

# EVIDENCE AND PROOF AGAINST CHURCH ERAS

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## INTRODUCTION

I am writing this article in response to a booklet written by The Eternal Church of God and located on this website [Ref1] called *Evidence for Eras*. This booklet gives evidences in each chapter as to why they feel that the seven letters in Revelation represent church eras throughout history. This article gives my understanding of reasons why church eras should not be accepted as God's motive for having the Apostle John write the seven letters in Revelation 2 and 3. It is a good idea to read both sides of this issue in order to have a thorough understanding.

## THE HISTORY OF THE ERAS DOCTRINE

This doctrine was said to be invented by the Baptist preacher William Miller (1782-1849). The Eternal Church of God included him as a leader in their chapter on Church of God history even though he was a Baptist, and not a Sabbath keeper. [Ref2] It is said that the Sabbath keeping groups came out from him.

The original "eras" doctrine that Miller taught had these timings:

Ephesus era - in the first century up to 100 AD

Smyrna era - 100 to 312 AD

Pergamos era - 312 to 538 AD

Thyatira era" - 538 to 901 AD (the 10<sup>th</sup> century)

Sardis era - 901 to 1517 AD (the Reformation)

Philadelphia era - 1517 to 1798 AD

Laodicea era - from 1798 to 1843 AD (According to Miller, Jesus was to return in 1843, so, that year was "the end".)

Other ministers who taught the eras doctrine had other timings:

Timings according to William Brahnem (1909-1965) [Ref3]

Ephesus era - 53-170 AD (Paul)

Smyrna era - 179-312 AD (Irenius)

Pergamos era - 312-606 AD (St. Martin)

Thyatira era - 606-1520 AD (Columba)

Sardis era - 1520-1750 AD (Luther)

Philadelphia era - 1750-1906 AD (Wesley)

Laodicea era - 1906-Present (Brahnem)

The Eternal Church of God had these timings in their booklet [Ref 1 Pg 106]

Ephesus era - 31- 135 AD (under name Christians)

Smyrna era - 135-450 (under name Nazarines)

Pergamos era - 450-1050 (under name Paulicians)

Thyatira era" - 1050-1600 (under names Vaudois, Insabbati, Albigenses, Waldenses)

Sardis era - 1600-1933 (under name Seventh Day Church of God)

Philadelphia era - 1933-1986 (under name Worldwide Church of God)

Laodicea era - 1986-Present (under name Grace International or scattered churches of God with various names)

In comparing the timings, you first notice quite a variation of dates. This shows how preachers have copied the original doctrine and adapted it according to their church's beliefs. Also notice how easy it is to find events in history that seem to fit right in with the descriptions in the letters to the seven churches. For example, the 'open door' of the Philadelphia era is seen by Miller's group to be the Reformation which provided an 'open door' leading out of the Catholic Church. In William Branham's group the open door is seen as 'the full revelation of the mystery of God' opened by Jesus which his doctrines represent.

Coming out of the Sardis Age and into the Philadelphian Age we find this "open door". It's not just "open" but the original text indicates that it is "wide open". Our Lord Jesus set an open door for those who were willing to "come out" of man-made religion and enter into the fullness of the Word. What God started in Luther, built on in Wesley, forms into the Pentecostal Revival, He "Crowns" with the Full revelation of the Mystery of God. But one MUST go through the Door to recognize it. Jesus said, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved..." The church is not the door - Christ, the Living Word is that Door. In the Last Age the "Door" is swung wide open, when, according to Revelation 10:7 the "Mystery of God is finished" and revealed through the Messenger of that Age. Man-made religion and man-made theology would try to shut this door, and stop the unfolding of the Mystery of God. But as we shall see in that last Age they fail and are judged accordingly. Quoted from Ref 3

<http://www.williambranhamhomepage.org/awesley.htm>

The Eternal Church of God saw the 'open door' as the beginning of the Worldwide Church of God and their being given the ability to preach around the world.

