developments signal the warning to YOU and to me that we do not have much time left to get done THE MOST IMPORTANT JOB ON EARTH IN 1900 YEARS! We have now been moved into the last and final phase of the Work for this Age! (*Co-Worker Letter*, April 12, 1971)

This *last and final phase*—expected by him at that time to have led directly to *the end of the age* spoken of by Jesus Christ—occurred more than fifty years ago as of this writing. With that in mind, what do we conclude today—in hindsight—about Mr. Armstrong's *heartfelt conviction* that God was leading him to finish *the final phase* of God's work *through meeting with world leaders*? If the world did not end when he expected it to (in the 1970s), and it did not even end in the 1980s before he died, and it *still has not ended* even today, something about his conclusion back in 1968 could not have been correct!

The fact is, since the prophesied *consummation of the age* (end of the world) did not occur, then whatever Mr. Armstrong was doing while meeting with heads of state from 1968 through the mid-1980s *was not* God's final warning to the world! It simply cannot be. Yet there are many former members and ministers of the Worldwide Church of God today who will not face that fact. Herbert Armstrong believed sincerely that God would use him to "finish the Work." Certain ministers under him boldly proclaimed to the laity that if Herbert Armstrong died before the return of Christ, it was never the true Church of God. Is it any wonder that so many became disillusioned when these prophetic speculations failed? And many of those prognostications were predicated upon the belief that Herbert Armstrong's "open door to visit kings" was testament to his commission at the very end of the age.

Perhaps "visiting kings" was still an endeavor ordained of God, but if so, it was not so that Herbert Armstrong could fulfill an *Elijah commission* to prepare the way for *the imminent return* of Jesus Christ. Even as John the Baptist performed his commission to prepare the way for *the first coming* of Christ (Matthew 17:11–13; Luke 1:17)—and did so *immediately preceding and leading into* the beginning of Christ's first ministry on earth—the Bible shows that *a last-day Elijah* will perform his commission by giving a warning *just prior to and leading into* the *Second Coming of Christ* (Malachi 3:1; 4:5–6). What value is an urgent, "last-minute" warning that comes more than fifty years before the prophesied event? That simply does not add up. And all of these individuals out there today trying to "carry on" that *particular* commission of Herbert Armstrong are fooling themselves.

What Were the Fruits?

Herbert Armstrong always pointed to "the fruits" of any endeavor to substantiate it as having divine inspiration. When challenged by those who claimed he was a fraud, he would point to "the fruits" of the Radio Church of God as evidence of God's guiding hand. He would point to the reach of his radio broadcast and print publications around the world, and he would point to the growth of the church, year after year. In all of these "evidences," he did indeed have justification for claiming that he was a legitimate minister of Jesus Christ, called by God for a commission to go to the world with power to proclaim the real Truth of God. Why and how did he manifest legitimacy in this? Because he accomplished so much in that regard! The fruits of that physical church were evident! Many still claimed he was just lucky, or diabolically clever, but a great religious empire was built under him nonetheless. He claimed it was the divine intervention of God that made all of that possible. And if that is not true, then some other evidence would have to be brought forth to substantiate it. You certainly cannot "prove" he was not legitimate by showing that he was an utter failure. He was not! The size and eventual reach of that church was unmistakable. *It did indeed bear fruit!*

But what about this "new commission" that began in 1968? What about this *brand new* attempt to fulfill God's will by beginning to go to *the rulers* of this world?

As I mentioned in my previous letter a month ago, the Work of necessity had to begin by reaching the grassroots -- the masses of the common people -- the RULED. We now are reaching more than 150 MILLION of them. . . .

But we have reached the point where it has now become necessary that we reach ALSO the RULERS -- those in the very top echelons of POWER in the world. Because, whether we have realized it or not, this Work is the GREATEST, MOST EFFECTIVE activity on earth for WORLD PEACE! (*Co-Worker Letter*, May 28, 1971)

How was Herbert Armstrong's *Work* to be a catalyst for world peace? Initially, it was because he felt it was a new platform to *warn national rulers about the eminent return of Jesus Christ*, with *God's Kingdom* bringing *peace* finally to the world. But sadly, as it became evident that Jesus Christ was not returning within months (or even years), rather than to reassess the value of devoting so much time to meeting with heads of state to "warn them," the concept of "bringing world peace" quickly morphed into a program to *join with nations and worldly institutions* to try to make *this current world* a better place. But that concept was a total departure from the church doctrine that Herbert

Armstrong had championed for over forty years! Until 1968, the thrust of the message was a true warning:

Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins (Isaiah 58:1).

