

February 2023

Dear Brethren:

Ripped from the headlines! Prophecy being fulfilled before your very eyes! These are the kinds of article titles that have been prevalent among Church of God groups for decades, as ministers seek to tie current events in today's world to specific Bible prophecies concerning the last days.

Copying the style of Mr. Herbert Armstrong from the early twentieth century—who effectively showed the relevance of the Bible for our modern times—these ministers seek to capitalize upon his past successes, dangling *prophecy* as a shiny object to captivate and to attract attention to their own personalized spiritual "works." For many of these ministers it is a winning strategy, because God's people love to be "in the know" about the who, what, when, and how of last-day prophecy. If you give people a good dose of prophecy, they mostly lap it up like a mesmerizing drug.

Without doubt, God did indeed command us to pay attention to events of the last days, and we will indeed examine, here, one *correct use* of His long-range prophecies. But most today have been seduced into eating a diet of *prophecy junk food*, devoid of any real spiritual value, and in fact starving themselves of true spiritual nourishment. But why is that so?

Bait and Switch

Focusing upon *current events* is a whole lot easier than actually working to overcome personal sins. If I can be pleasing to God by "studying prophecy," then that is a lot more appealing than being told I have to break my bad habits of the flesh which endanger my eternal salvation. Overcoming our carnal natures is daunting, painful, exasperating, and often demoralizing when we seem to fail at conquering stubborn sins. It is so much more attractive to read the Bible in context of *current events* and to believe that God is somehow *very pleased* with this "study activity." But is He, really?

The problem is this: Focusing upon prophecy in this way is a *spectator sport*. It requires no true involvement of the Christian except to sit back and enjoy the show. The minister (or prophet) takes center stage, and we—as the audience—just have to go along for the ride. When the show is over, we can revel in the *giddy sensation* of possessing *new secret knowledge* that is yet hidden from the world. And because we think we see some secret connection between particular world leaders (and their geopolitical skirmishes) in

relation to Bible prophecy, we feel privileged, and all too often smug. But how is any of that actually helping us to prepare for the return of Jesus Christ? Will you "get points" from God for knowing *in advance* who specifically will be the Beast, the False Prophet, the Man of Sin, or what will be the Mark of the Beast, just for example? Will Jesus Christ hand you a test form before His return and ask you to fill out your answers about all of these specific prophetic fulfillments to come? If you correctly answer enough test questions about who will do what—proving that you figured them out in advance—will you be admitted into His Kingdom? Is that really the way it will work? Hardly!

We have many confirmations of these principles concerning the overall topic of prophecy, its real purposes in God's Plan, and the history of mistakes made in handling prophecy within our parent church. Please refer to our article, *Prophecy: What You Should Know About It*, as well as, *A Peculiar Treasure: The Enduring Legacy of Herbert & Loma Armstrong*, Chapter Fourteen, *The Prophecy Debacle*. The point of this *Monthly Letter* is not to rehash all of that important material. The point is actually to throw out a little *red meat* to some of you who are craving some prophecy discussion from current events. But we intend to do it *correctly and wisely*.

What Did Christ Tell Us to Watch?

The Worldwide Church of God told us repeatedly that God requires us to *watch*:

For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter *to watch*. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you *I say unto all, Watch* (Mark 13:34–37) [emphasis mine throughout].

So Christ told us to watch! OK, watch what? The WCG told us that it meant to *watch world events*! We were told to read newspapers and to keep up with what world leaders were doing, especially leaders of the Catholic Church and the governments of Europe and Israel. Their conclusion was that Christ wanted us to watch for signs of the emergence of the prophesied Beast and False Prophet. But what good is that kind of watching? If you spot something, what will you then do in response? Christ did not give us a command to watch so that we could just celebrate "figuring out" some secret in advance! Christ's command for His children to watch had everything to do with helping them *to be saved from deception and spiritual destruction*. So again, what should we watch for, and to what end? And then, *what do we do* when we see something prophetic come to pass?

A Babylonian Trap

The real value of watching what is happening in the world is to recognize the things that Christ said would transpire in the very last days, *so that we ourselves might avoid falling into a particular deadly trap!* What trap? Are we in danger of being seduced into joining the Catholic Church and paying homage to the Pope if he seems to begin to perform miracles? Of course not. What a joke! Are we in danger of bowing down before the government of Germany and the EU at some point? How ridiculous. Then what are we watching for, and why?

