

ELIJAH

AND DIVISION IN THE END-TIME CHURCH OF GOD

By Wayne M Icenhower

Thirty-six years have elapsed since the death of HWA. Today, HWA is still remembered by many, and remains very notable among those that claim allegiance to the true faith of Christ. However, many that were once members or children of members of the now-defunct corporate Worldwide Church of God, have completely rejected the teachings that they once believed and practiced. This large group has rejected all religion and chosen the ways of this evil, secular world.

Some believe HWA was a deceived man that meant well, returning quickly to Protestant dogma or the modern evangelical movement. They too have rejected almost all of the teachings they once believed to be the truth.

Many others essentially believe the writings of HWA to be inspired. They view Herbert Armstrong's writings as unalterable as codified scripture. They are firm in their belief that HWA fulfilled the role of the "Elijah to Come" as described in versus such as Malachi 4:5-6, and Matthew 17:11; and also believe that they are "holding fast" as admonished by Christ in Revelation 3:11.

There are still others today that are unsure about Herbert W. Armstrong fulfilling the end-time Elijah role. They theorize the fulfillment may be a future event involving the two witnesses or some other man. The extreme theory held by some includes a possible resurrection of Moses and Elijah in the end time.

Why are there so many opinions, and what is the real truth of the matter? Who was HWA with respect to Church History, and what role did he play in these end times? Why is understanding the truth about HWA and his place in the history of the true Church of God so crucial to Christians living in this age? Why does it matter at all?

This article will provide clear and unassailable answers to these important questions.

What Did HWA Believe?

A minor proof that we are living in the end of days prophesied in scripture is the fulfillment of Daniel 12:4—"But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." Adults living today have witnessed incredible advances in data (or "knowledge") storage, transmission, and access.

Today, the earth is saturated with information. Those seeking to determine exactly what HWA believed at different times in his life can discover it readily. Such an effort would have taken weeks or months three decades ago, but today it can be accomplished with relative ease in a fraction of the time. Those interested can determine quickly, and without a doubt what HWA believed and taught on the Elijah matter.

The following is a quotation by a (now deceased) evangelist, Raymond McNair, (ordained in the early Radio Church of God being led by HWA) in a article written some years ago: “And, as we shall later see, HWA said on *dozens* of occasions that HE alone, and *no one else*, had fulfilled the “*Elijah*” prophecies of Matthew 17 and Malachi 4.” (‘Was HWA Who He Said He Was’, by Raymond F. McNair)

On the Elijah matter, Raymond McNair was correct in this statement. HWA’s written and spoken words are available over the internet in easily accessed public records. So, let’s establish the truth about what HWA believed by reviewing two unambiguous HWA quotations.

Toward the end of his ministry, Herbert W. Armstrong wrote the book, “Mystery of The Ages”, and regarded the work as the culmination of his service to Jesus Christ in the 20th century. Referring to the index, under “Elijah”, one finds the following words on page 285 (softbound edition), under the subheading “Elijah to Come in Our Day”:

As Jesus said in Matthew, the prophecy of Malachi 3:1 applied to John the Baptist in type; but if you will continue reading through verse 5, it becomes very clear that the prophecy is speaking of one to prepare the way before the Second coming of Christ . . . But also preparing the way before his Second Coming was a messenger of whom Elijah was a type . . .

. . . Yet Jesus answered, speaking of the yet future, “[Elijah] truly shall first come, and restore all things. .” (verse 11 [*Author’s note-of Matthew 17:11*])

This could not possibly refer to John the Baptist . . . Also Malachi 4:5-6 pictures Elijah to come at the very end of the Church age . . .

Here is an even more explicit quotation written by Herbert Artmstrong in a Co-Worker letter (March 19, 1981):

As John the Baptist prepared the way, in the PHYSICAL wilderness of the Jordan River for the first coming of the HUMAN Jesus...then coming to His MATERIAL TEMPLE, and to His physical people Judah.... So God would use a human MESSENGER in the Spiritual wilderness of 20th century religious confusion, to be a voice CRYING OUT the gospel of the KINGDOM OF GOD....

Brethren has that been done by this Church? Did God raise up a ONE-MAN leadership [a ‘voice of ONE’] to be used by Him... in proclaiming after 1,900 years the true Gospel of the Kingdom of God—to even go to kings and heads of nations (Rev. 10:11).... Has that happened, in your days, and has God brought you into this prophetic fulfillment as a part of it? Has ANYONE ELSE done it?”

It is clear from these quotes, along with many other written quotes by HWA that he, *did* believe that he had been used by God to “restore all things” to the Church of God. Because of this, the Elijah “question” has—as Raymond McNair noted in his article—*been at least one of the most divisive topic since HWA’s death in 1986*.

What Others Believe Today

Those with the spirit of God in this age could be divided generally into three categories with respect to this subject of the end-time Elijah:

- (1) those that believe HWA was the end-time Elijah

- (2) those that do not believe that he was, and who are indifferent about the matter
- (3) those that profess that they don't know, but theorize there may be a yet-future fulfillment by a human being

While there may be other opinions that fall outside of these three main views today, generally speaking the vast majority of those in or associated with the faith of Christ today would fall somewhere within one of these three large groups.

