

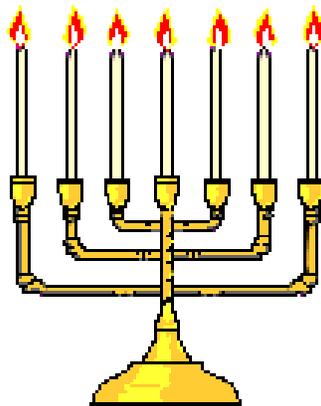
Bible Study:

THE SEVEN ERAS OF ANCIENT ISRAEL - TYPE OF THE ERAS OF THE CHURCH?

By C M White

Are there seven Church Eras? Just what is an 'era' anyway? Why should there be seven eras? Could it be that God actually works in eras? Is it important to believe in Church eras if they are real?

In this article these issues will be explored and possible answers will be presented. In the end, it will be up to each reader to ascertain for him or her-self if they wish to subscribe to this belief.



**Life is not about hitting the opposition the hardest.
It is about being hit, surviving and yet continue to move forward.**

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NB: this paper should be read in conjunction with the following:

- Seven Restorations of the Work
- Just what do you mean – “Laodicean Church”
- Amazing Temple Symbolism found in Revelation chapter 3!

There are those amongst the Sabbatarian Churches of God who deny the existence of Church eras. Yet, even some conservative Protestants and British-Israelites believe in the concept, though applying it only to themselves.

What is the truth? Are there any clues within the Word of God to substantiate the doctrine of Church eras? Are there any Old Testament parallels? Did ancient Israel, a type of the Church, foreshadow the eras of the Church in any way? And if so, how does this impact upon the doctrine of Church eras?

Before we explore the above, it should be mentioned that the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 are actual historical churches; symbolise seven characteristics of the Church of God at any time; and also symbolise seven types of true Christians. Leaving that behind, let us ascertain if indeed there are seven eras which is the focus of this article.

Historical Background

Firstly, what is an 'era'? It is simply an historical period or a phase with particular characteristics. Secular historians write about historical eras or periods. Geologists and palaeontologists similarly write of geological epochs or periods. One may write about the historical periods of ones school, business, family or political party. To be quite frank, eras are to be found everywhere. So why not in the Church of God?

Some have reacted to the entire concept due to the way it was mishandled by some ministers brow-beating their congregations over it; berating and belittling other Churches of God; or claiming superiority. They have brought disdain and disrespect upon a number of doctrines including church eras, identity of the lost tribes of Israel and the Ezekiel Warning Message. The time has come to reverse the overreactions and misunderstandings and return to topics such as eras which open up enormous portions of God's Word to us.

There are some who think that Church Eras are unique to Herbert W Armstrong. Not so!

The early Seventh-day Adventist pioneers including Ellen G White and Uriah Smith advocated this doctrine, teaching that their church was the Laodicean Era. To this day many Adventists continue to believe it and you may find references to it in their literature. One recent book, *Laodicea* by Jack Sequeira (Pacific Press Publishing 1995) is devoted in its entirety to this issue. While some Adventist offshoots feel that they have the Philadelphia spirit. Also, some Jehovah's Witness offshoots consider themselves to be Philadelphian and their parent church to represent the Laodicean era! You will find that the groups emanating out of the great Millerite family of religions, have an interest in such topics as eras, prophecy and the return of Christ, the identity of the Babylonian Mystery Religion, the concept of the latter rain, a warning witness to the world, Christology, 2520 years, jubilee cycles and so on.

Greenberry G Rupert and Andrew Dugger, whose writings and doctrines were very influential on Mr Armstrong, believed in Church Eras. Rupert, for example, wrote a booklet *The Seven Churches* published in the early years of this century. On pages 19-20 he writes with great insight in reference to the Philadelphia Era in chapter 3 of the book of Revelation:

“Verse 9 shows there is a great apostacy during the history of the Philadelphia church. Yet there are some few in that age that have kept his word ... How truly all this history is fulfilled before the eyes of those who can see, having eyes anointed to discern truth ... Now is the time to not be ashamed of his truth and proclaim it”. [emphasis mine]

How accurate and inspired he was! It seems that these words proved prophetic some 80 years later!