The work of the Philadelphia era was characterized by love, zeal, and a conviction for wholeheartedly seeking to obey God. As a result of such dedication, this era was promised an open door to the Kingdom (Rev. 3:7-8). In addition, another door would be open to this era—a means to fulfill Christ's commission to powerfully preach the gospel to the world and teach those who would be called (Mat.28:19-20). Quoted from Ref 1 Pg 94

The reason these different interpretations for the events of each era such as the open door event in the Philadelphia era as well as different dates are given is because no interpretation of events or dates exist in the Bible for each era that we can point to prove this doctrine. Interpretation of events and dates are based on ASSUMPTIONS, not on PROOF

If it is so important to see the era we are in so that we can heed the message and warning provided for that era, and seeing this as important for our salvation, then why wasn't the eras doctrine written into the letters more clearly so that Christians don't mistakenly see themselves in the wrong era and pay attention to the wrong message?

## **TRUE CHURCH OF GOD HISTORY**

The eras doctrine seeks to answer where the true church of God is in history. First, there are at least three doctrines that qualify a church to be included in the history of the true church.

One is proper baptism by immersion in water which follows calling by God who works with the individual's mind and leads him to repentance of his sins. After baptism is the laying on of hands. This is how a person receives God's holy spirit that puts him into the church - the body of Christ and unless he has the holy spirit of Christ, he is none of his. (Rom 8:9) Sprinkling and pouring water is not proper

baptism nor is baptizing of infants because a person must be mature enough to be able to repent of his sins and understand what baptism symbolizes and requires.

Another vital doctrine is taking the Christian Passover because Jesus said, "Unless you eat of my flesh and drink of my blood, you have no life in you." (Jhn 6:53) Jesus instituted the Christian Passover on the Passover night the 14th day of Nisan according to the Hebrew calendar before he was crucified. Passover is an annual holy day in accordance with God's commandment in Leviticus 23:5. (See also Mat 26:17-19, Luk 22:15) The Eucharist that is taken today in most churches on any day is not the Christian Passover that Jesus instituted.

In regards to the Christian Passover, Polycarp, was a disciple of John the Apostle and the Bishop of the church in Smyrna 69 to 155 AD. Polycarp visited Pope Anicetus in Rome sometime in the 150's and discussed what was called the quartodeciman controversy, the date to celebrate Easter. He and the church in Smyrna celebrated the Christian Passover on the 14th of Nisan while Anicetus and the churches in the west followed the western practice of celebrating the feast on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring equinox (March 21). It is recorded that Anicetus allowed Polycarp to celebrate the Eucharist in his own way and they ended the meeting on friendly terms. This tells me that this vital doctrine was already being replaced with heresy shortly after the death of John the Apostle and it also makes me wonder why Polycarp did not tell Anicetus that Easter and the time it was celebrated in the west is a heresy. And although he kept the true Christian Passover, was he open to the idea that it could be celebrated in different ways and at different times and this was OK with God? [Ref 4] [Ref 5] [Ref 6]

A third vital doctrine is that one must believe in keeping the commandments of God for it says in 1 John 2:4 "He that says I know him and keepeth not his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him." God gives the holy spirit to those who obey him. (Acts 5:32) Many people say they believe in keeping the commandments, but most people do not know, for example, that keeping Sunday as the day of worship breaks the fourth commandment that says the seventh day is the Sabbath. (Ex 20:10-11) Sunday is the first day of the week.

So we see here that according to these vital doctrines, William Miller should not be in Church of God history. The Eternal Church of God put him in the Sardis era which is said to be 'dead'. But being 'dead' as far as people in the church having faith but not maintaining good works is not the same thing as being spiritually 'dead' in that a person has a carnal (natural) mind and was never called by God and in the church in the first place. (Jas 2:18,20,26, Rom 8:7,9)

The timings above include groups such as the Nazarenes, the Paulecians, the Waldenses, the Vaudois, the Insabbati, the Seventh Day Church of God, the Worldwide Church of God and individuals such as Irenius, Martin, Columba, Luther, Wesley and Brahnam. These are all said to be in true church history. Are they? And how do we know? We should diligently research all of these to see if they held the vital doctrines mentioned above that would guarantee them a place in true church history. The churches that the apostles founded kept all three of these vital doctrines. But it was not long before the original churches were infiltrated by false teachers and changes were made to many of the original true doctrines that cut many groups off from being the true church. (Acts 20:29-31)

*Mat 7:13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:*

*Mat 7:14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

*Mat 7:15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

## **MOTIVE FOR THE INVENTION OF THE ERAS DOCTRINE**

This reference [Ref 7] gives the motive for William Miller having invented the eras doctrine.

