

Evidence for Eras

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In the book of Revelation, Christ commanded the Apostle John to record seven letters and to deliver them to seven specific churches. Many believe that these messages were written to seven chronological eras of God's Church, each occurring at precise times in history. Others categorically dismiss such a claim, asserting that there is no evidence for Church eras in the book of Revelation or the entire Bible. What is the truth? Is there evidence for Church eras? The answer may be the single most important truth for us to understand as we enter the end of the age.

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Evidence for Eras

~ Introduction ~

He that hath an ear, let him hear
what the Spirit saith unto the churches.
~ Revelation 3:22 ~

Throughout the religious community, the book of Revelation is one of the most mysterious and misunderstood books in the Bible. In it, the Apostle John was taken in spirit to the very throne of God where he witnessed a series of awesome apocalyptic visions. As these dramatic prophecies began to unfold, the apostle was presented with seven distinct letters and instructed to send them to seven churches located in specific cities of Asia Minor.

These seven messages are similar to other epistles in the Bible in that they contained both praise and correction to the Church. Yet, they are unlike any epistle ever written. While other letters penned by John, Peter, and Paul were inspired by the Holy Spirit, these seven came directly from God the Father, through Christ, and were dictated to John by an angel.

What was God's purpose in recording these unique messages? Were they intended only for Christians meeting in these seven cities? Or were they included in the entire book of Revelation for a greater purpose? Is it possible that the churches are symbolic and prophetic like the other imagery in this unique book? Could these seven represent the entire Church existing around the world and throughout time? Is it possible these letters were written to convey a vital message of hope and warning for us today?

Three Views

There are currently three views regarding these churches and their letters. The most fundamental of these considers the message to each congregation to be literal. Those who hold this opinion believe that every epistle was written solely for the purpose of addressing the circumstances, strengths, and weaknesses of God's people living during the first century.

A second view suggests that the churches represent seven attitudes that would exist within God's Church at any one time. Those holding this conviction believe that our attitude is a reflection of our spiritual state which is always subject to change. Therefore, there may be points in our lives when we find ourselves reflecting the moods, standards, or spiritual condition of any one of these churches. For this reason, the Savior told each congregation, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." According to this view, no matter what age we may live in, we should always heed the exhortation given to all seven congregations.

A third perspective considers the first two interpretations as having some validity, but concludes that each letter addressed to its respective church is primarily symbolic and prophetic. Advocates of this view believe the main purpose of the letters is to describe the circumstances and spiritual state of God's people during specific times through history. They would encourage, warn, and correct the Church living during each of seven eras existing from the time of John until the return of Christ.

We Need to Know

Is it possible that God's purpose for recording these admonitions was to send an important message to His people during specific times in history? Those who oppose this belief claim there is no proof that these letters were written for a later time. Some even declare that believing in

Church eras can be harmful. They charge that this teaching may cause believers to identify themselves with the Philadelphian era. By this they may elevate themselves causing division within the Church.

Other opponents argue that the issue is irrelevant because it has little or no effect on our salvation. However, this doctrine is of enormous importance! In fact, it is one of the most crucial issues facing the Church today.

Consider the immense value to modern Christians if these letters were actually written as a warning and reproof to people living at different times. If that is true, then this subject is not only important, it is of great significance! If these letters were written to eras of God's Church, then there is a message among them for us!

Imagine reading a letter of admonishment from Christ to you. Such a message would make an enormous difference. However, what if we mistakenly believe that His message does not apply to us and ignore the warning? Such a judgment might affect our eternal destiny—yes, even our salvation! But, if we heed God's correction, it could be a factor that determines whether we are saved from the great tribulation. It can arm us with a profound conviction that might make a difference in the reward we will ultimately receive.

The truth about Church eras is invaluable. The action we decide to take as a result of Christ's warning and instruction could determine our future position in the Kingdom of God! As the spirit of our age permeates deeper into the hearts and minds of God's people, the advantage of knowing the truth about eras becomes absolutely monumental!

We are cascading into the time the Bible calls "the last days." We should be picking up the pace in our zeal for God's way of life! Instead, paradoxically, many of us are bogging down. We are slowing down spiritually, and some of our spiritual lethargy is due to the fact that the doctrine of

Church eras is not clearly understood and powerfully taught. As a result, many do not realize what spirit is affecting the Church today. Vast numbers of God's people do not know what they must resist in order to overcome during this age.