Andrew Dugger was a great leader of the Church of God (seventh day) who had a ‘vision’ for a Church of God college and a powerful radio broadcast. Together, he and C.O. Dodd co-authored the *A True History of the True Religion*. In this famous book, they clearly teach Church Eras. On pages 253-54 they claim that the Philadelphia Era commenced at the city of Philadelphia in 1789. Truly, there is nothing new and no unique doctrine under the sun. Herbert Armstrong was an inspired sifter who drew upon the works of many and put truths together in a comprehensive way seldom seen since the passing of the original Apostles.

Ancient Israel— optional concepts in interpreting eras

Search as you may for material on ancient Israel’s eras, and you will find great difficulty in obtaining anything on the subject. Thomas Scott in his *Commentary* (Vol II, p 754 published over 140 years ago) wrote on the earliest known commentator on the book of Revelation, Victorinus, the Bishop of Pettau who died in 303 AD seems to have advocated Church Eras which indicate that this was known and taught in the earliest Christian Church and represents a doctrine of original and primitive Christianity. Scott writes:

“What Victorinus means, is that ... the seven Churches in the Apocalypse are meant to comprise all the Churches in the world: that is, the Church Catholic of all ages. This was also the view of Tichaenius, of the fourth century; Arethas of Cappadocia, and Primasius of Adrumetum, in the sixth; and Vitranga, Mede, More, Girdlestone, and a large body of divined, of later periods”

Two other authors who refer to the subject are EW Bullinger and LE Froom. Bullinger in his *Companion Bible* (c1890) mentions it on page 1885 in a note to Rev 2 & 3 on the structure of the seven epistles to the seven churches written in an introversion and

alternation style:

Correspondent to Israel in Wilderness:

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Ephesus | Israel's espousals. |
| 2 Smyrna | Israel's testing. |
| 3 Pergamos | Israel's failure |

Correspondent to Israel in the Land:

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 4 Thyatira | The day of Israel's kings. |
| 5 Sardis | Israel's removal. |
| 6 Philadelphia. | The day of Judah's kings. |
| 7 Laodicea. | Judah's removals. |

In his excellent *Commentary on Revelation* (c1900), Bullinger discusses the topic more fully on pages 73-102. Here he enunciates the outline referred to in his *Companion Bible*: Ephesus is the day of Israel's espousals (Exodus); Pergamos the wilderness period (Numbers); Thyatira the period of Israel's kings (1 & 2 Kings); Sardis the period of Israel's removals (1 & 2 Chronicles); Philadelphia the period of Judah's kings (2 Chronicles) and Laodicea the period of Judah's removal (the minor prophets). Whether this was a concept unique to Bullinger or whether he was drawing upon ideas raised by others, is not known.

7 Seals of Revelation	Old Testament Era
from Christ's resurrection to the death of John	paralleling Jacob to Moses and Joshua
death of John to Constantine	Moses & Joshua to Samuel & David
Constantine to Justinian	Samuel & David to Elijah and Elisha
Justinian to Charlemagne	Elijah & Elisha to Isaiah and Hezekiah
Charlemagne to the present days	Isaiah & Hezekiah to Judah's captivity
present days to the smiting of new Babylon	Jews' return to Malachi's death
the last state, the Sabbath of the Lord's	Malachi's death to Zacharias
saints, until the coming of the Lord	the father of John the Baptist

From (*The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vol 1, pp703-4) refers to Joachim's application of the seven seals of Revelation to the sevenfold division of the Christian era, paralleling seven Old Testament divisions from Abraham onward:

It is interesting that Joachim indicates these parallels between the Christian era and Israel without reference to the seven churches. We have no knowledge if he even had

them in mind when drafting these parallels, but it is likely. In any event, what is interesting is that he has regard to seven phases. Today, few Bible commentators accept the Church era or prophetic teachings of Revelation 2 and 3.