He caused his followers to think that they were “the true church” which was “genuine” and had “apostolic roots”, in contrast to all other churches which were not and did not. In other words: He created for his own Baptist church a new history and new “roots”, a history that did not originate from the Catholic Church but was instead parallel with it.

The Catholic Church points to its history going back to the apostles of Christ as proof that they are the true church. But when you look at what they do compared with the apostles, there is little resemblance. The apostles kept the Sabbath and Biblical Holy Days, not Xmas or Easter or Sunday. The apostles did not use rosary beads or dress in priests' robes or have convents, etc.

So here, the churches of God want to compete with the Catholic Church by establishing their own history back to the apostles in the eras doctrine. But this is not necessary for we have scriptures telling us who the true Christians are.

*Jhn 8:31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;*

*Jhn 8:32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

*Mat 7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

*Mat 12:50 For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*

## **A BELIEF OF THE EPHESIAN ERA THAT DOES NOT SUPPORT ERAS**

These scriptures show that the earliest Christians (the supposed Ephesian era) thought that the return of Christ was imminent.

*1 Cor 7:29 But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none;*

*1 Cor 7:30 And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not;*

*1 Cor 7:31 And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.*

In agreement with this, the Evidence for Eras booklet states that the first century Ephesian era Christians believed that the great fire in the city of Rome during the reign of Nero was God's doing and it signaled the destruction of the Roman Empire and the imminent return of Christ to take over the world. (Pg 61-62) Evidence for Eras also states that it would be the job of each church era to pass along the knowledge of eras to the next era. But the fact that the Christians of the first era believed in the imminent return of Christ indicates that they had no such knowledge that they were the Ephesian era and that there would be other church eras coming after them that they must pass this knowledge on to. In fact there is no documentation of the eras doctrine until the Baptist minister William Miller invented it in the early 1800's

## **IS THE PHILADELPHIA CHURCH IN OUR ERA OR IN THE FIRST CENTURY?**

Let's look at Philadelphia era, the only church that seems to have good evidence for being in the end-time era. This is because it is spared from the ‘Hour of Temptation’ that shall come upon the whole world. We place this church in our era by assuming that this ‘Hour of Temptation’ is the same thing as the coming ‘Great Tribulation’ that shall come upon the whole world. But, when you look at these two

phrases closely, it is evident that the words, 'Hour of Temptation' and 'Great Tribulation' are not the same words:

The word 'Temptation' is the Greek word 'Peirasmos' that is used in these scriptures as an enticement or a lure.

*Mar 14:38 Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. (Peirasmos) The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.*

*Luk 4:13 And when the devil had ended all the temptation, (Peirasmos) he departed from him for a season.*

The Greek word for 'Tribulation' is 'Thlipsis' as used in these scriptures:

*Mat 24:21 For then shall be great tribulation, (thlipsis) such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

*Rev 7:14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation' (thlipsis), and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

The words 'great tribulation' (Megas Thlipsis) are actually used in the letter to Thyatira referring to the Lord's judgment on the lovers of Jezebel. (Rev 2:22) So if he had intended to save the Philadelphian church from the 'great tribulation' (Megas Thlipsis) of the end time, he would have surely used those words instead of 'hour of temptation'.

Another point about the 'Hour of Temptation' is that a prophetic hour is not the same period of time as the Great Tribulation which continues from the time the Abomination of Desolation is placed until Christ returns, a period of three and a half years. An hour is only a small portion of a day. If a prophetic day represents a year, then an hour (and there are 12 hours in a day) might represent half a month.

In the context of the first century, the letter to Philadelphia tells us that the 'Hour of Temptation' would be a future event from when John wrote to them from the Island of Patmos - 95-96 AD. At this time under Domitian who reigned from 81-96 AD the worship of the emperor of Rome became compulsory for every Roman citizen on threat of death. The cities of Asia had competed for the privilege of erecting a temple in honor of the emperor. In 29 BC Pergamum was the first to erect a temple and Smyrna the second in 21 AD. Ephesus was the third. To show their allegiance, every citizen was required to burn incense once a year to the emperor and to declare that "Caesar is Lord". The citizen having done this was issued a certificate saying that he had met the imperial requirement and he could then go and worship any god he pleased.