Those that believe HWA fulfilled the Elijah role have used the belief as their litmus test of conversion for others, generally viewing any skeptical group or minister as "blind" and "Laodicean". The remaining two groups generally dismiss the belief, but usually do so without proving it false.

Those that still believe HWA to be the Elijah relate the cause of the disunity of God's people in this final era of the church to the rejection of a dogmatic belief that HWA fulfilled this prophecy. Many with this view today have become "lone Christians", believing there is nowhere to assemble, with only self-seeking men on one hand; and what they believe are lukewarm groups on the other. Unfortunately, as time has gone by they have become very comfortable in their isolation.

Why should there be such division caused by this matter of "the Elijah"? And why is determining the answer important to a modern-day Christian at all?

In fact, the truth about this matter is absolutely *crucial*. If HWA fulfilled this role, then he—according to scripture—restored *all things* to the Church of God in the 20th century! *If* he fulfilled this role, then *no one* dare tamper with ANY point of belief observed during the last era of the church, including administrative details and established traditions that cannot be specifically proven from scripture! Every written word must be regarded as canonical; and spoken words in recorded sermons as if delivered *ex-cathedra*.

"All things" written in Matthew 17:11 means just that —ALL—and deviations from this "all" would place one outside of the group of believers "holding fast" as admonished by Jesus Christ to Philadelphia (Rev. 3:11). But only IF HWA fulfilled the "Elijah" role as so many have believed.

HWA himself challenged God's people many times to not just believe him, but PROVE ALL THINGS (I Thes 5:21), just as the Bereans in the first century (Acts 17:11). Are we now exempt, living in this Laodicean age, from these admonishments? Should the people of God accept doctrines, traditions, and policies just because "so and so" stated them to be true?

NO! The people of God should either solidly prove or disprove every point of belief using the inspired Bible as the final reference on each matter. Doing otherwise is not only unwise, but can become a violation of the first and second commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me", and "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. ." (Exodus 20:3-4)

If we don't have our feet firmly planted in verifiable, Biblical truth and understanding, we won't be able to stand during the difficult days soon to arrive upon the world.

Sardis, Philadelphia, and the "Falling Away"

Those in the one true faith should understand that church eras are sequential. While the precise dates are open to some speculative discussion, it is plain from scripture that the “churches” described by Christ in Revelation 2 and 3 are sequential church ages—most lasting hundreds of years—in which the majority of God’s people have certain predominate character strengths and weaknesses described in scripture.

Many of God’s people in these last days of Satan’s reign on earth have lived through the Philadelphian, and then into the Laodicean era. These two eras are contrasted against one another in scripture, with Jesus Christ admonishing “Philadelphians” to hold fast to what they were taught, and promising them protection for the Great Tribulation as a part of the reward for so doing. (Rev 3:10-11). But most in the last era of the church—the era we are in today—do not heed this admonishment, and receive one of the most horrific corrections in church history! (Rev. 3:19).

With this in mind, the meaning and impact of 2 Thessalonians 2:3 should become vividly clear. The modern “falling away” began to occur when a “synagogue of Satan” (Rev 3:9) assumed control over the visible, corporate church organization where most of the called and converted people assembled. The term falling away in verse 3 comes from the Greek word “apostasia”, meaning “defection from the truth”.

Of course, there cannot be a “defection” or “falling away” from truth, if the truth has not been established and practiced for some period of time. The era that preceded the Philadelphian era was described by Jesus Christ as spiritually “dead” (Rev 3:1). Those in this era could not have “fallen away”, because they had already gradually lost most specific doctrinal truth as revealed in scripture. The “dead” era was marked by a lack of understanding resulting from truths being lost over the centuries—at least since the Thyratiran era ended somewhere around 1635 AD.

It was Sardis era brethren that HWA came into contact with in the late 1920’s. In fact, he was ordained as a minister in the visible organization of this era, and served Sardis congregations for some years before finding positions held by church leadership to not be in accordance with a growing number of truths Jesus Christ was revealing. Because of this, he was eventually forced to leave their fellowship.

What followed can only be summarized briefly here. Jesus Christ worked through HWA and others with him as a team to re-establish lost truths to the Church of God. Many hundreds of Biblical truths were revealed in the 20th century. Truths about modern Isrealitish descendants, sacred Holy Days, resurrections, the framework of Biblical prophecy, and many others.

The most crucial truth revealed plainly was the fundamental truth about the destiny of man—the reproduction of God beings through mankind. In essence, the basic purpose of the entire creation!

These crystal clear truths seemed brand new, but they were not. They had been understood clearly by the original disciples that Jesus Christ used to give mankind the Holy Scriptures. We can also presume that the patriarchs of the Old Testament understood the master plan. But, to the called and chosen of the 20th century—and even thousands that proved themselves to be only co-workers—these truths were astonishing and new.

The Radio Church of God (RCG), and later the Worldwide Church of God (WCG) grew in numbers to around 160,000 members and children at the numerical peak, before the WCG began to break apart. While still small in comparison to the world’s many false religious organizations, the visible corporate body became larger than at any other time except, perhaps, the Church of God during the first century.

