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MR. ARMSTRONG WAS NOT ELIJAH

[Previously I had included this material as a part of the article "The Power of the Holy People Shall Be Scattered". I wrote that article in September 1995, the date stated above.]

A major misunderstanding to which many of the people in God's Church still cling is that "Mr. Armstrong filled the office of the Elijah at the end time".

That idea is totally false!

It is based on a false assumption! Let's understand.

There is only one single passage in the Old Testament that predicted that God would send another "Elijah". It is found in Malachi 4:5.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: (Malachi 4:5)

The next verse talks about what Elijah would do.

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. (Malachi 4:6)

Now understand something: these two verses are the last statement in the entire Old Testament as we have it, or the last statement in the section known as "the Prophets" in the inspired Hebrew canon of the O.T.. These verses form a bridge to the New Testament. They form a bridge specifically to "the Day of the LORD", the time when Jesus Christ will return to this Earth.

The references in the New Testament we will now see all refer back specifically to this closing passage of the section of "the Prophets".

The angel Gabriel told Zacharias that John the Baptist would fill the role of the prophesied "Elijah".

And he SHALL GO BEFORE HIM IN THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF ELIAS, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. (Luke 1:17)

Notice here first of all that filling the role of "Elijah" involves GOING BEFORE JESUS CHRIST TO INTRODUCE CHRIST AND TO POINT PEOPLE TO CHRIST! Elijah ... "shall go before Him"! Notice also that Gabriel expanded the original prophecy of Malachi 4 to mean: "IN THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF Elijah". Next, notice that Gabriel explained that the "turning" referred to in Malachi 4:6 means: "TO TURN THE DISOBEDIENT TO THE WISDOM OF THE JUST AND TO PREPARE A PEOPLE FOR THE FIRST COMING OF CHRIST"! This statement by Gabriel means that the "Elijah" at the end must also

prepare a people for the SECOND coming of Christ, since Malachi 4:5 focuses specifically on Christ's second coming.

Jesus Christ referred to this prophecy on one occasion. This is recorded in two of the gospel accounts ... in Matthew 17:10-13 and in Mark 9:11-13. The account in Matthew gives more details. So let's examine that account.

And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?
(Matthew 17:10)

This was asked after they had witnessed the transfiguration in which they had seen a vision of Elijah. Since they had seen "Elijah" in vision, they apparently assumed that Elijah was already a spirit being and therefore asked: "why does Elijah still need to be resurrected and come again, if he is already a spirit being?" The account in Mark shows that the context they were talking about was "the resurrection". Notice.

And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another WHAT THE RISING FROM THE DEAD SHOULD MEAN. (Mark 9:10)

This context is important to keep in mind. The vision had focused their minds on the resurrection.

Next, the answer to their question is really quite simple: THE REASON why the scribes said that Elijah must come before the Messiah comes was because the scribes were aware of Malachi 4:5! Bear in mind that Malachi 4:5 doesn't really say before WHICH coming of the Messiah. The scribes thought that there would be only ONE coming of the Messiah, the second one. WE IN GOD'S CHURCH TODAY can clearly understand that the Messiah was prophesied to come TWICE, but the scribes didn't understand this.

From Jesus Christ's explanation we today can also understand that the prophecy in Malachi 4:5, even though it clearly focuses on the second coming of Christ, was intended by God to also have an application to Christ's first coming; something that John the Baptist fulfilled. This is a clear example of the principle of DUAL APPLICATIONS for many prophecies, something Mr. Armstrong often expounded on.

Now notice how Christ answered their question.

And Jesus answered and said unto them, ELIAS TRULY SHALL FIRST COME, AND RESTORE ALL THINGS. (Matthew 17:11)

First of all, Christ CONFIRMED that the scribes were correct in saying that "Elijah" still had to come at some time in the future. Christ was referring to the obvious intent of Malachi 4:5, something that would take place before the second coming.

But then Christ ADDED something not found in the original prophecy. Christ said that "Elijah" would "RESTORE ALL THINGS"! This is something of a "job description" for "Elijah" ... that he would have to "restore" things.

