

January 1996: What Happened?

by Staff

***Forerunner*, "Prophecy Watch," March 1996**

Why even ask this question? January has been a very interesting month throughout the modern history of the church of God (see inset below). As we can see, some of the most significant events in our spiritual lives have had their beginnings in this mid-winter month.

January 11, 1996, was significant for those of us in the Church of the Great God since it was this church's fourth anniversary. God's law says that a tree's fruit can be used generally in the fifth year after three years of "circumcised" fruit and one year of "holy" fruit (Leviticus 19:23-25). Will we have a change of direction in our work after four years of God's revelation of Himself? That remains to be seen.

Hold Fast!

January 16, 1996, was the tenth anniversary of the death of Herbert Armstrong. Ten is used in the Bible to show complete testing, judgment, and punishment (Ten Plagues, Ten Commandments, Ten Virgins). It is a number of Divine order or a complete cycle. Over these past ten years, we have seen a great falling away from the truth of God, even though Revelation 3:11 specifically tells us to "hold fast." Could God have used these ten years to determine who will hold fast and who will allow themselves to be pulled away from His truth?

The "Personal" in the February 1996 *Plain Truth*, distributed in January, was first printed in the Winter 1996 issue of *Christian Research Journal*. Entitled "A Church Reborn," it uses a ten-year framework to summarize the "accomplishments" of the Worldwide Church of God. This includes a comprehensive list of changes in almost everything that the church once believed. A quotation from the "Personal" will suffice to show the attitude:

All these changes in the space of 10 years? Many are now advising us that profound course corrections of this magnitude are without historical precedent, at least since the days of the New Testament church. . . . Despite the material losses, we have gained much. As Paul wrote, *whatever was to our profit in what we embraced before, we now consider worthless for the sake of Christ*. (Our emphasis)

Ten years after the death of Herbert Armstrong, most of the doctrines he taught are now considered worthless! Is it not ironic that this ten-year summary was officially distributed in January 1996? Did God test the leaders of the church for ten years to see if they would "hold fast" to true doctrine or follow the religion of Babylon? The last sentence of the "Personal" gives their response: "Relying on God in faith and in fervent prayer, *we fully intend to stay the course* on which Jesus Christ has set us." They are not willing to return to "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3)! (Please understand, I do not intend to "bad mouth" the leadership of this church. They are quite happy with what they have done, though, personally, I think they have erred. God, however, makes the ultimate judgment.)

Will God soon begin to show His judgment between those who held fast and those who let go? Perhaps these phrases and numbers are merely speculative and coincidental. Whatever the case, they are certainly interesting in connection with the list of January occurrences.

"Not One Stone"

Matthew 24:2 is interesting in this context of judgment. Jesus prophesies, "Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone [of the Temple] shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down." We understand that in other verses the "temple" represents the church, composed of the "called-out ones," described as "living stones" (I Peter 2:5). As this 10-year agenda of changing doctrine concludes, it would seem all the "stones" have been cast down or cast out on their own. In one fashion or another, the Temple has been "completely shattered" (Daniel 12:7)!

We may also think of these stones as symbols of individual doctrines that provided the foundation for our beliefs. Many verses in the New Testament admonish us to cling to sound, godly doctrine. We are warned, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine [of Christ], do not receive him into your house nor greet him" (II John 10). At the same time the "living stones" of the Temple were being cast down, the doctrines that defined God's true people were also being thrown down until all were gone. Now no doctrinal basis remains to define a true temple people.

The context of Matthew 24 is of the Great Tribulation. God's people have been cast down from within before, beginning with wolves in the flock in the first century (Acts 20:29-30). Is this current casting down from within to be soon followed by persecution and martyrdom (Matthew 24:9-13)—continuing from within, but increasingly from without?

Other January Events

President Ezer Weizman of Israel made an official state visit to Germany, speaking before the German Bundestag on January 16, 1996. According to *This Week in Germany* (January 19, 1996), "Weizman is the first Israeli president to travel to Germany since [German] unification and only the second ever [since Israel's founding]." He spoke of forgetting the past and working together for the future. With German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel:

Weizman discussed German-Israeli relations and *Germany's support for the on-going Middle East peace process*. The two nations, Kinkel observed in a statement to the press, have close political, economic and cultural ties. (Our emphasis)

The Charlotte Observer ran a similar article on Israeli-German ties on January 26, 1996, titled "Israeli leader: No request for Germans on Golan yet":

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres briefed German leaders Thursday on peace talks with Syria but said *he stopped short of asking for German troops* to help enforce any peace deal. (Our emphasis)

The key word is "yet." Notice what *Insight* (February 12, 1996, p. 6) writes about using U.S. and other nations' troops to protect an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement: "Arrangements would include the

stationing of American GIs on the Israeli side of the border while troops drawn from an assortment of other nations would man the Syrian side." Will U.N. forces—including German—soon be lined up across the border from U.S. and Israeli troops?