The Ephesus Era—Beginnings

This era commenced the history of the New Testament phase of the Church of God - the spiritual Israel - with the Apostles (and Prophets) as their 'patriarchs' and messengers from God. If there are Old Testament parallels to the New Testament eras, there must be some similarities between the two sets of eras which we can draw upon (cf Rom 9:6; ICor 10:6; Gal 6:16; Phil 3:3; IPet 2:10). Let us now explore those similarities for each era.

It appears logical that this era is associated with Israel's beginnings or genesis in the loins of the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These men hated the works of wicked agents of Satan (Rev 2:2a) yet they had weaknesses themselves (v5) but they repented and became the foundation of Israel. Spiritually Abraham is the spiritual father of us all - we emerge from his loins so to speak and live a Way of life which leads to eternal life - the spiritual Promised Land.

It would behove the reader to read the scriptures associated with each era first. This will assist in gaining an appreciation of what is presented and why certain parallels have been drawn. In addition, it would be wise to consider that not all parallels are mentioned in this article. Indeed, you can draw many others. But what is regarded as the chief parallels are referred to.

2:1 Unto the angel of the **church of Ephesus** write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; 2:2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: 2:3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. 2:4 Nevertheless I have [somewhat] against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 2:5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. 2:6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. 2:8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; 2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and [I know] the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but [are] the synagogue of Satan. 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast [some] of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. 2:11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

We know that this, the first of the seven eras, more-or-less parallels the condition of the True Church from 31AD to about 135AD. The Church was known as the Nazarenes in the book of Acts and in secular history (Acts 24:5). In Acts 8:1 there is reference to a scattering of the Church in 33AD – the Church of God has never been in one organized group since. Other members of the True Church scattered in various directions after about 69AD: some found haven among the Ebionites, some in the desert with other sects, while many remained in the eastern churches which in large part observed the Sabbath. Gradually, during the next era, the eastern church became corrupted by false apostles who even battled each other over heresy and doctrine.

In any event, this era commenced the history of the New Testament spiritual Israel with the original Apostles (and prophets) as their 'patriarchs' and messengers from God. If there are Old Testament parallels to the New Testament eras, there must be some similarities which we can pinpoint.

It seems logical that this era is associated with Israel's beginnings or genesis in the loins of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These men hated the works of wicked agents of Satan (Rev 2:2a) yet they had weaknesses themselves (v5) but they repented and became the foundation of Israel. Spiritually Abraham is the spiritual father of us all – we emerge from his loins so to speak and live a Way of life which leads to eternal life – the spiritual promised land (Rom 4:16; Gal 3:29).

The Smyrna Era—Persecution and Exodus

2:8 And unto the angel of the **church in Smyrna** write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; 2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and [I know] the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but [are] the synagogue of Satan. 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast [some] of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. 2:11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

During this era the Church suffered immense persecution and martyrdom, especially during the horrific period 303-313AD for 10 years (v10b). Similarly, Israel was held in captivity for about 215 years but inflicted with adversity for 400 years (Acts 7:6 with Gen 15:13-14). Note that 400 is 40 (for testing) x 10 (for perfect order).

Yet after the persecution the Church survived and fled into the wilderness. Likewise, Israel fled from the Pharaoh (type of Satan) in the Exodus and into the wilderness to be tested. They were thus given a new lease on life (v10c).

The Pergamos Era — wonderings in the wilderness

2:12 And to the angel of the **church in Pergamos** write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; 2:13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, [even] where Satan's seat [is]: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas [was] my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. 2:15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 2:16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 2:17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; 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].

The Church had fled into the wilderness to survive the hate-filled persecutions of the Great False Church drenched in the blood of the saints (Rev 17:6). They had some who were poisoning them with false doctrines and attempting to lead them into False 'Christianity'.

At times some of them even took up arms to protect themselves from persecution. However, should they overcome, they would be fed with spiritual manna (v17).