The Greek word translated "restore" is "apokathistemi". It is used eight times in the N.T.: four times it refers to healing and twice it refers to what "Elijah" would do. In three verses it refers to a withered hand being "RESTORED" (Matthew 12:13; Mark 3:5 and Luke 6:10). In one verse it refers to a man's sight

being "restored" (Mark 8:25). These usages convey the meaning of "restoring to a state of origin" or "restoring to the way that something should really be".

So in verse 11 Christ affirmed that what the scribes said was correct. But then in the next verse He contrasted this with something that the scribes did NOT understand.

But I say unto you, That ELIAS IS COME ALREADY, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. LIKEWISE shall also the Son of man suffer of them. (Matthew 17:12)

The words "but I say unto you" introduce an additional application of Malachi's prophecy. This was a confirmation of the prophecy Gabriel had pronounced to Zacharias. The "Elijah" Christ refers to here was already "past tense" at the time Christ said this. THE FOCUS Christ presented here was that John the Baptist WAS KILLED! The word "LIKEWISE" transfers this focus to Christ Himself. In other words, in the same way that John the Baptist was put to death for doing the job of "Elijah", so Jesus Christ Himself would also be put to death for the message that He brought.

The concluding verse of this section makes clear that the disciples understood that Christ meant that John the Baptist had indeed filled the role of "Elijah".

Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist. (Matthew 17:13)

And that is all we have in the Bible as far as prophecies about "Elijah" are concerned. So let's summarize what we have seen.

This is a clear illustration of "progressive revelation".

Firstly, The only prophecy about "Elijah" in the O.T. is very brief and short on details. However, the focus is clearly on the SECOND coming of Christ. This reference is intended to provide a bridge from the O.T. to the second coming of Christ.

Secondly, the angel Gabriel explained that the prophecy referred to someone coming "in the spirit and power of Elijah". Gabriel applied this prophecy to John the Baptist.

Thirdly, Gabriel explained that the prophecy refers to someone "going before" the Messiah; i.e. announcing the Messiah's coming and pointing people to the Messiah, identifying Him for people.

Fourthly, Gabriel made clear that the prophecy referred to a specific person, not to "a work" of a whole church era! The prophecy does not speak about "THE WORK of Elijah"; it speaks in the singular about one individual who would do a specific work.

Fifthly, Gabriel explained what the expression "turning the hearts" refers to ... it refers to TEACHING PEOPLE NOT TO BE "DISOBEDIENT" TO THE LAWS OF GOD and to prepare people for the coming of Christ.

Next, Jesus Christ confirmed that John the Baptist did indeed fulfil the role of coming "in the spirit and power of Elijah". But what Christ did is change the focus BACK TO THE "ELIJAH" AT THE END!

Next, Christ added that the "Elijah" at the end would have to restore things to the way they really should be! Christ did not mean that "Elijah" would restore things "in the world" ... that wasn't the original Elijah's job and that wasn't the job of John the Baptist either. Jesus Christ meant that "Elijah" would restore

things to the way they really should be IN THE CHURCH OF GOD! That commission for "Elijah" implies that there is a "falling away" first which then necessitates "a restoring"! In 2 Thessalonians 2:3 Paul explained that there would be a "falling away" before Christ's second coming; that is why "Elijah" needs to "restore all things".

THE WRONG ASSUMPTION that Mr. Armstrong was the "Elijah" of the end time was arrived at as follows:

Back in the 1960's Mr. Armstrong believed Christ would return in the 1970'ies. He believed we had already then entered the time of the end. THEREFORE there simply had to be an "Elijah" somewhere around. It was logical that the "Elijah" would be God's leading servant at the time. It was also logical to assume that "Elijah" would be the leader of the two witnesses. And it was felt that Mr. Armstrong was the leader of the two witnesses as well ... after all, who else was there for these roles?

HOWEVER: today we should recognize very clearly that in the 1960's we had NOT YET entered the specific end time events that precede the return of Jesus Christ. Thirty years have passed since then.

It was 30 years too soon to focus on who the two witnesses will be! It was also 30 years too soon to focus on who the end time "Elijah" will be.