One of the real dangers to the people of God is getting caught up in some of the seductions of Babylon the Great without even realizing it. How so?

We see evils transpiring in the world and we lament the progressive moral, social and economic decay engulfing us today. Yes, we admit that no human governments have ever been truly godly, but at least in years past, many of our western nations paid lip service to Christianity and the principles of God and family, personal freedoms, and the opportunity to work hard and to make a good life. Human beings are always hypocritical and commit sins of all kinds, but at least in bygone eras, people did not violate God's moral laws with impunity—outwardly—for fear of being socially outcast. There was a social stigma associated with being "ungodly" or "immoral." There was also popular support for celebrating individual national cultures and identities, and praising the God of Abraham for giving us our national blessings. Patriotism was taught in our schools, and socialism was treated by the majority as the enemy of free peoples under God. But all of that has changed dramatically, and many of us today pine for "the good old days." They were not really "good," but they were sure better by comparison than what we are experiencing today!

So then, what is the trap? We are tempted to support those figures within our nations who are trying to *push back* against the liberal progressives—the ones pushing us toward a totalitarian "one world government." We hate what they are doing and therefore we are naturally attracted to supporting politicians and civic leaders who champion the freedoms of the past. We long to see the conservatives "win" these social battles and find a way to preserve "the good things" of yesteryear. We do not want to see our countries go down. We ourselves do not get involved in politics, but we cannot help but align ourselves *emotionally* with those who are fighting back against *the barbarians at the gate*. It is natural. It is automatic. We cannot help but find ourselves *picking a side* and rooting for our conservative champions to "win." Do you not feel it? Be honest!

But the trap is that all aspects of what you see going on in the world today—whether labeled liberal or conservative—are part of Babylon, the enemy of God and His true people.

The only hope for the future of humanity is the return of Jesus Christ to become King over this earth. There is no interim geopolitical battle going on right now that is worthy of your support. None! And if we fail to recognize that fact and begin to push back against this tendency in our minds to pick a side, then we are in real danger of falling into a Babylonian trap which is absolutely deadly to the people of God. We cannot afford to take our eyes off of the real prize.

With this in mind, we are now ready to interpret some of the warnings that Jesus Christ gave for the last days—in this context—which are very critical for our spiritual salvation.

Prophecy That Is Personal

The best use of long-range prophecy is the one that Jesus Christ specifically commanded:

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you [already in your midst through the preaching of Christ Himself]. And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them. For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day (Luke 17:20–24).

The first warning that Christ gave against the *prevailing desire* to discern in advance information about future events was to recognize that this very desire for such knowledge is *in itself covetous!* Covetousness is the *inordinate desire for something that is not lawful.* Desiring—lusting for—details about future events that God has no intention of revealing is wrong, and it can become deadly to God's people. That is why Christ began by warning the Jews that *no one* is going to see the details in advance! God will surprise everyone with the fulfilment of His prophecies. Do you believe that? If you think that you are somehow an exception, then you too are already falling into this very trap right now!

Next, Christ prophesied of His own death as a fulfillment of God's Plan and purpose:

But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation (Luke 17:25).

The death of the Messiah as a sacrificial Lamb—before an eventual *second* triumphant arrival as King—was *totally unknown* to anyone, even though it was well documented in the Bible. God miraculously blinded all from being able to put those pieces together before that prophecy was actually being fulfilled. Christ's disciples chafed anytime Jesus spoke about the need for Him to die, because it was absolutely ludicrous to them! No one "figured it out" in advance!

Then, after this declaration, Christ next begins to speak about last-day events:

And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. *Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed* (Luke 17:26–30).

So the next important lesson/warning from Christ about the last days is that no one in that final age will figure out this timing in advance, because everyone will be going about his normal activities, thinking that tomorrow will be just like today. The Second Coming of Christ will be *a complete and utter surprise* to everyone. Church of God members and ministers spend a lot of time trying to prove that this applies to everyone else, *but not to them*. They have all kinds of explanations for why God is going to let them have advance knowledge about this timing. But the wise will take Jesus Christ at His word and accept at face value what He said that He is going to do, and how He is going to do it. Of what value is argumentation with God?