This large laity required a substantial ministry for leadership. When HWA died, there were approximately 1500 ministers, with around 800 being fulltime. With the visible organization becoming so huge, it should be no surprise that most who became members and ministers were never called or chosen at all (Matthew 22:14, Revelation 3:9)!

Nevertheless, because of the miraculous nature of the abundant truth revealed in such a short period of time, an aura was attached to the WCG ministry's words as they delivered sermons from lecterns around the world. The human and very fallible ministry was elevated in stature beyond what any group of men were capable of—even if they had all been converted and “on fire” for God's truth!

History has proven that many of these men were only parroting the truth as revealed by others, under the leadership of HWA. When HWA died, they changed their beliefs almost as quickly as changing clothes.

Preconditioning For The End-Time Test

While Jesus Christ is the true revelator, many in the visible organization of the RCG and WCG exalted the ministry above the stature of men. They began to view the ministry as the arbiters of truth, abdicating their own, individual responsibility to become “*Kings and Priests*”. (Rev. 5:10) Competitive, carnal men seeking personal accolades and perceived “power” and influence, promoted cliques, exclusion, and hypocrisy! Their works were directly counter to the “give way” of love that HWA so often preached about.

Many assumed a new minister—even very young men—to be due “double honor” (I Timothy 5:17) the moment hands were removed from his head after his ordination. Immediately there was assumed to be a double portion of the Spirit of God within them, and profuse oracles of instant wisdom, regardless of their peculiar life-experience - or lack of it; and Biblical knowledge. Their credential was their visible ordination along with an Ambassador College liberal arts degree, apart from their works. De-emphasized or ignored were the words in the rest of the verse clearly stating that a man must “rule well” to be worthy of such “double honor”.

Being lost quickly was the Biblically revealed role and function of a true minister of God. Jesus Christ plainly taught that a minister was to be a “servant” to the people of God (Mark 10:43-44). Essentially those with the greatest capability and knowledge were commanded to live the way of “give”, and pour themselves out for others! The wise teaching would lead to all of God's people being trained for the Kingdom of God (Ephesians 4:11-13). In most cases, unfortunately, this was not practiced or even attempted.

While there were some men truly called into the ministry of God during this era, an honest look at recent church history leads to the conclusion that most were carnal tares placed in the body by Satan the devil, or had at the very least fallen from where they began. These false ministers placed among the Body were used to perpetrate a “falling away” from truth that was largely established in the Philadelphian era. Many of these false ministers were also used to create a great test for the people of God leading up to the Great Tribulation, as they formed into different and disparate groups—and *continued the falling away to its conclusion*.

It is the unfortunate lot of carnal man that he invariably chooses to substitute due worship of his creator which he cannot see, for the vain worship of physical men that are visible. Such is not the way of God! God commands ALL to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”. (Phil 2:12) The main

purpose of the ministry is to assist, counsel, and teach the people of God—NOT direct them into the Kingdom of God! The people of God—INCLUDING THE MINISTRY—must live by every Word of God (Matt. 4:4). They must not accept the words of mere mortal men, no matter what the visible credentials or apparent fruits.

HWA did not expect any less from God's people. Inspired preaching is ALWAYS direct from the Holy Bible. Men's words are NEVER canonical, unless they are quoting scripture. HWA, as a man and an Apostle was not exempted from the following: "ALL scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (II Tim 3:16)

The purpose of the recollection of recent church history is not to disparage hierarchical, church government as Biblically revealed. Nor is it to reject or scorn the many good works of legitimate and sincere ministers of the Living Christ during this period. There were true ministers used by Christ during this period that were, indeed, due the "double honor" of I Timothy 5:17. There were many converted ministers during this period that understood their responsibility and role.

But, the dismal fruits in the church of God experienced during the past thirty-five years are rooted in a, generally speaking, environment of competition and hypocrisy. The condition was masked by the indisputable and charismatic leadership of Herbert W Armstrong, until his death in 1986.

This improper exaltation and unrealistic expectation of the WCG ministry as a whole, created a spiritually unhealthy dependency among many in the laity toward the WCG ministry. This was driven by, as we will see later very clearly, a view of near-infallibility of the words delivered by HWA, and then encouraged by many of those that worked for him.

Many in the laity lost their spiritual focus, and unknowingly drifted from the true Jesus Christ. They became ever more reliant and dependent upon the ministry for interpretation of scripture, while neglecting their own personal Bible study. Some of God's people went so far as to drift into an idolatry of the ministry, becoming personally dysfunctional, while looking to these men as authorities on even the smallest of secular matters.

This dependency set the stage for not only the falling away (II Thes 2:3), but the subsequent delusion, and scattering of the people of God (II Thes 2:11). First, the apostates were able to use the preconditioning to command deviation from established biblical truth and tradition by dictating changes. Much of the membership had developed such a dependency, that they had lost their ability to think and reason properly, offering little resistance to the absurd ideas and changes originating with Satan and finding their way into the splinters.