We correctly understood that "Elijah" immediately precedes the second coming of Christ. Once we had put a name to "Elijah" (i.e. the name "Herbert W. Armstrong"), THEN we looked for reasons to hold onto that name ... even when circumstances changed! As circumstances changed, we should have recognized that our speculations about Mr. Armstrong being "Elijah" were wrong. Instead we modified our expectations to accommodate changed circumstances. We then said: it is not that Mr. Armstrong is "Elijah"; it is that the whole Church under the human leadership of Mr. Armstrong is doing THE WORK OF ELIJAH! But that is not what the Scriptures say!

The Scripture says: "behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet ...", and NOT: "behold I will send you A WORK OF ELIJAH ...".

Let me state it this way:

IF back in the 1960's we had understood that Mr. Armstrong would die at the beginning of 1986 and that Jesus Christ would definitely not return until at least 20 years after Mr. Armstrong had died ... THEN NOBODY WOULD HAVE CONCLUDED THAT MR. ARMSTRONG WAS "ELIJAH"!

The conclusion, back in the 60's, that Mr. Armstrong was "Elijah" was based on the ASSUMPTION that Mr. Armstrong would also live up to the second coming of Christ! History has proved that assumption to be wrong. But some continue to hold fast to the wrong conclusion based on that wrong assumption ... they now look for OTHER WAYS of rationalizing that the wrong conclusion was somehow correct.

Others have never understood the real reasons WHY we felt that Mr. Armstrong was "Elijah" in the first place ... all they know is something very general about some "WORK OF ELIJAH", whatever that may be? They are the ones who looked to things like the Church's Y.E.S. and Y.O.U. programs somehow being fulfillments of Malachi 4:6. But Malachi 4:6 was not talking about Y.E.S. lessons and Y.O.U. activities. The angel Gabriel explained that this Scripture refers to turning the hearts of those who are disobedient towards God.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT ELIJAH THAT GOD FOCUSED ON?

WHY did God say that He would send "Elijah"? Why not "Isaiah" or "Moses" or "Jeremiah" or "Ezekiel"? Why "Elijah"? Do we understand?

As Gabriel pointed out, it has nothing to do with THE PERSON of Elijah as such. It has to do with 2 things: coming in the spirit of Elijah, and coming in the power of Elijah. So we have to look at the ministry of Elijah himself to see what God means here.

There are several things that stand out about Elijah's ministry or work:

- Elijah brought on a three and one half year drought (James 5:17; 1 Kings 17:1).
- Elijah identified the true God to Israel in an age of confusion.

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, HOW LONG HALT YE BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS? IF THE LORD [BE] GOD, FOLLOW HIM: but if Baal, [then] follow him. And the people answered him not a word. (1 Kings 18:21)

- Elijah took on the false ministry head-on and slew 450 of the pagan priests (1 Kings 18:22, 40).
- Elijah called fire down from heaven on three occasions (1 Kings 18:24, 38; 2 Kings 1:10, 12).

Now which of these things is God trying to draw our attention to by telling us that He will send someone "in the spirit and power of Elijah"? Well, let's look in the Book of Revelation. These things that identify Elijah lead us straight to the two witnesses at the end.

- the 2 witnesses have a three and one half year ministry, the same length as the drought Elijah pronounced (Revelation 11:3);
- the 2 witnesses have power to cause a drought for that whole length of time.

These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will. (Revelation 11:6)

- the 2 witnesses also have power to call fire from heaven, through their speaking.

And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. (Revelation 11:5)

- the 2 witnesses will identify the true God in an age of confusion ... that is why they are "witnesses".
- the 2 witnesses will also confront the false ministry head-on, and some of their enemies will die (Revelation 11:5).

All of these things are "IN THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF ELIJAH"! The parallels between Elijah in the O.T. and the two witnesses before Christ's second coming are overwhelming!