The whole point of all that we have read so far is to warn God's faithful people against falling into the very traps waiting for everyone else around us in the last days. He is saying, *accept that you will not see it coming*. Stop trying! Accept that history is going to repeat itself in the very way that all of these events unfold. Learn from those *past lessons* so that you can wind up "being surprised" at *doing the right things* when Christ suddenly and shockingly appears. The emphasis is about minding our spiritual obligations now—consistently—so that the *sudden revelation of events* at Christ's return will not catch us in the wrong position. And the answer is not "figuring out" when, where, and how all of these things will come to pass so that we can *correct our posture* at the last minute. The

clear message is that the people of God will be *making a thoughtful practice of minding their spiritual business* as a habit so that when the end comes surprisingly, they will *be discovered* doing everything that God wanted them to be doing all along. What a different approach to long-range prophecy is that! But again, it is all right there in the very specific warnings of Jesus Christ, if you are willing to take it at face value and to heed it.

Everything Old Is New Again

Recall that we just read Christ's assertion that what will be happening in the very last days will be exactly what was transpiring at the time of Noah's flood, and also what was transpiring just before Sodom was destroyed. In that very statement is actually an incredible revelation!

First of all, it emphasizes that what is most important has nothing to do with the advent of modern technology in these last days. Yes, no doubt, technologies which have only existed in the world over the last one hundred years or so will surely be utilized by Babylon to enslave the world. That is already happening and the noose has been tightening for many years. And yes, as Mr. Herbert Armstrong emphasized, it is thanks to modern technology that man finally has the power to wipe himself off the face of the earth (through nuclear weapons), if Christ does not intervene to prevent it. That is all very true.

But none of that is most important to the people of God, because Christ did not warn about aspects of the last days that are *unique to our era* of human history. Quite the contrary, He focused totally upon *that which we have in common with all past generations* of people from antiquity! That should tell us something. Man will always seek to exploit and to enslave peoples using whatever tools he has at his disposal. That is what Nimrod did in the first rise of Babylon. He did not have the technologies of today, but he was still inspired by our enemy—Satan the Devil—*and his own carnal nature*, to seek to dominate and to exploit. The very same thing is going on today, because Satan is still the same, and human nature is still the same. The tools available are different, but the *motivations and purposes of our black hearts* are exactly the same. And this fact is the one that Christ chose to emphasize. If we are willing to learn from this history, Christ is telling us that we will have *everything needed* to endure successfully until the very end.

Beware of Becoming Lot's Wife

The very next part of Christ's prophetic warning is to avoid reacting to these stunning, unexpected events as did Lot's wife:

In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. *Remember Lot's wife* (Luke 17:31–32).

What did Lot's wife actually do that was so wrong—that which Christ chose to use as an example for you and me? Here is the original account from Genesis:

Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. But *his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt* (Genesis 19:24–26).

What was so egregious about simply turning her head to look back at the destruction of Sodom? Is that not just a natural human reaction, to turn to see what is happening? Why was that so bad? The answer is that her sin was not just her physical act of turning to look. God read *the heart of Lot's wife* and knew that what she was really doing was *mourning* the destruction of Sodom! God was pronouncing a righteous verdict in destroying that wicked city, and Lot's wife *disagreed with God* and His action. That is why God made an example of her and turned her into a pillar of salt—struck her dead—and that very act was recorded so that Jesus Christ (the very God of the Old Testament who killed her) could use it as a warning for you and me today. So when Jesus Christ said to "remember Lot's wife," He was warning us to avoid falling into the very trap that she did when God also begins to act to intervene suddenly and unexpectedly in these last days.

When God begins to intervene in world affairs to humble the nations and to destroy Babylon the Great, are you sure that you will agree with God, or will you too mourn for the loss of many things in this present world that you love? If you think that this is a silly question and reply that "of course I want to see Babylon fall," beware. Jesus Christ did not give this warning for no reason. He emphasized the sin of Lot's wife because it is likewise *a serious threat* to God's people of the last days! Dismiss this warning at your peril! The wise of God's people will take to heart the insidious way that we easily fall in love with the things of this world, in spite of knowing with our minds that it is evil overall. Again, do we not still feel pangs of patriotism for our home countries? Do not strong emotions well up when we hear a national anthem, or think about the greatness of the past generations of our forefathers? Of course we do. But never forget what Christ commanded concerning this end-time Babylonian system:

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, *Come out of her, my people,* that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For

her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities (Revelation 18:4–5).