While extreme loyalty can be commendable under certain conditions, God's people must be people of law and Biblical tenant first and foremost! Loyalty to those that seek to subvert and deceive is not demonstrative of God's Holy Spirit: "For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love [agape], and of a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7) Sound minds must learn to think independently and logically, united in the truth with others of like minds! Blind loyalty is blindness, nonetheless, and operates counter to God's overall purpose for humankind!

As many recognized the false ministers of WCG orchestrating the apostasy, they sought fellowship with others seeking to remain in the faith. Certain men used the hierarchical autocratic model to deceive many of God's people by convincing them they alone were God's only man on earth really "holding fast" to "all things" as restored to the Church of God by HWA.

The stage had been set for the end time testing of the people of God. It's safe here to say that NO ONE anticipated the manner in which events unfolded following the death of HWA. First, a falling away occurred, which was then followed by the incorporation and assembly of multiple groups led by demagogic false ministers, leading to an end-time scattering of thousands of the people of God—as the apostasy continued.

But we must remember, Jesus Christ had warned of this condition when he prophesied concerning the end time: “For many shall come in my name, saying I [He, Jesus Christ is] Christ; and shall deceive many.” (Matthew 24:5)

Measuring and Testing

In the decades following the death of HWA, men seeking a following arose among the people of God. These self-seekers claimed to be “holding fast” and honoring HWA as the end-time Elijah as no others, promising personal protection for those that followed them. While each of these carnal demagogues had their own distinct flavor rooted in their peculiar psychology, background, experience and capability; they ALL had at least three characteristics in common:

- (1) They began their independent ventures by claiming to be the only ex-WCG minister really “holding fast” and acknowledging HWA as the end-time Elijah.
- (2) They misused the hierarchical organizational structure described in the Bible for the Church of God, to abuse and further divide the people of God. (Jer 23:1-2, Ezekiel 34:4).
- (3) They ALL eventually appropriated important titles to themselves, and moved the focus of their followers from Christ to themselves

While many remaining in these groups likely do not have the Spirit of God, those actually called and chosen are in grave danger! They are, in reality, being coerced daily into substituting the worship of the true God in exchange for the idolatry of mere men that are not being led by the True Christ.

What has been the main result of the efforts of these vain men forming *their own* groups? Scattering and more division! (Jer 23:1, Ezekiel 34:5) Many have, perhaps, already lost their reward (Rev. 3:11) as they became embittered, victimized by the “force and cruelty” (Ezekiel 34:4) experienced under these demagogues!

Remember, this *is* the Laodicean age in which MOST are prophesied to be “rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.” (Rev 3:17) Most of those *WITH* the Spirit of God are prophesied to require very strong correction from their creator. We must not forget that it is a minority—perhaps a much smaller minority—that will actually be pleasing God and protected from the greatest time of trouble to ever fall upon the entire earth! (Rev. 3:10, Rev. Rev. 12:14)

Consider the latter part of the verse in Revelation 3:11 “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that *no man* take thy crown.” For years most assumed this to refer to the unconverted men that moved the WCG back into false Christianity. Events in the last three plus decades reveal the main reason Jesus Christ inspired these words: they were placed in scripture to warn God’s people of the many “wolves in sheeps clothing” arising from the confusion *after* the falling away of thousands from the truth.

God's people became conditioned to esteem the words of mere men as nearly infallible, without criticism. Unfortunately, many began to rely upon them as literal mediators between themselves and their perfect High Priest! This misplaced veneration moved many to become lazy in their personal Bible study, leaving interpretation of scripture to whoever they might be following.

By forgetting their responsibility as individual Christians, it is unfortunate that many are well on their way to failing in the testing and measuring administered by Jesus Christ at the end of the age. (Rev. 11:1-2)

Filthy Rags

With this as a background, you can understand why the matter of the so-called "end time Elijah" has always been crucial, not to be ignored. A belief that HWA fulfilled this role provides near canonical importance to everything he said or wrote about anything throughout his long life. It is no surprise that, to this day, there are hundreds—if not thousands—that view recorded sermons, written books and booklets with nearly the same gravity as the perfect Word of God given to us in the codified Holy Bible.

In organizations claiming to be the "one true church" where such belief is a fundamental requirement for membership, it seems inevitable that the man at the top becomes abusive. Every single detail must be clearly judged and administered because ALL things were restored. "All" means every single detail, therefore requiring uniformity and absolute conformance to just about anything the demagogue decides—whether it is clearly directed by Biblical tenant or not.

If one believes that "all things" were restored to the Church of God by HWA, there is absolutely no room for deviation from what was taught *and* administered. When such a premise is held in uncompromising fashion, God's way necessarily becomes a humanly constructed "black and white" model, with no margin provided for human error—even among those that practice it.

Is it any wonder that Satan has used such sentiment as a means to dupe the people of God in this Laodicean era? This era is characterized by men claiming to represent the Christ not as His disciple, but as His man. Men leading different groups all claim to be the only man on earth receiving direct inspiration from Jesus Christ, thus giving only them the right, insight, inspiration and the ability to lead God's people. This confusion *did not* exist during the Philadelphian era.