The original Elijah worked alone. He felt a heavy burden and he FELT ALONE; he said: "even I alone am left" (1 Kings 19:14). In due time God replaced him with Elisha. John the Baptist, the first man to come

"in the spirit and power of Elijah", also worked alone, and died alone. He needed reassurance when he had run his course. So he sent his disciples to ask Christ:

And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? (Matthew 11:3)

It is not until the Book of Revelation that we see that "Elijah" is actually given an assistant to share the load that the original Elijah felt was too heavy for him. And so we see that there will be TWO witnesses, who will do the very same things that Elijah did!

Whether only the leader of the two witnesses qualifies for being called "Elijah" or whether both of them fill the role of doing one work is only a technicality. Revelation 11 makes clear that BOTH of the two witnesses will do Elijah-like works ... and both will die in the same way.

So our reasoning in the 60's that "Elijah" and the leader of the two witnesses are the same person was correct; but our conclusion that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong fulfilled both these roles was wrong. If we had known for sure that Mr. Armstrong would die more than 20 years before Christ's second coming, we would not have made that wrong assumption.

THE JOB OF THE END TIME "ELIJAH"

In Malachi 4:5-6 we saw the original prophecy. In Luke 1:17 we saw how the angel Gabriel APPLIED this prophecy. It has to do with preparing for the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist was the one who pointed out the true Christ to humanity. He was there when Christ started His ministry. And John the Baptist was killed for doing that job.

Jesus Christ ADDED something to the job description of "Elijah". Christ said that "Elijah" would have to "restore all things", meaning restoring the true teachings of God to the Church.

The two English words "all things" in this expression are a translation of the one Greek word "pas". In this context we should not take the word "ALL" to refer to the nth degree. It means "all things in a general way of speaking". It is used in the same way as in Matthew 2:3, where "ALL Jerusalem was troubled" and in Matthew 3:5, where "ALL Judaea went out to John the Baptist" and in Luke 6:17, where a great multitude "out of ALL Judaea" came to hear Christ, etc.. Obviously, not every single person in Jerusalem was troubled when the wise men came to Herod, and not every single person in Judaea went out to John the Baptist. It is a reference to "all in a general way of speaking".

Back to Christ's statement: the reference to "restoring" implies that some things must first "be lost".

I don't believe that it is in any way an exaggeration to say that Mr. Armstrong would not in his wildest dreams have imagined the magnitude of the extent to which the Church of God would, within a mere 10 years of his death, LOSE the truth of God!

Let me state it this way:

10 years ago, in 1985, Mr. Armstrong wrote about the "18 truths" he had been used to restore to God's Church. IF at that time Mr. Armstrong had known how many truths the Church would have lost by 1995, he would certainly not have felt that his was the final restoration!

Today we are talking about A LOT MORE THAN JUST 18 TRUTHS that have to be restored! Can we

grasp this?

The dismantling of the teachings of the Church, the rejection of the truth, the introduction of heresies and the discarding of the writings of Mr. Armstrong has been so methodical and so thorough under Mr. Tkach's leadership, that almost everybody in the Church has been influenced to some degree. Many of those who consider themselves loyal to the things Mr. Armstrong taught don't even realize that they have departed in one area or another from the faith that was once delivered to us. It is not a matter of having a wrong attitude; it is a matter of having been deceived by the sleight of men and by cunning craftiness.

That we [henceforth] be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, [and] cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;
(Ephesians 4:14)

In plain English: how many people have been taken in by clever arguments in one area or another? All too many, it seems.

IT IS IN THIS CONTEXT THAT THERE IS A NEED FOR GOD TO SEND "ELIJAH" TO
RESTORE ALL THINGS TO THE CHURCH!

I have upheld Mr. Armstrong's integrity and his office and his position as much as anyone else, and I still do so! But Mr. Armstrong was not the "Elijah" who would restore all things immediately prior to the second coming of Christ! The depth of doctrinal depravity into which the Church of God has sunk in the past 10 years REQUIRES that God send someone to restore all things before Jesus Christ returns! It is because of THE FOUNDATION that Mr. Armstrong was used to lay, that it will be possible for an "Elijah" to restore all things. The things God used Mr. Armstrong to put into God's Church are the basic reference points, the yardstick, the measurement by which things need to be "restored".