Whatever happens, the Jews seem to be relying more and more on Germany. The prophecy in Hosea 5:12-13 depicts Ephraim and Judah going to Assyria (modern Germany) for help to cure their "sickness." The prophet says they are "like a silly dove" (Hosea 7:11) because Assyria is the rod of God's anger (Isaiah 10:5), used to punish end-time Ephraim and Judah. They are fleeing straight into the clutches of their real enemy!

Why would Judah go to the Assyrians, considering the long history of bad blood between Germans and Jews? The United States has been pressuring the Israelis to concede the Golan Heights to Syria in return for a peace treaty with the Arab nations. Though U.S. military and economic assistance has always been available to protect their struggling nation, Israel's leaders have begun to fear losing some of this support if they do not make concessions to the Arabs. Many in Israel today, including the new Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, would be willing to concede Golan for a treaty.

The Israelis are nervous. They foresee increasing U.S. support to the Arabs and declining support for themselves. In addition, they see a hopelessly bankrupt America, squabbling internally over a budget and rapidly reducing its own military. Can they depend on the U.S. as a continuing safety net?

Many Israelis fear they cannot. Who else in the world can and might provide that support? Apparently, they feel Germany can. Even if they make a pact with the Germans, Daniel 11:40-45 shows the Beast power, led by the Germans, will overthrow many Mideast nations and set up a government in Jerusalem.

Judah Warned

Whether or not a pact with Germany transpires, the Israelis made an official visit with those overtones. It is noteworthy that Weizman made his official address to the Bundestag on January 16, the tenth anniversary of Herbert Armstrong's death. Mr. Armstrong visited with Israeli leaders on many occasions, gently warning them to turn to God and His way of love. Those same leaders sent condolences at Mr. Armstrong's death. **EXACTLY** ten years later, they make overtures of alliance to the Assyrians, leader of the coming Babylon!

In January 1996, we observe a branch of spiritual Israel, the Worldwide Church of God, officially declaring its Temple-destroying agenda complete. *That church has repudiated most of the distinctive teachings of the church of God and accepted many of the doctrines of the religious arm of Babylon!*

We also see a nation of physical Israel (Judah) flying like a silly dove to the military, economic, and political arm of Babylon. *She has rejected the protection of God and is courting the embrace of a "lover" for her future protection!*

This column is entitled "Prophecy Watch," not "Predict"! I am not predicting anything in particular, just putting together some interesting occurrences and their dates along with Bible numerology for our reflection. While prophecy is interesting and motivating, the direction of that interest and motivation has to be spiritual preparedness. Otherwise, it is an exercise in vanity and futility.

We have had some very interesting Januarys in the 62 years since 1934. In retrospect, this one may be interesting or even *very* interesting. Only God knows, but He instructs us to watch and pray always that events do not "slip up on us" and we find ourselves spiritually unprepared. Paul would probably not mind lending a phrase to fit this context: ". . . so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25)!

Inset: Significant Januarys in Recent Church History

1934 Gospel goes to the United States via radio (7th); first issue of *The Plain Truth* magazine prepared.

1953 Gospel goes to Europe via Radio Luxembourg (1st).

1965 Radio broadcast begins on Radio London from "pirate" ships (5th).

1972 Gospel goes international via *Reader's Digest*; financing received for building "a house for God" (Ambassador Auditorium), and ground-breaking ceremony occurs on January 14; radio broadcast resumes with old tapes of Herbert W. Armstrong (HWA), having been interrupted in October 1971 by Garner Ted Armstrong's (GTA) leave of absence.

1974 Forty years from 1934; Pentecost doctrine is questioned at ministerial conference, and HWA initiates a research team on it; seeds planted for a rebellion to break out in February over 1) GTA's leave of absence, 2) divorce and remarriage, 3) church authority and administrations (voting, democratic government) with most of the tithes staying in local church areas and 4) claims of misallocation of church funds (see HWA's member letter, February 25, 1974).

1978 Ministerial conference: Rebellion occurs when the Systematic Theology Project is discussed and distributed to the ministry after HWA says not to make any changes.

1979 State of California attacks the Worldwide Church of God (3rd).

1986 Herbert W. Armstrong dies (16th).

1992 Church of the Great God (CGG) begins with the sermon, "Do You See God?" (11th).

1996 ???

(Other branches of God's church may have significant dates in January of which we do not have knowledge.)