Most of these men claimed their roots to be with the Worldwide Church of God under HWA, along with touting their AC credential. They claimed to be "holding fast", and to believe that HWA was the end-time Elijah who restored "all things". They ALL gradually moved the focus from HWA to themselves, as they attempted to satisfy their huge egos by elevating themselves in the eyes of their followers.

Those finally recognizing the source of the demagoguery have often been shattered, disappointed, and disillusioned. This sad and dangerous spiritual state would not ever have occurred if God's true people would flee the idolatry of men (I Corinthians 10:14), and look first to the leadership and authority of the LIVING Christ!

True Christians must also acknowledge that God's people must flee idolatry of Herbert W. Armstrong.

To be a successful Christian in this lukewarm and spiritually self-assured age, one must “put on the whole armor of God ” (Ephesians 6:11), and recognize that it is not in man to “direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23) WE ALL DESPERATELY NEED DIRECTION FROM THE LIVING CHRIST!

While it would be the worst decision we could make if we reject the Biblical truths established during the Philadelphian era, God’s people should not and cannot view the writings of HWA as sacrosanct and flawless. While the books, booklets, and sermons from HWA are useful tools that can be used by every Bible student to better understand the sacred scripture, they should never be viewed as perfectly inspired AND WITHOUT ERROR.

The implications are huge, and yet simple. When one acknowledges inescapable conclusions based on facts, the PRUDENT AND RIGHT response is a humble return to the pure Word of God.

True Christians—by definition “followers of the Living Christ”—must realign their thinking by recognizing there are two types of religious statements (1) opinions, and (2) clear Biblical command and revelation. The first category includes both truth and error with respect to ANY MAN, because all flesh is fallible. The second category is infallible, and originates with Jesus Christ and God the Father. There is the righteousness that comes only from the God family, and there is man’s self-righteousness that the Bible describes as “filthy rags”. (Isaiah 64:6)

It should not be enough for any true Christian to form an uncompromising opinion on a matter simply because a man—any man— “said so”. HWA would not expect this, nor should any of those that carry on the faith following his death. Isn’t it clear that those that continue to cleave to HWA “restoring all things” in spite of clear facts and growth on certain points, may be relieving themselves of the need to grow in “grace and knowledge” (2 Peter 3:18), and by doing so become “rich and increased” having “need of nothing” (Rev 3:17)? How can any growth occur, if ALL things are already known?

However, no one can seem to determine, without doubt, exactly what HWA taught and practiced on every subject, at any time. Hence, the practice of the faith has divided in this end-time into contentions over what HWA said and did about such and such, combined with debates about when he said it—instead of focusing on what the Bible reveals.

In resolving this important and divisive Elijah question, the mistakes of a mere, mortal man—HWA—must not be de-emphasized, and certainly not ignored entirely. Honest acknowledgement of error not only shifts the paradigm of belief; it necessarily obliterates it! The impact following such a significant shift in thought might be very emotional and disruptive to many. Sadly, many have and will reject the true faith entirely, becoming embittered. Because the man they have looked to as some kind of “super-apostle” was, in fact, fallible, and made mistakes in judgment and interpretation of scripture, they will conclude that EVERYTHING was a deception and a mistake. Such thinking is a tragedy in our time.

We must keep in mind that sometimes the mistakes of leaders can profit the people of God and further God’s purpose. Why did God document in codified scripture the adultery of David—a man after his own heart? (Acts 13:22) Why are the sins of others recorded? It is not to shame these servants of God, but to benefit those in the flesh that were to follow them!

All must remind themselves of their commitment to Jesus Christ made at baptism, and look to the Bible as the only source of infallible truth. If God’s people keep this firmly in their minds, along with the MAIN GOAL of literally being born as a God being into His family, there is no need for any with the Spirit of God to stumble as they come to this realization.

So, now let's drill down to the truth of the matter.

Who Is The Elijah To Come?

Perhaps more than in any other age, false leaders have arisen in this end-time church age. These men have used the exciting restoration of truth that occurred in the Philadelphia era, a general fear of the Great Tribulation, combined with extreme autocratic rule, to confuse and hoodwink many of the true people of God in this last age of the church.

The framework in which these demagogues have constructed their "work" hinges upon one central belief—that HWA came in the spirit of Elijah and restored all things to the church of God. Let's take an honest look at the scriptures that HWA believed applied to him and the work accomplished before his death in January of 1986.

Often quoted Malachi 4:5-6 states, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

Ask yourself, if HWA fulfilled these scriptures, why did God inspire Malachi to prophesy an "Elijah" just before the Day of the Lord? Why not "before the Great Tribulation", or "in the last days", or alternatively, "in the end time"? While the timing was believable to many three decades ago, thirty six years have now passed since the death of HWA—and over 60 years since HWA began to believe that he fulfilled the prophecy. Generations have passed away since that time, and the Day of the Lord has not arrived.

What about the fulfillment of the latter part of the verse? Do the fruits many of us have been witnesses to indicate a return of children's hearts to their fathers—even within the church of God—in this modern church age? The unpleasant reality of many homes unnecessarily shattered by an incorrect understanding of "divorce and remarriage" in the 1960's must be noted here. The forced splitting of fathers, mothers, and children based on improper understanding of I Corinthians 7 did not nurture improved relations between fathers and children.