Under Trajan who reigned a short time later from 98-117 AD, we find this documented evidence of Christian persecution. Pliny the Younger was sent by the emperor Trajan between 109 and 111 AD to the province of Bithynia in Anatolia as Governor. Pliny reported to him in a letter on people who had been denounced as Christians. Those who persisted in confessing that they were Christians he had executed or, if Roman citizens, sent to Rome. Those who denied that they were Christians he subjected to the test of invoking the gods, offering them incense and a libation in the presence of an image of the emperor, and cursing Christ. The letter can be found on this site: [Ref 8]

So this 'hour of temptation' that the Philadelphians were spared from could have taken place in this persecution sometime in the final year of Domitian or under Trajan in which Christians were brought before magistrates and tempted to deny the name of Jesus. This is why it was called the hour of temptation and also why the Apostle John said to them that they had a little strength, but did not deny his name.

It is significant that in the letter to each of the churches, Jesus did NOT say, "He that hath wisdom, let him find and understand the era that this church belongs to." Rather, he wanted the individuals in each church to listen to the messages contained in all the letters. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." So instead of each Christian figuring what era to place himself in, God may actually be judging what church to put each Christian in based on his works.

## **WHAT THE LETTERS DO NOT SAY**

One of the fundamental rules of Bible study as I have always heard it is to ask, 'What does the Bible SAY and what does it NOT SAY?'

So first, we must see the truth that there is no scripture anywhere saying that the churches in Revelation represent eras. The dates given above can only be speculated and assumed and not proven because there is no scripture that confirms church eras. The scriptures only confirm that these congregations all existed at the same time. Thus, like the other letters in the New Testament, they were addressed to congregations of Christians living at that time, but just like all the letters addressed to congregations and contained in the New Testament, the lessons in the Revelation letters can apply to Christians in any age of history.

Whenever God wants to show events being opened in succession, he uses numbers such as the seven trumpets blown one after the other in Revelation. However there is no numbering of the seven letters. God also uses words like AFTER THIS. Notice how the word AFTER is used to describe the successive coming of each Beast in Daniel 7:3-7 However, the word AFTER is never used in Revelation 2 and 3 to separate each of the letters and show that one church follows another.

There is no evidence that the messages in the letters are addressed to any other time period than the time in which they were sent to those churches. For example, the persecution for 10 days written to the church in Smyrna does apply to them since they were living during the compulsory worship of the emperor on pain of death. There is no proof that the letter applies to a ten year persecution that happened 200 years later as the eras doctrine proposes. But persecuted Christians living in any age can still apply the encouraging Smyrna message to themselves, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

## **WHAT THE LETTERS DO SAY**

Now that we see what the scriptures do NOT SAY about the eras doctrine, the following are things that we can and do know about the letters. We are to Prove (not assume) all things and then hold fast to that which is good. (1Th 5:21)

1. We can agree with the booklet Evidence for Eras that THE LETTERS REPRESENT THE ENTIRE CHURCH FROM BEGINNING TO END because there are seven golden candlesticks. However, these letters do not represent eras of the church's history. They could represent categories that God puts each member of his church into according to their works. A good evidence for this idea is that in the letters there are seven major sins that the churches and members are told to repent of.

These are:

1. losing your first love Repent and do the first works.

1John 5:3 says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not grievous." Have any of God's commandments become grievous for me to keep or have I failed to

grow in his commandments by not meditating in his law night and day as Psalms 1 tells us to do? Notice that the penalty for losing our first love is that God will remove this candlestick from being his church.

2. You have the deeds and/or doctrines of the Nicolaitans

There is no group that we know of by this name. But the word itself means Nico or victory and laitans or laity. We see in this name a victory over the people either by oppressive doctrines or oppressive authority. We are all either in positions of authority or in positions under authority. How do we treat those over us and how do we treat those under us? How are the brethren treated by the leaders in my church? How do I treat my wife? How do I treat my children? Do I respect the civil government? The Lord says he hates the Nicolaitans. Do I want him to hate me?

3. You have the doctrine of Balaam which taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication.

Balac, King of Moab hired Balaam to curse Israel when they came out from Egypt so he could destroy his enemies. He told Balaam that he would promote him to very great honour for cursing Israel. The Lord would not allow Balaam to curse Israel so he got around God's word by teaching Balac to tempt the Israelites to eat things sacrificed to idols and commit fornication so

that God himself would destroy them. 2Peter 2 describes false teachers who teach false doctrines in the church as comparable to Balaam who loved the wages of unrighteousness. Are there any ministers in our church willing to teach false doctrine for some promotion or gain or advantage?