Likewise, Israel fled into the wilderness and sojourned therein for 40 years. As many of the True Church were killed, so were Israelites in the wilderness for various sins and rebellions (1Cor 10:5-11; Num 11:4,34; 25:9; 14:1-4). Yet God fed Israel with manna for the period of the wilderness wonderings.

The Thyatira Era - Joshua & former Judges

2:18 And unto the angel of the **church in Thyatira** write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet [are] like fine brass; 2:19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last [to be] more than the first. 2:20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. 2:21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. 2:22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. 2:23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. 2:24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. 2:25 But that which ye have [already] hold fast till I come. 2:26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: 2:27 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. 2:28 And I will give him the morning star. 2:29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

The True Church survived centuries of hounding and afterwards was able to pronounce the Gospel in parts of Europe and America. Nevertheless, at certain times, the teachings and doctrines of the Babylonian Mystery Religion made its way into the Church. The great Jezebel seduced many of God's people with incorrect ideas and made them drunk with false doctrines.

This was apparent in Israel during the former judges (see Jud 2:10-14; 3:5-8; 8:33-35; 10:6) - they went a whoring after foreign gods - committing fornication with false doctrines and thus with the Devil via this mode (cp Rev 2:20).

Israel, like this New Testament church, defied God's truths and offered sacrifices to idols (v20c) but at other times they became stronger than surrounding nations (v26).

The Sardis Era–Dead in Works – Followed by its Revival

3:1 And unto the angel of the **church in Sardis** write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. 3:2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. 3:3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. 3:4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. 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. 3:6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

It was during this time in Israel that the people did what seemed right in their own eyes during the time of the latter judges (Jud 17:6; 21:25). Saul eventually became king, but God withdrew his Spirit. However, some still followed God's way (Rev 3:4) and were spiritually alive, even though their Work was dead. There was a time when the Church of God disappeared from history and seemed dead. But it revived and continued.

Saul hunted down David. Yet David was already anointed (see ISam 15:23, 35; 16:13) but he did not occupy the throne for a number of years.

Some groups have been labelled as 'Sardis' by other groups. But if we look at the scriptures carefully, if there is or was a Sardis Era then they are God's people whose Work was almost dead. If they were spiritually dead (ie without the Holy Spirit), they would not be God's people and not even be Sardis.

Now if there is or was a Sardis era, this particular period of theirs where they were considered "dead" may have been from the early 1580s to about the 1840s when the Churches of God disappeared from view. Obviously they later revived due to the

efforts of those that did not defile their garments by not adopting false doctrines and by bearing the fruits of the Spirit and expressing the beattitudes. Today, if there is a Sardis Church, it certainly is not dead and is very much a living branch of God's Church.

Finally, one of the most ludicrous comments that I have ever heard since being in the UCG was that "if there are Church Eras, then we were the Sardis Era under HWA". You've got to be joking! When we look back at his history, warts and all, with utter honesty, there is just no way the old WCG may be considered such.

The Philadelphia Era — King David

3:7 And to the angel of the **church in Philadelphia** write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; 3:8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. 3:9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. 3:10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. 3:11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. 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. 3:13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

It appears that HWA was similar to David in certain characteristics. David planned for the Temple to be built. HWA planned (and had built) the famous Ambassador Auditorium (Rev 3:12b). The Temple in turn was a type of the spiritual Temple Christ is building.

A door was opened for David to proclaim the Gospel in his day to his subjects(v8). He fed his sheep like Christ fed the Church (IChron 11:2; John 21:7).

After the Judges and Saul, David restored administrative structure, like HWA did with HQ at Pasadena ("Crown City") in the Los Angeles ("City of Angels") metropolitan region (IChron 27:1). He had men filling various functions in administration (see IChron 27:25-31). David had several key 'pillars' around him (IChron 11:10-12; 27:32-34; see Gal 2:9; Rev 3:12a) as HWA had key evangelists around him. But he had little strength compared to Goliath (ISam 17:33), just as Philadelphia had little strength (Rev 3:8) - yet God was with him and gave him the help he needed at the appropriate times.