We must also recognize that the vast majority of the youth growing up in the Worldwide Church of God departed from the faith as fast as they could run away from it. Furthermore, did any of HWA's living children continue in the faith? Unfortunately, his younger son was a serial philandering adulterer, misusing the authority of his office in church organizations to pressure and seduce women. Denied and covered up for decades, his delusional and twisted immorality was finally captured by modern, digital recording that couldn't be covered up. Additionally, neither of HWA's daughters were anywhere to be found by the people of God as soon as they reached adulthood.

Don't these undeniable facts lead reasonable minds to conclude that HWA could not have fulfilled Malachi 4:5-6?

What about Malachi 3:1—"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in . . .?"

These verses could have been fulfilled by the late HWA, but not necessarily. This messenger appears to be a man, however he is probably not the same being as the "Elijah" described in Malachi 4:5-6. Let's

emphasize here that, even though these verses have been preached as if they refer to the same human being, “Elijah” is not mentioned in Malachi 3:1.

One of the basic rules for studying and understanding scripture is to first understand the meaning of clearly written verses, before adding to understanding by pulling in those that are more obscure. Malachi 3:1 does not clearly reveal precise timing, or personality. It simply states that one would prepare the way for Jesus Christ’s second coming, and then He would return suddenly to His people.

The two witnesses will undoubtedly announce—or pave the way for—the imminent return of Jesus Christ. The single messenger noted in Malachi 3:1 may be inspired simply because one of the two witnesses will be leader over the other, as God’s government always works in such a manner. However, it is admitted here that the verse is not crystal clear as to whom it references.

But let’s move to what are very clear scriptural final proofs of the end time Elijah prophecy. The Church of God acknowledges that those with the gift of the Holy Spirit in this age must use the Bible to interpret the Bible. Jesus Christ reveals knowledge to his servants by presenting both clear and indisputable references on matters both small and great, accompanied by other supporting scriptures that can add depth to the subject.

On the matter of the “restoration of all things” as often quoted in this end time from Matthew 17:11, we should begin by reading a very clear scripture from Acts 3:20-21:

And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of *[restoration] of all things*, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

Notice these two verses in Acts clearly reveal “who” will provide the restoration of all things, and “when” this will occur. Clearly, *Jesus Christ* will restore all things *when* he returns to earth to set up the Kingdom of God!

Knowing that Jesus Christ will restore all things at the beginning of His reign on earth eliminates the possibility some have entertained of one of the two witnesses being the “Elijah”. Why? *Because there would be no need for a restoration by Jesus Christ if one of the two prophet witnesses had performed the same action just a few short months or years previous!*

Now let’s read from Matthew 17:11, a quotation delivered by this same great being, “And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things.” Here Jesus Christ prophecies a future restoration, and then proceeds to explain that John the Baptist had also already come in the spirit of Elijah. He points to an “Elijah” that will perform that action. On the surface, it has appeared to be a human being in the end time that would perform a restoration of truth.

A key word in this scripture that has caused many to believe this prophecy to be describing a different restoration than that described in Acts 3:20-21 is the reference to “Elijah”. However, we need to look at the MEANING of the word Elijah. The Hebrew meaning provides THE crucial piece of to the puzzle!

The word “Elijah” is translated from the Hebrew word “ay lee yaw” (Strong’s H452), with the meaning “*God of Jehovah*”, or “*God of Yaweh*”! This one translation changes everything with respect to the “Elijah” in the end time!

With this in mind, let’s reread Matthew 17:11 with the meaning for Elijah inserted:

And Jesus answered and said unto them, the [*God of Yaweh*] truly shall first come, and restore all things.

Stripping preconceptions away, isn't it clear that Jesus Christ was referring to the time specifically described in Acts 3:20-21? Isn't it clear that Matthew 17:11 was inspired as a companion verse to Acts 3:20-21?

Let's also take a fresh look at Malachi 4:5-6, after substituting in the Hebrew meaning:

Behold, I will send you [*God of Yaweh*] the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

The trumpet blasts that make up the Day of the Lord are delivered by angels under the command of Jesus Christ! It is well known that the Day of the Lord is the one year period of the wrath of God delivered upon rebellious mankind. Jesus Christ is in command during this period and directly involved with administering punishment upon mankind. This occurs *after* the two and one half year period of Satan's wrath called the Great Tribulation!

The understanding of the meaning of "Elijah" provides positive proof about when the restoration of all things will take place, and the One who will accomplish it! Again, *Matthew 17:11 is clearly a companion scripture to Act 3:20-21!*

While clearly understanding these scriptures should be sufficient for reasonable and sound minds, the positive proof can be combined with negative disproof to conclude the matter.

All Things

As noted above, we MUST—if we are honest Bible students—consider that the word '*all*' is intended to mean just what it says—'*all things*'. 'All' comes from the greek word 'pas' (SC 3956), and means "thoroughly, whatsoever, whole, all, every". The word is not in any way, mysterious.

