CHAPTER TWO
BEHAVIOR OF GOD’S TREASURE—PAST AND FUTURE

Is it really reasonable to conclude that the Radio Church of God was actually the work of the Living God in this age? Is there solid evidence to support that belief for ones who may be honestly doubtful? We began by profiling the biblical attributes of the true Church of God and what it must look like wherever it may be found. We identified five major attributes that help distinguish the true Church from all other claimants.

With these principles in mind, what other evidence might be available in the Bible to help us identify unique characteristics that differentiate God’s true church—His peculiar treasure—from all others? What about the recorded history of the behavior of ancient Israel, the behavior of the first-century Church, and specific prophecies related to the behavior of a last-day Church? Did God prophesy what would actually happen to that Church—God’s peculiar treasure? And if so, might any of those detailed events have already transpired?

ANCIENT ISRAEL’S BEHAVIOR

We have already seen that ancient Israel was called out from among all nations to become God’s peculiar treasure. He promised to fight their battles for them and to deliver them from any enemy if they would honor their covenant promises to Him:

When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he
sware unto them. For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him. Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou hearest his words out of the midst of the fire. And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt; To drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day. Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the LORD he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else. Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever (Deuteronomy 4:30–40).

But did God really expect that they would be a faithful and loyal people to Him? God was not so naive.

O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be
well with them, and with their children for ever! (Deuteronomy 5:29)

God knew the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). And lest any should later believe He was surprised by the eventual outcome of ancient Israel, He made sure to prophesy through Moses exactly what He knew they would choose to do:

For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the LORD; and how much more after my death? Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them. For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands (Deuteronomy 31:27–29).

God also prophesied what His own response to their faithlessness would be:

When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke him to anger: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you (Deuteronomy 4:25–27).
And that is precisely what happened to them over many centuries. The Old Testament is largely an historical record of the failures of God’s chosen people. Times of reformation and heartfelt reconciliation with God through the work of faithful champions (judges, kings, or prophets) were all too few and far between. Mostly, in spite of being given every possible advantage, Israel never appreciated it and repeatedly drifted back into lawlessness and idolatry. They did exactly what God prophesied they would do. And very often, it was the leaders of Israel—especially their priests—who were responsible for their national apostasy.

But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean (Isaiah 28:7–8).

And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination. The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit (Jeremiah 2:7–8).

But surely this failure only occurred with ancient Israel—that physical nation, right? Spiritual Israel—the New Testament Church—with the power of God’s Holy Spirit indwelling, would never behave in the same way, would they?
Behavior of the First-Century Church of God

Unfortunately, the written history of the first-century church—the true spiritual Body of Jesus Christ—was no better than that of the original church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). Though called out of this world to become God’s peculiar treasure, and sanctified by the gift of the Holy Spirit, within forty years of the death and ascension of Jesus Christ, they too corrupted themselves through perversions of the true doctrine and became largely cut off from God. Ironically, the Apostle Paul prophesied in God’s name to the Church with an ominous warning about their future, just as Moses had prophesied earlier to Israel.

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy [Spirit] hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears (Acts 20:28–31).

Not only did God prophesy through Paul that the true church would begin to champion corrupt teachings, but also that perversion would spring from the faithless acts of church leaders—the elders—who would cease to defend the Truth originally delivered to that chosen Body by Jesus Christ Himself!

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the
grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage. But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit (Jude 3–4, 16–19).

So the legitimate Body of Jesus Christ in the first century—the true church of God—actually abandoned the Truth, just like the original Israelites did. By the early 90s A.D., the Apostle John had been cast out of the physical assembly of the church, and was forced to minister to only a small scattered remnant left of those who still loved the original teachings.

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church (3 John 9–10).

It was this perverted leader, Diotrephes (as well as many others across Asia Minor), who held sway with the assembly in that region, not the true apostles, like John. The main assembly—within forty years of the beginning of the Christian faith through the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2)—no longer wanted to hear those foundational doctrines confirmed. They had moved on to teachings they considered to be superior, but which God considered to be Baal worship. These were the "Church Fathers" of the late first century and second century who repudiated Sabbath-keeping in favor of
Sunday worship, embraced the Trinity heresy to explain the nature of God, and every other perversion that became ultimately synonymous with Christianity so-called from that time down to the present.

But what about God’s true church in our own time? Why should there have to be a modern-day parallel? After all, just because the first-century church was seduced from within through the subtleties of Baal worship, should we not expect the legitimate church of God in our own time—founded upon the true Jesus Christ—to have remained faithful? What does the Bible say?

**Prophecies of the Last-day Church**

The New Testament not only records a history of what happened to the first-century church, but also many prophecies applying specifically to that Body that would exist immediately prior and leading to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that *in the latter times* some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron (1 Timothy 4:1–2) [emphasis mine].

In fact, the Bible really applies primarily to that church of the last days. Concerning all of the events chronicled in the Old Testament, Paul wrote:

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, *upon whom the ends of the world are come*. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall (1 Corinthians 10:11–12) [emphasis mine].
This includes those very prophecies Moses spoke concerning the "latter days."

For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands (Deuteronomy 31:29) [emphasis mine].