God protected him from the enemy (see IChron 17:42, 49; also ISam 26:24) as the Philadelphia Era will be protected from the Great Tribulation to come. Here Goliath is a

type of Satan, the Philistines a type of the demons and David a type of the Philadelphia Era (see Rev 3:10; 12:15-16).

There may be more than one branch of Philadelphia, just as the previous eras consisted of various branches. Not necessarily all Philadelphians listened to what the Spirit says **to the churches** (although these scriptures refer to historical churches and to Christians as individuals, Christ want us to ascertain what they mean to the seven churches). This "he who has an ear, let him hear" is an Hebraic expression and means to understand, to be very perceptive, intentful and to be sensitive to what is being said. This can only be done when one understands the manouverings and mysterious ways the Spirit moves. It is mostly subtle and not forceful - it needs to be within us urging us onward. So with the church eras - some listen and some don't. HWA listened and as such doors opened up to him. Others of the Church of God did not listen, did not perceive the signs of the times (in the Church or the world).

The Laodicean Era — Solomon's apostasy and division in Israel

3:14 And unto the angel of the **church of the Laodiceans** write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; 3:15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. 3:16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. 3:17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: 3:18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and [that] the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. 3:19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. 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. 3:22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

The Laodiceans appear to be symbolised by Solomon and the divided kingdom. Solomon began ruling 40 years after the Philadelphia Era of King David really emerged as a separate entity. We cannot be certain that Solomon will be in the Kingdom, but he appears to have made a death-bed repentance. So it is with the Laodiceans - we cannot be sure of the salvation of many of them - half will be shut out of the Kingdom (Matt 25:1-10).

Solomon had many foreign wives and he committed sexual sins as well as compromising his religion. Likewise, Laodicea is "naked" - an Hebraism for committing fornication with foreign gods. It is thus guilty of committing adultery like the Thyatira era did during certain stages and thus became worthy of being spewed out of His mouth (ie divorce. cp Lev 18:25-28; Ezek 36:17-20).

Like Laodicea, Solomon was very rich. He had knowledge, but it was a mixture of truth

with error. He and his sons “fell away” (apostasied) from the Truth and God’s Way. This falling away was followed by Pharoah Shishak sacking the Temple just as the climax of the final falling away will be followed by great persecution upon the Laodiceans

Solomon’s kingdom split in two after his death. Similarly, will the Laodicean Era split in two after the death of the messenger to Laodicea? (cp Matt 25:1-10).

Are there Church Eras?

Why shouldn’t there be? We find Eras extant in world history, the geological record and of course in ancient Israel. So why not in the True Church, itself typed by Israel?

Eras are mere phases with distinct characteristics. For example, it is said that a human goes through 7 distinct phases in his or her life. In so doing, every cell is replaced over a period of 10 years or so - yet it is the same person with the same mind. When the True Church of God undergoes changes in phases or eras, it changes characteristics - yet it is the same Church, albeit with various branches existing alongside each other since the late first century.

Church eras? That is up to each reader to determine for him or her-self. Should a Church of God adopt this doctrine within its belief system or have it as a doctrine? Why not? Provided it does not use that to become exclusivist, isolationist, to feel haughty or to reject others. Instead, Church Eras should show us that there is a degree of carnality and problems within each Era and that should be very humbling to all of us. It should also demonstrate that there are others from various branches of God’s Church who have the Spirit of God and are thereby members of His body.

But at no time should a Church seek to denigrate other Churches of God (sometimes in bitter diatribes) or haughtily condemn other members of the Body of Christ.

Another possible interpretation that cannot be ruled out due to the dual nature of prophecy is the following:

Ephesus Era	40 years in the Wilderness
Smyrna	Period of the Judges
Pergamos	Reign of the Kings
Thyatira	70 years in Babylon
Sardis	Second Temple Period
Philadelphia	Maccabean Period
Laodicea	Herodian Temple Period until fall of Jerusalem

Finally, it is of considerable interest that Christ said to the last four eras that he is coming to them:

Thyatira	“hold fast till I come”
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Sardis	“I will come on thee as a thief”
Philadelphia	“Behold, I come quickly”
Laodicea	“Behold, I stand at the door and knock”

These statements are not made of the first three eras as they have now died out. But the last four, each with various branches, are alongside each other in the Last Days. While some similar statements are made to Ephesus (verse 5b) and Pergamos (verse 16), these are warnings of Christ’s punishment, not His return.