Herbert Armstrong thundered with authority that the whole world was suffering because of sin—the rejection of God's divine Law. But once it became possible for Mr. Armstrong to spend significant amounts of his personal time in high-level, diplomatic settings around the world, that fiery proclamation of the need to repent was replaced by a soft, appeasing message about "an unseen hand" that was coming to solve the world's problems.

What was the evidence—the fruits—that this kind of *new commission* was ever intended by God? How would you measure it? If proof of having a divine commission *to raise up a church* is given by producing a large, worldwide organization (which Herbert Armstrong actually accomplished), what would be the proof that one was sent by God to speak to kings? Is the very fact that you are *permitted to speak to kings* evidence that God is the One who blessed it as a new commission?

No, Mr. Armstrong clearly stated the "why" of his wanting to meet with world rulers. Mere *opportunity to rub shoulders with powerful people* is not a reason to do it, and certainly it is not *evidence* of God's involvement! The "why" was to *complete a new commission* (an Elijah commission) *to warn the world* just prior to the appearance of Jesus Christ! If that was the "why" of its being done, then what should we be able to observe retroactively as *the fruits* of that endeavor? Was there ever any evidence that such a commission was given by God?

From 1968 to the mid-1980s, did those national leaders receive a bone-chilling warning about the imminent return of Christ, with His *new government* soon to dethrone those current kings, presidents, and prime ministers? Did Mr. Armstrong speak to them the way Elijah spoke to King Ahab, and as John the Baptist spoke to King Herod? Was the entire world warned with mighty signs and miracles about their national sins and the need for repentance? Has there even yet been the kind of "witness" comparable to that which God prophesied will occur before the arrival of His Son? No such warning message was ever proclaimed by Mr. Armstrong to kings, and we have not even yet seen the fulfillment of that prophecy of a true *warning Work*. Instead, with Mr. Armstrong's visits to heads-of-state, diplomacy was the order of the day, including expensive gifts to dignitaries, and only a *very veiled message* about Jesus Christ—often without ever using

His name! Is that really what we saw from Elijah and from John the Baptist? Is that truly the way we think God is going to make final preparation for Christ's return?

So again, in evaluating Mr. Armstrong's *very strong and sincere belief* in 1968 that God had tasked him with *a brand new commission*, what do the fruits actually show in hindsight? The nations were not warned as God promised He will do, and Jesus Christ did not return following the conclusion of years of those international state visits. According to Mr. Armstrong's own standard of proof, this aspect of his work does not pass muster.

Besides warning the world before Christ's imminent return, visiting heads-of-state was also expected to "open doors" to allow the Worldwide Church of God more access to preach the Gospel to these leaders' peoples. But God had already opened doors for radio broadcasts and print publications in most of these areas, even without visiting their national leaders (like King Leopold of Belgium). But what about the bonds he forged with leaders in countries like Japan, especially? The hope was that this personal rapport with the Japanese Prime Minister and other officials would "open the door" for eventual church congregations in Japan. But that never happened! There were a whole lot of state banquets and formal meetings with dignitaries across Asia, but those contacts never produced congregations! The one country in that region where the church flourished was in the Philippines (a Catholic country), and that work had been accomplished beginning in the early 1960s, long before visiting world leaders became a goal. And in every other country where the church had been previously *shut out* from operating (like most of the Buddhist nations), even after years of hob-knobbing with Buddhist dignitaries, the church mostly was still *shut out* from forming congregations there! So once again, what were the real fruits? The claim was made repeatedly that this activity would "open doors." But the Gospel of Jesus Christ was *never really preached* there, and the church did not gain *any significant foothold* because of those meetings. No fruits!

A Commission . . . or a Test?

Therefore, if it is true that *God was opening a new door* in 1968 to allow Mr. Armstrong access to many rulers of this world, then at a minimum, God's purpose *was not* what he thought it was. But if God *was* indeed involved, what might His purpose have been instead?

Might it have been *a test*, and not a commission at all? Might it have been *a temptation* permitted by God, similar to the one documented previously (in the mid-1940s), when Mr. Armstrong was offered a lot more money to give up religion and to

become a secular radio announcer instead? Recall what he wrote about Mrs. Loma Armstrong's reaction to that offer?