The word fornication is the Greek pornea which means a wide variety of sexual sins including adultery and divorce and remarriage while the first spouse is still living which Jesus said is adultery. This sin is allowed in many of the churches today). Jesus said in John 6:57, "He who eats me shall live by me." So if we eat things sacrificed to idols, we are living by doctrines of idolatry instead of doctrines of God." Do we have any false doctrines in our church? Have I been diligent to study what I am taught in this church? And if I am a minister do I teach what I am told even though I know it is wrong so I can keep my pay check coming?

4. You allow Jezebel to teach and seduce my servants to eat things sacrificed to idols and commit fornication. Are women permitted to preach in our church or do we obey 1Corinthians 14:35? See previous example for eating things sacrificed to idols and fornication.

5. You have a name that you live and are dead for your works are not perfect. You must wake up and WATCH the progression of this loss of good works. If you do not watch I will come on you unexpectedly. You have faith in God but lack works.

*Jas 2:20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*

*Jas 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

*Jas 2:18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.*

6. You are neither cold nor hot but lukewarm. Therefore I will spit you out of my mouth.

This seems to have to do with lack of zeal for God and his ways. Here are some scriptures having to do with zeal.

*Num 25:11 Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy.*

*Note: Phinehas killed a man and woman who were committing adultery.*

*Psa 69:9 For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.*

*Note: Jesus had the zeal to lash out condemn the evil that was being made in the temple.*

*Psa 119:139 My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words.*

*1Cor 14:12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.*

*Tit 2:14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

*Rev 3:19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.*

*Note: It takes a zeal for righteousness to truly repent.*

7. You think that you are rich and increased with goods, but are actually wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

You are unaware of your true spiritual condition. Because of our human nature we are all able to see faults in others sooner than in ourselves. So to know how we measure up in God's sight, we have to earnestly pray, fast and persistently ask God to show us the true spiritual condition of ourselves and our church as he sees us.

2. We can know that THE LETTERS WERE MEANT FOR EACH SPECIFIC CHURCH CONGREGATION EXISTING AT THAT TIME because John sent the letters to those churches and also because the letters mention specific events and people existing at that time. For example:

A. The saints in Smyrna were going to suffer ten days of imprisonment and tribulation. John wrote that the devil SHALL (future tense) cast some of you in prison for ten days. So we know this 10-day imprisonment was a future event from the time John wrote (95-96 AD).

The author of Evidence for Eras places the ten days as the Diocletianic Persecution [Ref 5] that came upon Christians 200 years later for a ten-year period from 303 to 313 AD, and ended with the Edict of Milan. Others think that John meant persecution over the reign of ten Roman Emperors. The first under Nero, 54 AD; the second under Domitian, 81 AD; the third under Trajan, 98 AD; the fourth under Hadrian, 117AD; the fifth under Septimus Severus, 193 AD; the sixth under Maximin, 235 AD; the seventh under Decius, 249 AD; the eighth under Valerian, 254 AD; the ninth under Aurelian, 270AD; the tenth under Diocletian, 284AD.” Some think that in ten days are two hundred and forty hours, which make up the number of years from 85, when the second persecution began, (under which John at this time was) to 325, when all the persecutions ceased. Finally some say that ten days is simply an expression of speech, not to be taken literally, but it is the normal Greek expression for a short time. Do you see how this multitude of assumptions about the meaning of the ten days makes God the author of confusion? Which one of these ideas is true? We simply do not know do we because there is no scripture telling us.

There is no proof compelling us to believe that ten days means anything other than ten literal days of imprisonment ending in death for some of the Smyrna Christians who at that time under the emperors Domitian and Trajan were facing the compulsory worship of the emperor under threat of death.

B. Antipas was a specific person in Pergamos who was martyred. Eras believers identify him with Constantine of Mananah martyred in 681 AD and that the name Antipas is a symbolic name for his being anti-Pope. But in the letter to Pergamos John said that Antipas had already been martyred (past tense) at the time he sent the letters to the churches. (95-96 AD). So if Antipas was martyred before 95-96 AD, he could not be Constantine of Mananah who was martyred in 681 AD could he?