While some may accept that these seven messages were written to eras of God's Church, a growing number are unsure. Today, some actually believe this teaching should be abolished. Because of these varied opinions, the doctrine of Church eras is on trial. We need to wake up! We need to be sure!

This issue is so important, and the consequences so great, that God's people must understand the truth! For this reason, *Evidence for Eras* presents seven exhibits; each of which substantiates this doctrine. As each exhibit is presented, the conclusion will become more obvious, more profound, and more convincing. The facts presented will convict us without a doubt that the each letter to the seven churches was written to God's people living during a specific time in history. The evidence will conclusively show us which era is predominant today and what we must do to overcome in our age.

Chapter 1

~ Exhibit 1 ~

The Evidence of a Prophetic Book

No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.

~ 2 Peter 1:20-21 ~

The seven letters were set within the framework of a book that is entirely prophetic. The book of Revelation was written as a chronological record of events that would occur over vast periods of time. This is apparent from the very first verse in the book. Notice that the angel introduces Christ's vision with these words:

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 (Revelation 1:1).

This opening statement makes two important points. First, the entire vision is directed to God's servants. Since John's vision covers events that were to take place over thousands of years, it is written to all of God's servants; including those who would live at the end of the age. This is

apparent as the prophecy almost immediately moves to the end time, stating that Christ will come “with clouds; and every eye shall see Him” (Rev. 1:7).

Second, this verse tells us that the entire book was written to show things that must “shortly come to pass.” By this, God is NOT referring to events that were to occur immediately. Rather, He is speaking from the perspective of Heaven in which Christ considers the last 2,000 years of man’s rule as the “last days” (Heb. 1:2; 1John 2:18).

Therefore, the purpose of this entire vision is to reveal pivotal events that would begin in the first century and continue right up to the return of Christ and beyond.

Seven Letters—One Book

The Savior instructed John to write everything he saw in the vision and send them to these seven churches. If each of the letters had no relation to all of the congregations, the letters would NOT have been recorded as an integral part of the same manuscript. They would have been written to each congregation separately; as were all the other epistles penned by John, James, Peter, and Paul. Instead, these seven letters were included as an intrinsic part of a book that is entirely prophetic!

This fact generates a vital question. Why would God send the entire book filled with these prophecies only to these seven congregations if they had no practical application for them? Why send warnings of the beast, the false prophet, and the great tribulation if these events would have no impact on them? The only purpose for giving the churches the entire book was to insure that it was passed it down to succeeding generations who would experience these things.

The only way these prophecies would have meaning is if the churches represented eras throughout time. By recording these prophecies and handing them down to successive eras, as each age came to pass, the Church

existing at any point in time would understand both the history that went before them and the circumstances they would face during its time.

Therefore, God intended these missives to be an inherent part of the entire vision for a divine purpose. They are symbolic and prophetic! Their warnings and admonitions correspond to prophesied events that would begin in John's time and continue throughout the future of God's Church! For this reason, the angel told John to:

Write the things which thou hast seen, **and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter** (Revelation 1:19).

These profound introductory verses were written to set the stage so that Christians could understand as their respective era in time arrived. The book of Revelation is a calendar of successive world events that would begin in the first century and continue over vast periods of They will culminate with the end of this age and finally the establishment of God's Kingdom on the earth.

These prophecies describe successive stages of a great whore riding atop an enormous empire called the beast. They chronicle the rise of a great merchandising superpower—a modern day Babylon. They document the pivotal steps in man's history leading up to the unleashing of God's wrath just prior to the return of Christ. They reveal the establishment of God's Kingdom on the earth and describe the creation of the new heavens, a new earth, and the glorious New Jerusalem!

The entire book of Revelation is a panoramic prophetic chronology, and the messages to the churches were set within it as an indelible part of its framework and purpose. Therefore, while these letters might have had an application for the congregations existing in the first century, they were engrafted within Christ's entire revelation. They

carry enormous meaning for God's servants who would experience later circumstances. They were written to ALL of God's servants! Therefore, the messages within them are inextricably tied to the forward march of history.