In all this, Mrs. Armstrong was my faithful partner and helper. She even "scolded" me (she wasn't really serious) for telling her of that offer (*Co-Worker Letter*, September 1, 1968).

In like manner, what if it was never God's will at all for Mr. Armstrong to begin seeking meetings with world leaders? What if this was another temptation that threatened to sidetrack him from his *real commission* in God's service? What if this was just another way that his old weakness of vanity was being tested?

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!* (*The PLAIN TRUTH*, April 1959, p. 6)

Yet, here, beginning in 1967/68, Herbert Armstrong was being offered a chance to move into those very lofty circles of "the high and the mighty and the wealthy of this world" which he had always craved! But this time, he would not have to abandon his service to God in order to gain that prestige. By concluding that God was the One *sending him*, he could hence have *the very best of both worlds!* However, when faced with temptation this time, he did not have Loma Armstrong at his side to temper his natural attraction to a very tantalizing opportunity.

If this is not a credible assessment of what happened, then someone needs to show how those world visits actually fulfilled *any spiritual purpose of God!*

Unintended Fruits

The fruits hoped for were never realized from pursuing this "new commission" to visit kings. But there were indeed other fruits borne. What were they?

Once Mr. Armstrong began devoting the majority of his personal time to state visits around the world, it became impossible for him to "mind the store" back home. He was forced to delegate much more to other men in running church operations. After the

final expulsion of his son, Garner Ted Armstrong, from the church in 1978, recall how Mr. Armstrong assessed the reason for such serious problems through the 1970s:

For the past two years I have been laboring very hard to be Christ's servant and apostle in SETTING GOD'S CHURCH BACK ON THE TRACK. The entire Church had been derailed. A LIBERAL spirit from Satan had been injected into some in high positions under me at Headquarters in Pasadena. Instead of wholeheartedly OBEYING Christ through HIS WORD, THE BIBLE, there was creeping in, during years when I was in other parts of the world up to 300 out of the 365 days in the year, a LIBERAL spirit of SATAN.

Those leaders to whom I had delegated the responsibility of ADMINISTERING the POLICIES and DOCTRINES Christ had set in God's Church through His apostle, went way BEYOND the authority given them. They started CHANGING POLICIES and watering down God's TRUTH, changing DOCTRINES, compromising -- seeing HOW CLOSE they could go -- and lead the Brethren in going -- to the ways of SATAN! They wanted to be more LIBERAL -- more like THIS WORLD OF SATAN. . . .

But for two years Jesus Christ has been using me and those loyally still with and under me to SET BACK ON GOD'S TRACK God's Church (*Co-Worker Letter*, September 15, 1980).

Herbert Armstrong had been the one-and-only CEO of the Worldwide Church of God through that entire time. If he was at the helm, how did that church go so far away from what he deemed important? His answer, above, was that he was away from home for 300 out of 365 days a year. The inference is that had he *not been away* so much, he might have *prevented* this liberal cancer from ever taking hold.

And why was he away so much of the year? Because since 1968, he had been fulfilling that "new commission" to *warn rulers* of the *imminent arrival* of Jesus Christ.

So the very *unintended consequences* of latching onto this *new commission* in 1968 was *the implosion of his life's work* through the 1970s, as other men dismantled and restructured the Worldwide Church of God in his absence.

And once again, what was the *spiritual payoff* for all of those meetings with world rulers over the ensuing decade? Nothing! The only real fruit was a time of upheaval and tribulation for members of the Worldwide Church of God.

For all of this, we still have not answered the question: If God was behind Herbert Armstrong in the raising up of that church, why would He have allowed him to take such a wrong turn in 1968? Herbert Armstrong was well-meaning. He loved God and wanted to fulfill that calling in His service. So if that church was being led by God, why did God not prevent such a devastating mistake?

The answer will provide the context to understand *the real Work of God* in the twentieth century, and to confirm the truly enduring legacy of Herbert and Loma Armstrong. We will take up that part of the story next time.

In the meantime, may all of you—who see the value of that glorious Truth which we learned through Mr. Armstrong—hold fast and preserve it in your very own lives.

With love and deep affection in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in black ink and is centered on the page.

Jon W. Brisby