The true faith is not some kind of emotional experience. God's way of life is both practical and logical. But, for years many of us have catalogued various prophetic failures and doctrinal changes that occurred through the Philadelphian era; choosing not to assemble them, or even think about them very much. The fear many of us had was that, by noting these errors and mistakes, we would be siding with the apostates and invalidating the entire way of life practiced during the Philadelphian era. In too many cases, credibility has been sacrificed on the alter of emotion!

However, it cannot be spiritually healthy or profitable to hold to such a view while ignoring plain, verifiable facts. In consideration of such an important matter as the binding belief of HWA as the Elijah, failed predictions and doctrinal errors MUST BE FACED—even if it is painful or threatening! Doing otherwise is not just foolish on an individual level, it brings shame to all that call themselves disciples of Christ!

But admitting error—especially long held error with huge implications—is never easy!

Here are a few clear examples.

It is well documented that HWA believed for most or all of his life this end-time world power called the “king of the south” to be the tiny nation of Ethiopia, and the “push” to be the defeat of the Italian army in 1896. While this interpretation was believable when it was first written in the 1930’s, today it is absurd to hold to this view. Here’s why.

Verse 40 describes this push at “the time of the end”. While the precise beginning of “end” is open to some speculation, it is certainly not reasonable to believe the “end” to have commenced some 125 years ago! Furthermore, it is well documented that when he first described the “King of the South” as Ethiopia, HWA also believed Adolf Hitler would likely become the beast of Revelation, and that the end was imminent.

Years later in 1956, HWA authored a booklet called “1975 in Prophecy”. Here is an excerpt taken from page 10 of that booklet:

And now, the very next prophesied event—to strike the full fury of its climax before our democratic nations are invaded by the resurrected Roman Empire—is a tremendous universal FAMINE over America, Britain and northwestern Europe caused by unprecedented drought and floods . . .

. . . , United States Assistant Weather Chief I. R. Tanahill warns us unofficially to really fear “the big drought of 1975.” But the indications of prophecy are that this drought will be even more devastating than he foresees, and that it will strike sooner than 1975—probably between 1965 and 1972!

Many thousands in the Church of God during the 1960’s pointed to 1972 as the year of flight because of this near-dogmatic language. When the drought did not occur, and the “end” did not arrive, the booklet was simply pulled from circulation. HWA followed up without apology, claiming to never have “set dates”.

While technically that might be so, can anyone reasonably contend that the language used in the booklet was only speculative, without reference to dates? Many that were most affected financially and otherwise in the WCG at that time wouldn’t make such an argument. The impact of the failed prediction was felt a short time later when many ministers and thousands of lay members left the organization in 1974.

The reaction of some when confronted with such obvious errors plainly showing the human fallibility of HWA seem to practically go into near rage with emotion. Their reactions are, unfortunately, often an immediate irrational, self-righteous, indignant, and *very emotional* denial. Reasoning with minds so emotionally charged is futile. Their religion has become hinged upon an idol that is more precious to them than the truth.

But why? Because those that hold to an idolatrous belief that HWA “restored all things”, cannot bring their minds to acknowledge he could have been in error. The view of infallibility is driven entirely by emotion, devoid of reason. History and facts cease to matter, and the idolatry in extreme cases becomes a religion in and of itself! It is ironic that those reasoning in such a manner condemn others for imagined law breaking, while they themselves are violating the first and second commandments!

Let's also be clear on another matter. We should NEVER align with bitter detractors and scoffers entirely rejecting the Bible and ways of God. However, in order to conclusively *disprove* the divisive belief of HWA as a modern Elijah, we should necessarily review failed predictions, administrative mistakes and miscues of a long and *very successful* ministry.

Let the written and spoken *facts* speak for themselves. Here are just a few doctrinal and administrative errors in —some very serious—made over the course of a ministry lasting five decades:

- The 1934 June-July Plain Truth provided the explicit date of Christ's return, and the tribulation beginning in 1936 in the form of a chart.
- Divorce and Remarriage doctrine held until 1974 that previous marriages outside of the Church of God were bound for life, and made subsequent marriages invalid. Many families were broken because of this admitted (but never apologized for) misunderstanding.
- The Holy Day of Pentecost was observed on Monday until 1973, and then changed to Sunday
- While a written judgment on the use of cosmetics was not made until 1983, a sermon given by Rod Meredith in 1979 after being introduced by HWA proves that HWA acknowledged its use—and ALLOWED IT during the 1970's. There is no explicit Biblical reference to prohibit use, only a general guideline for modesty (I Peter 3:3)
- In a sermon given on the Feast of Trumpets in 1985, HWA declared that he would appoint another man to lead the WCG, and the members had better follow this man, or they would go straight into the Lake of Fire.
- At one time, HWA openly disagreed with I Corinthians 7:7 with respect to Paul's writing concerning remaining single. It is a mistake to disagree with ANY scripture, because ALL scripture is inspired by God. (II Timothy 3:16)

This short list is not exhaustive. There are many, many other speculative statements and administrative miscues made by HWA throughout his long ministry. The purpose here is not to belabor them, or to reject the truth that burst forth during the Philadelphian era. Nor are these facts presented to dispute HWA as an apostle of God. HWA had a very tough job!