The fact that the letters are directed to churches existing at different times becomes more obvious as the letters to Philadelphia and Laodicea are read. The messages to these two churches are directed to Christians living in the last days—not those existing during the first century (Rev. 3:10-20).

Based on these facts, it is evident that these seven churches represent seven distinct eras of God's Church throughout time. They were written to the Ephesian era in the first century, but were also addressed to Pergamos, Smyrna, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea—Church eras that would exist centuries later.

Chapter 2

~ Exhibit 2 ~

The Evidence of the Number Seven

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.

~ Revelation 1:20 ~

Throughout the Bible, the number seven is used to convey a symbolic meaning. It is the number of completion. Seven days complete a week. There are seven weeks in the count to Pentecost and seven weeks of years until the Jubilee. Noah waited in the ark seven days before the flood came upon the earth, and God commanded His people to eat unleavened bread for seven days. The number seven literally appears hundreds of times in the Scriptures. And when it is used symbolically, it always denotes completeness. E.W. Bullinger discusses this unique number in his book, *Number in Scripture*, stating:

In Hebrew, seven is *shevah*. It is from the root *savah* to be full or satisfied, have enough of. Hence the meaning of the word “seven” is dominated by this root, for on the *seventh* day God rested from the work of creation. It was full and complete, and good and perfect. Nothing could be added to it or taken from it without

marring it... It is *seven*, therefore, that stamps with perfection and completeness that in connection with which it is used (pp. 156-157).

By this, we see that seven is the number God uses to portray that which is complete. With this understanding, the fact that there are seven messages sent to seven churches demonstrates an important truth. These churches must represent the complete New Testament Church throughout time. Notice how Christ used this number when describing these churches:

And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw **seven golden candlesticks**; 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. His head and *his* hairs *were* white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes *were* as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. 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. 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: 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. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; 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** (Revelation 1:12-20).

Candlesticks or Lamp Stands?

The Apostle John explained that he saw seven golden candlesticks. It is important to understand that Christ did not give John a vision of seven candles, each having a wick surrounded by wax and set in decorative holders as we see today. The Greek word translated “candlesticks” is *luchnia*, and its literal translation is “lamp stand” (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, G3087). Candles were not yet invented in John’s time; therefore, the apostle was describing a lamp and not a candle.

Our modern candles likely began with the Egyptians who first put beeswax over the reeds that they gathered along the Nile. These were more like torches. It was not until the middle ages that wax was used with a wick. At that time, candles became the chief source of artificial light. It was this kind of light the King James translators were familiar with, and likely the reason they translated *luchnia* as candlesticks.

In John’s day, the Jewish people used a device that was closer to the menorah as described by the prophet Zechariah (Zec. 4:2-3). In the lamp stand, oil was distributed from a base to the lamp’s various conduits. The flame would heat the oil and the resulting vapor burned at the end of each of the branches. Therefore, each lamp bore its own light from the one main source of oil which is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. This imagery represents the Spirit of the One True God flowing through the leaders that Christ would send. His Spirit would ensure the light of truth they preached during each era would burn brightly.

While introducing the letters, Christ gave us the key to unlock their mystery. Notice that He does not say that the candlesticks are seven OF the churches, but rather they “are THE seven churches.” Since seven is the number of completion, these candlesticks must represent the entire Church of God.

The Entire Book only Sent to Seven Churches?

Imagine Christ revealing prophecies that would occur over thousands of years yet sending them to only seven specific congregations in Asia Minor. However, that is exactly what Christ commands:

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 (Revelation 1:11).

The prophecies covered in the book of Revelation are of enormous importance to all of God’s people. Yet, at the time of their unveiling, Christ sent them only to seven churches. Why? Did the Savior want to deny the other congregations access to this information? Did He withhold it from the congregations in Jerusalem, Thessalonica, Philippi, Colosse, or any of the others? Of course not!

Christ was not withholding information from any other congregation. The truth is that the entire book is “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, **to shew unto his servants...**” (Rev. 1:1). By this, He gave warning and hope to ALL the churches who would read the book. Christ commanded that it be sent to these seven without mentioning the others because these specific churches were symbolic and represented seven Church eras.

All of the congregations existing during John's time were included in the first era and would ultimately have access to the book. This is another piece of evidence that these seven churches represent the entire Church over the course of history.