And thus ends the story for the seven eras of God’s True Church. Those that have died during the first 3 eras will rise together with those that died during the last 4 eras. A little later those alive from the 4 extant eras will rise to meet Christ and reign with Him forever (I Thess 4:16-17).

[NOTE: please understand that the parallels drawn in this article and in the table below are not the final word on the subject and variations are certainly possible. It is the overall principle which is important. After I saw Bullinger’s comments on the subject in his *Companion Bible* when I bought a copy in 1976, I was awakened to the concept. No doubt others in the Churches have also written on the subject.]

History Research Projects

GPO Box 864, Sydney, Australia 2001

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Chart of Several Possible Relationships to Church Eras

Comparison	Ephesus	Smyrna	Pergamos	Thyatira	Sardis	Philadelphia	Laodicea
with ancient Israel	Patriarchs (Abraham etc)	Israel in Egypt	Israel in the wilderness	Leadership of Joshua and the former Judges	the latter Judges and Saul	King David	Solomon and the divided kingdom
with parts of the temple	foundations	altar of sacrifice	roof	curtains and decorations	walls	pillars	outer court & Solomon's porch (court of the gentiles)
with 7 tribes which first settled the Holy Land	Benjamin	Simeon	Zebulon	Issachar	Asher	Naphtali	Dan
of false teachers and negative attributes in the eras	false apostles & Nicolaitanes	synagogue of Satan	doctrine of Balaam & Nicolaitanes	Jezebel & depths of Satan	"ready to die"	synagogue of Satan & "little strength"	"wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked"
of rewards of the eras	eat of the tree of life	not be hurt by the 2nd death	hidden manna and white stone with a new name	power over the nations	white raiment, in book of life and confess them to the Father before the angels	pillar in the Temple, God's name on their forehead and Christ's new name	sit with Christ on His throne
did each have a special message in addition to the Gospel?	Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ	Conditionalism, pagan origins of Easter etc.	Pagan origins of false days and idols	Identity of the Whore of Revelation	The Sabbath	Identity of Israel, Incredible Human Potential and Ezekiel's Message/the Captivity Doctrine	Preaches Christ. Will be a witness during the Tribulation

Appendix 1: An Alternative View

(an alternative view I came across years after my research located at
<http://cryaloud.com/erascomp.htm>)

“The Seven Eras of the Church in the Wilderness”

There are amazing similarities between the historical periods of the nation of Israel and of the Seven Churches of the book of Revelation. This chart demonstrates how these divisions are similar. (Please note this is a simplistic overview to demonstrate the principle and a follow-up article is needed to clarify and explain the points.)

Comparison charts of the eras of:
the "Church in The Wilderness" to
the "7 Eras of Revelation 2 and 3"

40 YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS	THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS
Korah, Balaam; false prophets	tested false prophets
said "yes" and then rebelled	left their first love
golden calf; idolators died	hated deeds of Nicolaitans
SECOND ERA	
PERIOD OF THE JUDGES	THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA
attacked by neighboring nations	tribulation 10 days
economically stifled	their poverty
THIRD ERA	
REIGN OF THE KINGS	THE CHURCH AT PERGAMOS
period of religious compromise	the compromising church
national idolatry & Balaam worship	false doctrine
FOURTH ERA	
70 YEARS IN BABYLON	THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA
captivity because of national idolatry	the corrupt church
the works of Mordecai & Esther	latter works greater than the first
the few did not worship the image	"the rest" who did not have this doctrine
FIFTH ERA	
SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD	THE CHURCH AT SARDIS
ark of covenant not present?	the dead church
some did not have foreign wives	some not defiled
did not keep Jubilee Year	strengthen remaining truths