The very next statement of warning by Christ in Luke 17 is this:

Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it (Luke 17:33).

Did Jesus change the subject here all of a sudden? Did He suddenly stop talking about Lot's wife and then change to addressing a new topic? Not at all! It is all part of *the very same warning* to God's people. Lot's wife pined for the things of her old life that were being destroyed. She desired to *save her old life!* Christ is telling us that we have to use the time that we have *right now* to learn to change our priorities! By nature, like Lot's wife, we also love many things in this present world today, even though we claim to hate the world in the aggregate. It is hypocritical, but human beings are all double-minded by nature. Do you see that in yourself? If not, then you are at great risk for falling inadvertently into the very trap that Christ is warning about. On the other hand, if you recognize in yourself the strong impulse to love certain things in this world right now, and if you are fighting with the power of God's Holy Spirit to be transformed and to begin to love more what God loves and to hate intently what God hates, then you are on the right track. In doing so, you are proving that you are not seeking to save your old life, but are showing a willingness to "lose your life" today so that you may have a much better one tomorrow, in God's Kingdom.

That, dear friends, is how you can use long-range prophecy *right now* as a tool for your future survival. Forget about the European Union and the Catholic Church! Forget about tracking what the Jews are doing in Palestine! You have urgent work to do right now! You are not a spectator, sitting on the sidelines. You are a direct participant in last-day events, and what you do to either prepare your hearts and minds for coming catastrophe—or not—has everything to do with whether you will be able to make correct choices under pressure when you are suddenly plunged into chaotic times. Do not assume that you can coast along now and then dig deep to "summon faith" at the very last minute. That will never work! Anyone who is not working diligently right now to learn to crucify the natural lusts and to learn to align his thinking with God's will, is presently in serious jeopardy, spiritually. Do not get caught off guard and become taken unawares!

When Sins Come to the Full

Rather than looking for "signs of the end" in what nations, armies, religious leaders, and politicians are doing, look instead at what *the peoples themselves* are doing! Why so?

Because, once again, this is where Christ told us to focus our attention. What did He say is the real sign of the end? In the days of Noah, it was this:

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that *every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them (Genesis 6:5–7).

This was not just a condemnation of *the leaders* of those nations of that day. God is passing judgment upon *the people in totality!* There was no one in that age whom God considered "righteous" except for Noah. The same was true for Sodom and Gomorrah.

When God declared His intention to destroy those cities, Abraham pleaded with God to reconsider:

And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the LORD said, *If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes* (Genesis 18:23–26).

But there were not fifty righteous within those cities. And as it turns out (verses 27–32), there were not even ten! Because *the people* of those cities had lost all moral foundation regarding God's laws, their sins had finally "come to the full."

If you want to read circumstances as God reads them, come to recognize this important point. Evidence to confirm God's thinking can be found in His prophecy for Abraham concerning *the timing* of the future inheritance of the Promised Land by Israel:

And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth

generation they shall come hither again: *for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full* (Genesis 15:13–16).

What did the *level of sin* among the Amorites have to do with God's timing for giving Israel a promised inheritance? It had everything to do with it! When Israel was finally given the land of Caanan by God and allowed to cross into it, this was God's command to Joshua:

But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt *save alive nothing that breatheth*: But thou shalt *utterly destroy them*; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee: That they teach you not to do *after all their abominations*, which they have done unto their gods; so should ye sin against the LORD your God (Deuteronomy 20:16–18).

Putting these texts together, God did not give over that land to Israel until the sins of the current inhabitants had come to the full! And when the abominations of those peoples finally became so vile, God pronounced upon them a death sentence, even as He had done to the peoples of Noah's day, and as He had done to Sodom and Gomorrah. There might always be evil rulers, but when the people themselves become so vile that God determines that *their sins have come to the full*, that is when God acts to pass righteous judgment in totality.

The world today calls that genocide, and accuses that God of the Old Testament (the One who became Jesus Christ) of being evil. That is because they do not see that when people become *so far removed from God's moral law*, they become a horrible curse to themselves and to their families. They are not happy, but absolutely miserable in their existences! How long should little children be raised in such wicked societies, suffering the horrors of *institutional human depravity*? A loving and a merciful God eventually acts to put them out of their misery, and by letting them all go to sleep in the grave for a time, He preserves for them a chance for real blessing in a coming resurrection! That is when little children can be raised in a truly wholesome environment.