C. Jezebel was a specific person in Thyatira who was reprimanded for teaching and seducing Christians to commit fornication. (Rev 2:20) and specifically adultery (Rev 2:22) with her. Eras believers suppose she is symbolic of the Catholic Church who spiritually corrupted members of God's church during the Middle Ages. But notice in verses 22 and 23 that the Lord promised Jezebel would be cast into a (sick) bed, her



lovers would be given great tribulation, and her children would be killed. This did not happen to the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages did it? If Thyatira was an era and Jezebel was the Catholic Church, these promises against the Catholic Church would have taken place in the middle ages. Furthermore, the Catholic Church corrupted the true church long before the middle ages. Corruption began immediately even before the death of all the apostles. The truth is that this pronouncement against Jezebel can come upon any Christian who presumes to commit adultery in the church. So we all need to take this warning to heart.

3. We know the letters were meant for ALL THE CHURCHES AS A WHOLE IN ALL OF HISTORY because each letter concludes with a promise. The promise is addressed to only one church, but it applies to all of the churches. For example, it is addressed to Smyrna that those who overcome will not be hurt of the second death. This promise obviously applies to all the churches, not just to Smyrna. Here are the seven promises.

1. Rev 2:7 To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

2. Rev 2:11 He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

3. Rev 2:17 To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

4. Rev 2:26-28 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star.

5. Rev 3:5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

6. Rev 3:12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

7. Rev 3:21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

Also proof that the letters were meant for all the churches as a whole is that Jesus instructed the individuals in the churches to pay attention to the messages to all the churches: "Let him that hath an ear hear what the spirit saith unto the CHURCHES".

4. We know the letters were meant for ANY CHURCH OR CHRISTIAN IN ANY HISTORICAL AGE because they contain general admonitions that could apply to any church or Christian in any historical age.

Notice that the letter to the supposed first church era of Ephesus did not mention that this church had a problem with fornication. That problem did not appear until the Thyatira era. Yet, here in the supposed first century era is the problem of fornication written in 1 Corinthians 5. Likewise the Ephesus era did not have a problem with the Nicolaitanes. In fact their letter said they hated the Nicolaitanes and that problem did not appear until the Pergamos era. Yet, here in 3John 1:10 is a church leader of the Ephesian era casting people out of the church unjustly according to the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes (a word which means victory over the people).

The point here is that if you can say that the problems of other church eras appeared also in the Ephesian era, could it not also be said that people in other eras could lose their first love? Yes.

There are churches and Christians in all ages that have lost their first love.

One main reason it cannot be said that the letters were meant for specific eras is because the admonitions to any one church cannot be applied to only a specific era or even mainly to a specific era. For example, can you say dogmatically that losing your first love can only apply to the Ephesian Church in the first century and not to other Christians and churches in other ages? No you cannot. Rather, it is evident that the messages of each letter, even those addressed to specific people, can serve as examples to Christians in every historical age.

There are churches and Christians in all ages that are spiritually dead because they have faith without works. There are churches and Christians in all ages that have a lukewarm attitude. These are all ways that Satan can get his foot in the door of ANY church and into the heart of any Christian. This is why these letters are for all Christians of all historical ages and we need to pay attention to ALL of them. The question we all need to ask ourselves is not, 'what church era do I belong to?' but what messages in these seven letters apply to ME?

What if we someday find ourselves in a situation of imprisonment or facing martyrdom like the Smyrnans or Antipatros? Can't we take the message God wrote to them and apply it to ourselves?

*Rev 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: but be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

Also, if we are focused on being faithful to keep God's word and not denying his name as those in Philadelphia did, there is no reason why God would not give us a reward like he gave them of an open door and protection from a time of persecution. Not that we should call ourselves the Philadelphian era, but we can follow the example of the faithful Philadelphians. Here are some scriptures showing how any Christian can deny the Lord:

*Pro 30:8 Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me:*

*Pro 30:9 Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.*

Note: We can deny the Lord by being so full that we do not perceive any need for him.

*Mat 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

Note: We can deny the Lord by not denying ourselves when called upon to bear crosses and hardships to serve him.

*Mat 26:75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.*

Note: We can deny the Lord by actual denying him or his words in order to save ourselves when put under peer pressure.

*Tts 1:16 They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.*

Note: We can deny the Lord by failing to maintain good works.

*1Ti 5:8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

Note: We can deny the true faith by allowing laziness, apathy or whatever to keep us from providing properly for our own household.

Here are two examples of open doors that God may give to any faithful Christians who do not deny his name.

*Luk 13:25 When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are:*

Note: This is the door of the Kingdom of God that God will open to us if he finds us worthy.  
*Col 4:3 Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds:*

Note: This is the open door of preaching the gospel.