SIXTH ERA	
MACCABEAN PERIOD	THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA
zealous for God	the faithful church
Samaritans claimed to replace Israel	who say they are Jews
prevailed over enemies	a little strength
SEVENTH ERA	
HERODIAN TEMPLE PERIOD	THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA
Pharisees did not need God; they had Abraham	the lukewarm church: spiritually blind and naked
Jews martyred (70 A.D.)	"refined in fire"
John the Baptist: the work of Elijah	two witnesses: work of Elijah
Christ appears on the scene: goes up into the heavens	Return of Christ: from the heavens
sky darkened; earthquake	darkened sky; great earthquake
veil rent: Holy of Holies visible in Jerusalem's temple	Holy of Holies visible in Heaven (Rev. 11:19)

Appendix 2: An Alternative View on the Philadelphia Era

By John Wheeler

The closest parallel with the Philadelphian Era in the Old Testament Church of God (so to speak) is the time of the Maccabean priest-kings down to the scribes and Pharisees (during which time, BTW, the City of Philadelphia was founded by one of the Hellenistic priest-kings, Attalus II Philadelphius of Pergamos). Dr. Hoeh was of the opinion that the 6th era of the Old Testament Church began with the Maccabees, and I think he had good reason for that. My basic reason -- off the cuff -- is that the kind of authority wielded by and the missionary zeal of the Jews during that time (again, all the way down to the Pharisees) is without parallel in OTCOG history, and both are close in principle to what we have experienced in the NTCOG of our era. (Whereas it was the Sadducees and related priestly families -- with rare exceptions such as the notably humble Elders of Bathyra -- who fit with the characteristics described for Laodicea when its fruits are ripe.)

I think the simplest explanation (as a corollary) is that the time from Ezra to the Maccabees is the closest parallel to the 5th era of the NTCOG. Sardis started off very well -- but it decayed to where "it had a name that it was alive, but was dead". If you can keep from bogging down in the details, Josephus' comments on that period of history should illustrate for you a similar trend during the Ezra-to-Maccabees period. Another option would be a review of Dr. Ernest Martin's old GN article series, "Is Judaism the Law of Moses?" Its summary of that period of history may give you some good ideas to think about.

Appendix 3: The Seven Phases of the Moon

According to Jewish tradition, the Moon cycles through seven phases each month. This **may** fit with the moon typology. The information below is taken from the article "The Karaite Calendar" by Magdi Shamuel located at <http://www.newmoon.ws/>

In their literature, of our sages divided the orbit of the moon into seven stages (in Hebrew "Sheva Datot"). This division is referred to in many works including "Aderet Eliyahu" of Eliyahu Baschyatchi and Or Halevana of Yitzhak ben Shelomo as well as others. The following is a description of each of the seven stages:

- A) Conjunction (also called "its being burnt")- when the moon passes between the Earth and the sun. At this point the side of the moon facing the Earth is unlit and the moon is not visible from the Earth. Conjunction can be detected from earth during a full or partial solar eclipse.
- B) "From the time of Separation" (also called "its being saved from the burning")- after the moon passes the point of conjunction. At this stage the moon remains invisible from the earth.
- C) "Appearance of the Moon after sunset" (New Moon)- This stage is the time that the moon is first visible after conjunction.
- D) "Appearance of the moon with the sun before sunset" - In this stage the moon appears even before sunset and remains visible till moonset.
- E) "The filling of its basin" (Full Moon or Opposition)- In this stage the entire lit portion of the moon faces the Earth. When the moon passes across the plain of the Earth's orbit around the sun (the "Ecliptic") there will be a lunar eclipse because the Earth blocks the light coming from the Sun to the moon.
- F) "Appearance of the Old"- In this stage the moon appears in the East before and after sunrise.
- G) "Last Appearance of the Moon"- In this stage the moon will appear in the east before sunrise but not after and will not appear in the east on subsequent days.