Moses was not just speaking and writing a condemnation of the Israelites of his own day. Remember, these were God’s inspired words—not his own—and even without Moses’ knowledge, God was recording a warning for the Church He intended to raise up in those days just prior to the end of this age. Many have assumed that Paul (and other apostles), by such statements about the latter days, were mistaken in believing they themselves would live to see the Second Coming of Christ. Is that true? Who is it that wrote these New Testament books, including every word within them? Is it God, or was it fallible men? Who is it that wrote:

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17) [emphasis mine].

By using the pronoun, "we," did Paul really believe that some to whom he was writing in the first century would still be alive physically at the return of Christ? What about this warning:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by
spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand (2 Thessalonians 2:1–2) [emphasis mine].

Was Paul truly mistaken about the time of Christ’s return? This is a common conclusion among many. But if that is so, then God allowed human error—the presumptions of false reasoning—to be recorded in His Holy Bible. Do you believe that is true? If not, then what instead must be true? It actually confirms that Paul (as well as the other inspired writers) was only penning the words that God dictated to him to be carried down to the last-day Church—God’s peculiar treasure—which would exist in the days just before the consummation of this age.

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the [consummation of the age]? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many (Matthew 24:3–5).

Why did Jesus Christ not only speak these words, but then ensure that they were carried down in writing to our very time? Was it merely an historical record of a one-time conversation He had with those early disciples? Or was He recording a specific message for those He knew would be called in a much later generation? And if Christ’s own words were for a last-day Body of believers, why is it so difficult to recognize that the words of Paul, Peter, Jude, and John were likewise recorded by Jesus Christ for the last-day Church?

What else did God’s warnings through the apostles to that last-day church reveal?

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous,
boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy. Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith (2 Timothy 3:1–8) [emphasis mine].

This is not a condemnation of religionists of the world (Catholic and Protestant) who have always been deceived and have never yet been called by God. This is a prophecy concerning God’s true people, the ones in the last days who were called, and who did have a chance to understand. As quoted before from 1 Timothy 4:1, Paul said, "in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." A man cannot depart from that which he never first possessed. To depart requires one first to have known and understood the Truth, even as Israel of old had been given that Truth, but then later forsook it. The church of the last days, wherever it may be, was prophesied to do the very same thing.

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Timothy 4:2–4) [emphasis mine].
The true Church of God in the last days either already has, or yet will, turn away from the revealed Truth of God, just as its forerunners did. God said so.

Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition (2 Thessalonians 2:3) [emphasis mine].

This phrase, "falling away," is the Greek word, *apostasia*. It means, specifically, a defection from the Truth! It is a last-day prophecy confirming that the true Church of God—His peculiar treasure—would depart from the Truth upon which that Body would first be founded. That organized church would begin with the Truth as a revelation from God, but in time would change its teachings to embrace concepts that God despises.

What does all of this tell us about attributes of the true Church of God in the last days? If we are seeking to find the legitimate work of God, what should we be looking for as far as its prophesied behavior? It is not a church that begins with and holds firm to the correct teachings of God. If you are looking for a church that has always set a perfect example and continues consistently in good behavior and positive fruits, you are sure to miss it altogether. God's peculiar treasure of the last days is a body that will do exactly what its historical counterparts have always done. It will begin with the blessings of God in a miraculous work from its inception. But over time, it will allow men with nefarious personal agendas, especially its ministry, to destroy it from within:

Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD. . . . The anger of the LORD shall not
return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: *in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly* (Jeremiah 23:1–2, 20) [emphasis mine].

**So What About the Radio Church of God?**

We are trying to answer the question, is it possible that the twentieth-century work of Herbert Armstrong was actually the inspired biblical fulfillment of God’s last-day Church? Could the Radio Church of God potentially have been His peculiar treasure in our very own time? It is certainly a church that began with monumental impetus over the first forty years of its existence, and then gradually began to change its teachings as no other church in history has ever done, ultimately repudiating its very doctrinal foundation. It is also a church that began to splinter in the face of serious turmoil and internal strife, ultimately rejecting those members who still insisted upon holding to the original doctrines, and leaving those former believers scattered and disillusioned.

According to these biblical prophecies, we certainly cannot rule out the legitimacy of that work under Herbert Armstrong at this juncture, because the Radio Church of God experienced exactly the kind of initial blessing and ultimate corruption that God indicated must absolutely come to pass. Perhaps those who are skeptical will still not be convinced. But it still merits following the trail and completing our investigation.

Next, we want to summarize the basic doctrines that set Herbert Armstrong’s work apart from all other churches. Did his teachings meet the Bible’s *signature profile* of the true Church as opposed to the world’s false notions of Christianity? Then we want to summarize some of the key historical events that occurred in the early formation and expansion of the Radio Church of God, likewise examining the institutional forces that came to bear upon that body over time. If it was the true Church of God, then it must have possessed those doctrines that distinguish it from all imposters. Did it? It must also have endured the eventual destabilization and
destruction prophesied to befall that last-day Body. Many writers have tried to interpret that history. But all of these other writers have failed to recognize the underlying reasons for much of that which transpired. The true history is there for anyone who desires to confirm the facts and to consider it objectively. When evaluated without the entrenched preconceptions of most former members, or the skepticism of disdainful onlookers, the actual facts are quite startling. It is a story that can be told, and it should be told.