## **SATAN'S TACTIC**

I talked to a man who said that Eve must have had sex with Satan for this is how it can be explained that Jesus told the Jews that Satan is their father. (Jhn 8:44) I said that it is not written in the Bible that Satan had sex with Eve, but it says that Adam knew his wife and she conceived and bare Cain. He said that it does not need to be written because it is a REVELATION.

Another man who is a Catholic said that everything his church believes is not written in the Bible but we still believe what the church teaches because God gave them the AUTHORITY to bind and loose doctrine.

Do you see how this doctrine of church eras does the same thing as these other two examples? When you complain that the eras idea is simply not written in the scriptures, the believers in the doctrine say that the reason it is not written is because the letters are PROPHETIC.

You see, words like REVELATION, PROPHETIC and AUTHORITY make the doctrine sound spiritual and important. It is a fruit to be desired to make one wise as Mother Eve thought.

A true REVELATION should give the meaning of symbolic words in the scriptures. We do not need to guess or assume.

*Rev 1:20 The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.*

A true PROPHETIC meaning to an event should be given in the scriptures. We do not need to guess or assume. Here, the event of Jonas in the whale is told to picture Jesus being three days and three nights in the tomb.

*Mat 12:40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

As far as AUTHORITY is concerned, we know that we must obey God first.

*Act 5:29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.*

And how do we know we are in the 'true church'? Is it that we can point to a historical line? This is what the Jews thought when they said to Jesus, "We are Abraham's children". What did Jesus say to them?

*Jhn 8:39 Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.*

*Jhn 8:40 But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham.*

*Jhn 8:41 Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.*

*Jhn 8:42 Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.*

*Jhn 8:43 Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.*

*Jhn 8:44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

*Jhn 8:45 And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.*

*Jhn 8:46 Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?*

*Jhn 8:47 He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God.*

It is the same today. If you want to be a true Christian and be in the true church, then you will be doing the works of the original true church, who were taught by the original true apostles. You will be conforming to their original doctrines which are written in the scriptures and obeying all the words that Jesus brought from his father.

We must understand that it is the tactic of Satan the Devil to get us to believe and obey doctrines that are not written in God's word and to apply scripture to something other than what God himself meant to apply it to.

## **WHAT ARE THE FRUITS OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHURCH ERAS?**

Getting Christians to focus on church eras instead of what the letters actually say to Christians has led to unfortunate and harmful attitudes in the churches of God.

To say that each church's city name represents the spiritual condition of that church is self-deceptive. For example, the Church of God in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is not the church of brotherly love just because the members reside in a city called Philadelphia, a word that means brotherly love. But this is what members are taught to believe about themselves who supposedly belong to the Philadelphia era.

Worldwide Church of God named themselves the Philadelphia era. An offshoot of Worldwide named themselves the Philadelphia Church of God. Since there is hardly any reproof applied to this church but only promise of an open door and supposed protection from the Great Tribulation, claiming you are Philadelphia is a self-exalting thing to do. The Lord has said in Matthew 23:12, "Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased." Many who think they are Philadelphians have then point fingers at other church organizations looking down on them as the Laodiceans. Thus they have treated Christian brothers in a way Christ warned against.

*Mat 5:22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, (a stupid person who doesn't deserve to live) shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.*

What good does it do for a person's character to think he knows what era each of the letters belongs to? Will this knowledge get him into the Kingdom of God? In the literature about church eras, Christians are little taught to apply the criticisms in the letters to themselves, but to apply them to those people over there or back there in another era. For example, 'It is those people back there in the first century who lost their first love. That message does not apply to me! I am in the Philadelphia era.'

This most harmful attitude of being blind to all but what one thinks is his own era is easily avoided if we HEAR what Jesus said to the individuals in each of those churches:

*“HE (the individual) that hath an ear, let HIM hear what the Spirit saith unto the CHURCHES.*

This statement proves that Jesus did not want the individuals in those original churches to just pay attention to the letter addressed to their own church. Nor does he want individual Christians to just pay attention to their own supposed church era. He wants all Christian individuals of every historical age and in every church to hear what the spirit says to ALL the CHURCHES.