A mountain of truth *was* restored to the Church of God during the Philadelphian era, but "*all things*" WERE NOT! HWA made multiple errors in judgment, statements, and writing through his long ministry. While noting him to have been an apostle—"one sent"—is right and correct; we must never look to an imperfect man as some kind of savior.

So, who is the Elijah to come? The Bible clearly reveals that it is none other than the God of Yahweh that will return VERY SOON to RESTORE ALL THINGS to earth. The Bible and recent recorded church history could not be plainer about the matter.

Matthew 24:14

James wrote “ . . be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only . .” The theme of the book of James is one of action, and work, as a true Christian’s part in achieving eternal life. “Works” are not only important, they are critical and necessary. There are the individual works of each Christian man and women, and the collective works of the Body of Jesus Christ throughout Church History. These works are *critical to our salvation*, and we don’t want to be confused about what that collective effort should be!

While much more detail can be presented with respect to the work of Matthew 24:14 than will be summarized here, the relevance of this scripture to true Christians living today so huge, it warrants brief discussion as a side topic of the main theme. Here is the verse that has also become contentious among God’s people because of the mistaken belief that HWA “restored all things”:

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations: and then shall *the end come*. – Matthew 24:14

It is true that HWA wrote and said that Matthew 24:14 had been fulfilled, first beginning to preach this sometime in the early 1980’s. Because of this view, many opinions exist about the work of God today. Many even believe there is no work at all until the appearance of the two witnesses. But, if this were the case, how would true Christians be trained in the meantime?

Once again, can you see how—with this matter and many others—the uncompromising belief in HWA as the end time Elijah produces the OPPOSITE effect of the supposed unity it pretends to foster?!

The fulfillment of Matthew 24:14 sometime around 1983 would have credibility ONLY if HWA was the Elijah to come that restored “all things”. With this as a premise, we could only conclude that it must be so, because he (HWA) said it was so.

While in 1986, or 1990, or even 1995, it might have been reasonable to believe HWA was correct when he stated he had been used to fulfill this scripture, it should at least become a question for reasonable Christian people nearly *forty years later*!

At the time of this writing, nearly two generations have passed since the death of HWA; and “the end” has not come. Some have tried to explain away this observation by claiming the word “end” to have some kind of enigmatic and obscure meaning. Some use 2 Peter 3:8 to contend that this passage of time is really very miniscule.

In fact, the “end” in Matthew 24:14 is translated from the Greek word “telos”. The definition is a clear and rather simple “limit at which a thing ceases to be.” While forty years is, indeed, a blink of an eye to God; it is NOT an insignificant period of time on the historical timeline in the lives of a human beings—for which the Bible was written! Jesus Christ would have used a word different from “telos”, if the end were not to occur just at the fulfillment of the prophecy.

We are forced to acknowledge once again that the only basis for believing Matthew 24:14 to have been fulfilled some 40 years ago is an obsessed view of infallibility ascribed to the written words of HWA. The facts prove differently, along with the obvious lack of an “end” at the time of this writing.

This verse is uniquely timed and unprecedented to the Church of God. Matthew 24:14 HAS NOT been the commission or main focus of the work of God's people in eras preceding the Philadelphian era. Those centuries were far-removed from "the end" marking the fulfillment of Matthew 24:14.

One must also consider that it has been only recently that communication technology has advanced sufficiently to make the literal fulfillment of this verse possible. While HWA worked to fulfill this verse, he could only accomplish it in part through radio, television, magazine circulation, and by meeting with heads of state as no other leader in the history of the Church of God. But consider that he met with less than a third of the world's leaders, and that the people of these nations remained largely uninformed, without access to the true gospel message.

With all these things in mind, it should become clear that it is TODAY that the internet has provided—for the first time in human history— a means for every man and woman on the face of the earth to *potentially* hear the true gospel message during the past twenty years. It is only in the last few years that wireless communication by satellite and microwave tower has advanced to an extent where every corner of the globe could potentially access the true gospel message with an inexpensive laptop and wireless modem.

We are just now closing in on the time when this scripture will finally be fulfilled.

Where Are We Today?

The focus of this article has been to reach the true people of God that still may—many through force of habit—still hold to the belief that HWA restored "all things" and fulfilled Matthew 24:14. While this is the main audience, it is hoped that others that long ago rejected this view might also be encouraged and possibly discover additional truth that shed new light on their understanding. It is not sufficient to disbelieve, without understanding "why" rejected knowledge is untrue. Disproving such things must also be based upon the Holy Scripture.

It is in the nature of humanity to seek after mere men as saviors. All men and women do this at one time or other, through idolization of sports heroes, past military and political leaders, or by following religious leaders. Those in the church of God—the "called out ones"— still have a human nature, and are thus subject to this inclination, as well.

The people of God, should remain focused on the Christ as the model of perfection, *and understand clearly* what this great being provided in His Holy Scripture, while working out "salvation with fear and trembling." (Phillipians 2:12)

While HWA was used by Jesus Christ to revitalize the Church of God, and to began preaching the true Gospel to the nations of the earth; it is Jesus Christ that is returning very soon to "restore all things" to the earth (Acts 3:20-21).