Other Churches in Asia Minor

When Christ instructed John to send these letters to the seven congregations, it must be understood that they were not the only churches of God in the province of Asia Minor. While the seven were located in cities 30 to 50 miles apart, there were several other congregations in close proximity. For example, Hierapolis was located south of Philadelphia and approximately six miles north of Laodicea. Colosse was situated eleven miles to the south of Laodicea. Therefore, the Apostle Paul wrote of them, stating:

For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you (the church in Colosse), and them *that are* in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis (Colossians 4:13).

Besides Heirapolis and Colosse, two other churches are noted in history. Magnesia and Tralles were congregations positioned on this same route connecting the other churches, but they were not addressed by Christ in the Scriptures. This means that a minimum of four other churches existed along this same route.

Knowing this, why did the Messiah only mention seven? Did He favor the brethren in these seven cities? No! Christ is without partiality and does not play favorites (Jam. 3:17). We must understand that, in a book of prophecy, the number seven is symbolic. Since seven is a number that means *complete* or *whole*, these seven churches represent the entire Church of God. They picture all believers around the world and throughout time. Thus, Christ likely chose these

seven congregations from among all those in the province because they most closely represented the seven Church eras that would occur down through history.

The Messiah in Their Midst

It is also important to note that Christ is described as being in the midst of the candlesticks (Rev. 1:13). In the same passage, He told us plainly that **the candlesticks are the seven churches** (Rev. 1:20). Since Christ is, and always has been, in the midst of the entire Church, this truth stands as further evidence that these seven represent the entirety of His Church throughout time. Each candlestick portrays one era of the Church of God.

The Seven Angels

As the book of Revelation begins, it states that there are seven stars in Christ's hand. We are then told that these stars are "the angels of the seven churches" (Rev. 1:16, 20). It is preposterous to consider that only the seven churches in Asia Minor had angels representing them. If each of the churches in Asia had a separate angel, then the congregations in Jerusalem, Macedonia, Colosse, Galatia, Heirapolis, and Rome would also have an angel. If this were the case, Christ would have been depicted as having a dozen or more stars in His hand. However, He is shown only with seven.

By this, the prophetic number *seven* continues to instruct us. As the seven candlesticks represent the entire Church throughout history, these seven stars also reflect the seven angels who would preside over the Church at respective points in time. Each angel would be responsible for their specific era when its time arrived.

Who are the Seven Angels?

In the first chapter of Revelation, Christ is described as being in the midst of the seven golden lamp stands and having seven stars in His right hand. He explained that "the

seven stars are the angels of the seven churches” (Rev. 1:20). Some have thought that these angels are human leaders, pastors, or apostles of each Church. Others believe that they are literally angelic spirit beings. What is the truth?

Those who believe the term refers to angelic beings cite the fact that the Greek word is *aggelos* meaning a “a messenger; especially an angel” (*Strong’s*, G32). In addition, the book of Revelation uses the word 77 times, and nowhere does it appear to mean other than angelic beings. Also, the symbol of a star is used to represent angels in several other verses (Job 38:7; Isa. 14:13; Rev. 9:1).

On the other hand, *Strong’s* also states that, by implication, *aggelos* can mean “a pastor” (G32). In fact, the Bible occasionally uses the word angel in reference to a human messenger. In Malachi 2:7 a priest who gives instruction is called “the messenger of the Lord.” Later, the individual announcing Christ’s return at the end of the age is also called a messenger (Mal. 3:1). In Matthew 11:10 *aggelos* is used to identify John the Baptist. It is used when referring to the representatives sent to Jesus from John (Luke 7:24). It is also the term used in James 2:25 when speaking of the spies who were protected by Rahab.

In addition, stars are sometimes a reference to human beings. For example, in Daniel 12:3, we are told that those who lead many to righteousness shall shine “as the stars.” In Jude 1:13, false teachers are called “wandering stars.”

We must also recognize that God has never used a human to deliver a message to one of His angels. Since John was told to write “Unto the angel of the church,” it is unlikely that he wrote messages intended for angelic beings. God does not need our assistance to instruct His angels. Christ simply would have relayed these messages to them Himself.

From this evidence, we recognize that the word “angels” can refer to both spirit beings and human beings. This can be confusing, but perhaps a solution can be found in

the duality that pervades the Bible.