When God wiped out the nations with a worldwide flood, He did them a favor. When God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, he ended their gross suffering! And when God commanded Israel to be His instrument to snuff out the inhabitants of Canaan, He was doing exactly the same thing, in love! Do you see it God's way or are you inclined to agree with the deceived peoples of the world today, who pass judgment upon God and call Him evil? Be very careful! If you fail to read this history as does God, then you are rationalizing the inherent value of an evil society, just as Lot's wife did. Jesus Christ warned His children not

to fall into that trap! Will you take that to heart? Are you truly praying *from the heart* for the destruction of *all of these man-made institutions* upon this earth today, and the coming of the Kingdom of God to replace them?

The Real Sign of Our Prophetic Times

Once we come to know how God thinks—and when and how He chooses to act in the affairs of men—then we have a means for gleaning the importance of Christ's warnings concerning the end times. If God chooses to act aggressively to pass judgment upon nations *after the sins of their people in general have come to the full*, where do we stand in that regard today? To answer that, we are now ready to look at some "current events" to give us a hint:

Less than two months ago, the United States Congress and our President signed into law the *Respect For Marriage Act*. It was instituted as the new *law of the land* with little fanfare. As the name implies, was it truly an act to preserve godly marriage? Quite the contrary! Instead, this new law enshrines the rights of gays and lesbians to enjoy federal protections of "marriage," just like heterosexual couples. For years we have had particular liberal states within the Union that legalized same-sex marriage. But now, this new law ensures *federal recognition* of every vile union and requires *all states* to recognize these "valid marriages." It means that there are no longer any States where a stand to preserve godly marriage can be made. The legislation notably repeals the *Defense of Marriage Act* of 1996—signed into law by a liberal President at the time—which certified marriage for only one man and one woman. Just a quarter century ago, *no President* in our country, regardless of how liberal he might be, could be elected if he did not defend traditional marriage. But today, that has been totally upended. From an *Axios* article dated November 30, 2022, entitled, *What The Respect for Marriage Act Does and Doesn't Do*:

Compared to the decades and decades it took to dismantle Jim Crow laws or secure women's right to vote, America's about-face on same-sex marriage happened in the blink of an eye.

The big picture: Just 27% of Americans supported same-sex marriage in 1996, the year President Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act, which denied federal recognition to same-sex marriages.

That's flipped on its head: 71% now tell Gallup that same-sex and opposite-sex marriages should have the same legal recognition.

Driving the news: The Senate voted 61–36 on Tuesday to codify the rights to same-sex marriage and interracial marriage into federal law. . . .

What they're saying: "This is a great example of politicians following public opinion rather than leading it," Sasha Issenberg, author of "The Engagement: America's Quarter-Century Struggle over Same-Sex Marriage," tells Axios.


Yes, it is true that in America today, any politician who does not support same-sex marriage (or abortion, for that matter) becomes very handicapped in running for public office. Even the former President, who today is the "standard-bearer" for many "conservatives," has criticized his own party for losing elections because of unwillingness to embrace these new social norms. He may be an economic conservative, but he is a social liberal!

Are any of you still being enticed to tie yourselves *emotionally* to a political party claiming to be conservative, even though they are going "all in" on supporting these vile abominations in the eyes of God? Beware of becoming like Lot's wife! The politicians are all beholden to the people, and the people *overall* are becoming *more and more ungodly* with each passing year. This entire system is part of Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots (Revelation 17:5). There are no champions for the people of God within that system!

This huge change in *public opinion* about these former social norms is a very strong indication that we are quickly heading toward the time when God will deem that our sins *have come to the full*. We are not there yet, but that train is hurtling at breakneck speed toward the precipice. There are ever new abominations being debated right now, including advocates for allowing children to be mutilated, and to engage in sex with adults. This is the *new frontier* of current debate. The idea of resisting same-sex marriage and abortion now seems quite antiquated and out of touch. Those battles have long since been fought and lost.

So, dear brethren, if you truly want to follow current events in this world in relation to Bible prophecy, keep your eye on *the relative level of depravity of the people*. That measurement is your best gauge of how close we are to the very end of this age.

Your servant and friend of the Faith,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Jon W. Brisby