The closer we live to the time of Christ's return, the more understanding we will have access to. That is always the way God has worked. It does not in any way diminish the job God's servants in previous times performed. For example, Daniel and Jeremiah didn't understand some of the things the apostles came to understand. Notice the words of Christ.

For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous [men] have desired to see [those things] which ye see, and have not seen [them]; and to hear [those things] which ye hear, and have not heard [them]. (Matthew 13:17)

Not having seen and heard those things did not in any way take away from the prophets and righteous men of old. By the end of his life the Apostle John came to understand some things the others had not been privileged to understand. Mr. Armstrong came to understand some things that none of the apostles in their life-times could have understood. That didn't make Mr. Armstrong more important than any of the original apostles. He just lived at a later time when more of God's plan had unfolded.

It was Mr. Armstrong who repeatedly told us that 90% of prophecy applies to our time and beyond. And so it is not in any way demeaning towards Mr. Armstrong to realize that we today, almost 10 years after his death, should be in a position to understand MORE than what Mr. Armstrong was privileged to understand and to teach. It is simply a matter that MORE OF GOD'S PLAN HAS UNFOLDED IN THE PAST 10 YEARS. There is more for us to see. A lot of things have happened in these past 10 years! Had he lived, these things would also have influenced Mr. Armstrong's understanding.

So please understand that when I disagree with Mr. Armstrong on some things, it is not that I have any desire to elevate myself above Mr. Armstrong. Not at all! It is just that I have the privilege, as do you, to view the history and the developments in God's Church 10 years down the road from Mr. Armstrong's perspective. Those 10 years MUST have an influence on our understanding. We must confront reality! And we must GROW in knowledge, as well as in grace (2 Peter 3:18).

So the job of the end time "Elijah" is to restore the things the Church has lost. As Gabriel pointed out, the job also includes going before the Messiah ... announcing the Messiah's return. Yes, Mr. Armstrong did do this during his lifetime, but he is now dead and can't do it any more. But **SOMEBODY** will still have to do this until Christ **DOES** return! The job of Elijah, as Jesus Christ pointed out, also involves **DYING**! As Christ referred to John being put to death ("... they have done unto him whatsoever they listed ..."), so likewise the end time "Elijah" will have to die as a martyr. And that is precisely what the two witnesses will have to do.

In the Greek of the New Testament the one word "martus" means both, "a witness" and "a martyr" and it is translated by both these English words. And as we know, the two witnesses are "martyred", or killed, at the end of their ministry.

Mr. Armstrong was not killed ... he died a natural death at the end of a long life. This means that Mr. Armstrong could not have been either one of the two witnesses or "Elijah".

Another point to consider: the people who still believe that Mr. Armstrong was the "Elijah" of the end **ALSO** used to believe (15 and 20 years ago) that Mr. Armstrong was one of the two witnesses. Mr. Armstrong's death has **FORCED** them to stop believing the latter idea, but they still cling to the former. They don't understand that the two are tied together.

This is a typical problem that arises when people approach a Scripture with the answer in mind even **BEFORE** they have examined the Scripture itself. People like that are then forced to read specific meanings into what the Bible actually says. Their minds are closed to the correct answers. We need to always examine the Scriptures first with an honest open mind.

Think this whole question through very carefully for yourself. Mr. Armstrong was a servant of God. He was the leader of an era of God's Church. But he was not the "Elijah" of the time of the end, just as surely as Franz Josef Strauss was not "the Beast". It was our mistake to, already 30 years ago, want to put names to "Elijah" and to "the Beast" and to "the two witnesses". We should now understand that 30 years ago God was not about to tell us who these individuals would be 30 or more years later! 30 years ago it wasn't really our business to know who these individuals will be. But it is hard not to speculate a little bit now and then, isn't it?

So: "Elijah" truly shall still come and restore all things! And "Elijah" will be one of the two witnesses. And he will announce the return of Jesus Christ. And just like John the Baptist, he will then be put to death (together with the other one of the two witnesses); in this case three and one half days before the return of Jesus Christ. And just like John the Baptist he will announce: **"BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD!"**

That was not the job God called Mr. Armstrong to perform.

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