Scripture often sets up a physical representation of that which is spiritual. There is the earthly reflecting the heavenly (Rom. 1:20). For example, man on earth is made in the image of God in heaven. There is a first Adam, and the second Adam—Christ. There was a physical temple on earth, and it was patterned after the spiritual in heaven. There was physical Israel, and later spiritual Israel—the Church. In light of such duality, is it possible that this same twofold representation is found in the angels of these churches?

From the example of the damsel who, upon seeing Peter, thought she had seen his angel; we realize that there are guardian spirit beings over God's people. As Peter had an angel assigned to him, is it possible that each era has both an angelic being and human messenger associated with it.

Consider that, as servants of the Almighty, the angels in heaven minister to, protect, and influence the human heirs to salvation (Heb. 1:14). As the angels in heaven bring messages from God to men, God's human servants also bring messages from God to other human beings. In this way, the statement, "angels to the seven churches" could be dual; representing both spirit beings and human church leaders.

Chapter 3

~ Exhibit 3 ~

The Evidence of the Mail-Route

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.

~ Revelation 1:11 ~

As Christ dictated these seven letters, John was instructed to write them in a book (Rev. 1:11). The word “book” is *biblion* in the Greek, a term indicating “a roll: - bill, book, scroll, writing” (*Strong’s*, G975). Understanding the writing material of the time, the seven letters were literally recorded on a single continuous parchment which was delivered to each of the seven Churches beginning with Ephesus and proceeding to the next church named in the letters. As the scroll was unrolled and the letters were read, they were viewed in the same order that we see in our Bibles today. The scroll would then continue its route to each successive church on Christ’s list.

It is interesting to note that the sequence in which Christ addressed the churches corresponded exactly to the location of these cities on a mail route in Asia Minor. John McRay explained this in his work, *Archeology and the New Testament*, stating:

Our study of transportation routes in the province has been facilitated greatly by a major work on Roman roads in Asia Minor by David French. Roads ran up the coast from Ephesus to Smyrna and Pergamum, and from there a road ran through the valleys to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. It is no accident that the letters in Revelation 1-3 are arranged in the same sequence. Beginning with Ephesus, the roads follow a geographical semicircle, extending northward, turning to the east, and continuing southward to Laodicea, thus connecting the cities on what must have functioned as an ancient postal route. Thus the order of the list may simply reflect the order in which the letter would be delivered to the churches (p. 242).

Mail Route of the Churches



Since the city of Ephesus was the port of entry for goods coming into Asia, the scroll containing John's vision was first read there. It was then passed on to Smyrna where the brethren would read the parchment before sending it to Pergamos. On it went to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and finally to Laodicea. Each presiding elder would unroll the scroll and read through the messages to the previous churches until he came to the message directed to Christians in his city.

The way these missives were delivered and read serves to help us understand their purpose. This pattern mirrors the order in which they would be read and understood by the Church throughout the course of human history. Each era would first read the letters to the churches that existed before them and thus be able to understand the circumstances of the preceding era. Then, they would come to the epistle addressed to them. They could then apply Christ's message of exhortation and warning to the events and circumstances of their time.

Had Christ addressed the churches in any other order than the sequence in which they received their mail, there would be little or no basis for a belief in eras. Small as this fact may seem, it is of enormous importance. Christ dictated the letters in the exact order in which they would be received on this mail-route, and they were read in this very same sequence for a reason. As will be shown later, these seven congregations were specifically chosen because their characteristics coincided with the record of Church history.

Since these messages were placed in a book that is entirely prophetic, and in view of the historical parallel, it becomes obvious that this progression also serves a symbolic and prophetic function. The order in which the letters were received foreshadows the same successive pattern in which eras of God's Church would occur. Thus, we have further evidence of successive Church eras.

Chapter 4

~ Exhibit 4 ~

The Evidence of Sevens in Succession

Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are,
and the things which shall be hereafter;

~ Revelation 1:19 ~

God's purpose for recording the book of Revelation was to reveal events that would begin during the time of John and continue throughout the course of human history. In fulfilling this purpose, He revealed seven separate categories of prophesy. Within each of these categories are seven related events—all of which would take place in chronological succession.

Seven Seals—a Progression through Time

The Apostle John explained that in heaven there exists a scroll with unique seals. As John described his vision, he explained that only Christ can open the seals to reveal the events they conceal:

And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, **sealed with seven seals**. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look

thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to **loose the seven seals** thereof (Revelation 5:1-5).