## **PROOF THAT THE SEVEN LETTERS DO NOT REPRESENT FUTURE CHURCH ERAS**

Here is the first chapter of Revelation:

*Rev 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:*

*Rev 1:2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.*

*Rev 1:3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.*

*Rev 1:4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;*

*Rev 1:5 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,*

*Rev 1:6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

*Rev 1:7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.*

*Rev 1:8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.*

*Rev 1:9 I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

*Rev 1:10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,*

*Rev 1:11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.*

*Rev 1:12 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;*

*Rev 1:13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.*

*Rev 1:14 His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;*

*Rev 1:15 And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.*

*Rev 1:16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.*

*Rev 1:17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:*

*Rev 1:18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.*

**REV 1:19 WRITE THE THINGS WHICH THOU HAST SEEN, AND THE THINGS WHICH ARE, AND THE THINGS WHICH SHALL BE HEREAFTER;**

*Rev 1:20 The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.*

As you consider this chapter, notice first that verse 19 tells us that John was commanded to write all the things he saw in three categories, the things which he had already seen, the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.

So all the verses in Revelation Chapter 1 before verse 19 (especially verses 10-18) come under the category of the things he had already seen.

Now look at this verse. It contains the same word 'hereafter' that is in Revelation 1:19.

*Rev 4:1 After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and **I WILL SHEW THEE THINGS WHICH MUST BE HEREAFTER.***

This verse tells us that all the rest of the book of Revelation after Chapter 4 verse 1 comes under the category of the things which must be hereafter.

That leaves the letters to the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 to be under the category of **THE THINGS WHICH ARE**. The word **ARE** is Strong's Number G1526 which is the Greek *eisi*. This word **ARE** occurs 166 times in 146 verses in the Greek concordance of the KJV. If you read some of these verses there is no doubt that it is used to convey the present tense.

THE THREE CATEGORIES OF REVELATION 1:19		
Write	Relevant Scriptures	Categories Explained
The things which thou hast seen	Rev 1:1-18	What John saw before he wrote the letters
The things which are	Rev 1:20 and Rev 2 and 3	Interpretation of stars and candlesticks and the letters to the seven churches
The things which shall be hereafter	Rev 4:1 to Rev 22:21	All the rest of the book of Revelation

Since the letters to the seven churches are **THE THINGS WHICH ARE**, this **PROVES** that the letters were not sent to or for future eras of history, but were written to the present people in those churches in Asia and for the present time that John wrote to them. If they were written for future eras, then Revelation 4 verse 1 which says, "I will show thee things which shall be hereafter" would be written **BEFORE** the letters, not **AFTER**.

## GOD'S MOTIVE FOR PLACING THE LETTERS IN REVELATION

One point of evidence used for church eras is that the seven letters were placed in the book of Revelation, a purely prophetic book that gives events in succession. So let's ask the question, "If the letters do not represent eras, then what was God's motive for placing them in the book of Revelation?" Here is a good answer:

The book of Revelation is the vision of the events of the Day of the Lord.

*Rev 1:10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, (Day of the Lord) and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,*

This book contains all the events of the Day of the Lord surrounding the return of Jesus Christ and the first resurrection at the seventh trumpet. It is this event that every Christian who ever lived is looking forward to. The messages in each letter are the Lord's messages of praise, of warning to repent of sin, of exhortation to remain faithful to death that can apply to Christians of any age. Jesus placed these messages at the beginning of the book of Revelation to help his churches prepare themselves for his coming by applying these messages to themselves and their churches. So as they read the letters, each and every Christian is not to ask, 'what era do I belong to?' but rather, what messages in these letters apply to ME?

The messages show how Jesus is watching and judging what his churches are doing in order to make a determination whether they are going to remain his churches or not. Ephesus is told that unless they repent of losing their first love, the Lord will remove their candlestick. Sardis is told that if they do not watch, the Lord will come upon them quickly and it is implied that they will be removed for he says that only some of them will walk in white for they are worthy. Also unless the Laodiceans repent of their lukewarmness the Lord will spit them out of his mouth. Is the Lord going to remove entire eras of Christians each era lasting perhaps hundreds of years for these faults? Or isn't it more logical to believe that he is going to remove those individuals in every age who are guilty of these faults and not repenting?

God's purpose is to prepare all of his people for the return of Jesus Christ, to help them depart from iniquity, remain faithful to their calling and attain to his kingdom. These letters to the seven churches can do that if we pay attention to all the messages, take them to our heart and diligently apply them to our own selves and our churches.

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