Each of the seals obscures a specific prophecy from view. As Christ systematically removes them, the scroll reveals a new and different calamity. Thus, each successive seal divulges events that occur in chronological order.

The first seal revealed a white horse whose rider carries a bow and wears a crown that was given to him (Rev. 6:2). Armed with authority and weapons of war, he goes forth conquering. While some have speculated that the white color portrays religious purity, and therefore represents Christ, this cannot be the case. Although the Messiah returns on a white horse, He is described as having many crowns and a supernatural sword coming from His mouth, not a man-made weapon of war (Rev. 19:11-15). Instead, this white horse is one of four banes that would befall humanity. As Jesus previously prophesied, this horse represents a false religion, cloaked with the appearance of righteousness (Mat. 24:4-5).

When Christ opened the second seal, a red horse appeared whose rider was given the ability to take peace from the earth (Rev. 6:4). The rider's great sword and the horse's blood-red color prefigure wars and rumors of wars (Mat. 24:6).

The opening of the third seal unleashed a black horse whose rider weighs out portions of food (Rev. 6:5-6). This dark imagery pictures a war scorched earth—land that is no longer able to produce food. The rider carries a set of balances portraying a world in which famine permeates much of the planet (Mat. 24:7).

The fourth seal revealed a pale horse whose rider was given the name Death and the grave followed him (Rev. 6:8). The Greek word for “pale” is *chlōros* and is defined as “greenish” (*Strong’s*, G5515). It is the same root word from which we derive our term *chlorophyll*. Its hue foreshadows sickness—disease epidemics that commonly follow war and famine. From this we can understand the meaning of the pale horse. It portrays a terrible pestilence that is prophesied to ravage the earth and lead to the death of untold numbers.



Seals in Succession

The fulfillment of these prophetic events began shortly after Christ ascended to heaven. Having the appearance of purity and claiming that Jesus was the Messiah, false ministers soon arose preaching a false Christ and a false gospel. Posing as ministers of righteousness, their perverted message would continue deceiving people until the very end (Mat. 24:5, 24-26; 2Cor. 11:4, 13-15).

In 70 A.D. war came to Jerusalem and with it terrible famine. Some inhabitants of the holy city turned to

cannibalism and literally ate their own children. As a consequence of war and famine, disease epidemics followed bringing death to many.

However, the fall of Jerusalem was not the end of these prophecies. It was only the beginning! These terrible events have continued down through time and have increased in scope and frequency. Tragically, they will continue in this same order and the four horsemen will ride hard and heavy as we near the triumphant return of Christ. Eventually, these first four seals will dramatically affect the entire world's population. As Christ foretold:

... And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth (Revelation 6:8).

As the next seals are loosed and their corresponding events are examined, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that they occur in a successive order. The fifth seal becomes more specific to the last days:

And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, how long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they *were*, should be fulfilled (Revelation 6:9-11).

The opening of this seal revealed the martyrdom of God's saints. Notice that this verse looks back to the

faithful people of God who were killed in the past. However, it also foretold the future murder of God's elect. In fact, a terrible time of martyrdom is yet to come; during the great tribulation!

As the sixth seal is opened, we see a onetime event that will only occur at the end of the age. This seal is a dramatic sign to all mankind—a warning that Christ's return is near:

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand? (Revelation 6:12-17).

This sixth seal serves as a terrifying wake up call. It is a frightening reminder to mankind that God's wrath is about to be inflicted on a hostile world filled with sin.

Finally, the seventh seal is opened to conclude this series of traumatic prophetic events. However, the devastation does not end here. This seventh seal begins another round of seven even more powerful and destructive plagues that will afflict a defiant humanity:

When he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets (Revelation 8:1-2).

In times of great tragedy, people sometimes pause for a moment to show respect and reflect on the severity of what has occurred. The following trumpet plagues are of such enormity that the angelic realm is absolutely silent for half an hour.

Imagine the entirety of heaven pausing to consider what has brought the world and its inhabitants to this moment. As the Almighty pauses, He ponders the enormous magnitude of the action He must now take against the earth and the people that He has always loved (John 3:16).

Seven Trumpet Plagues

As the seventh and final seal was opened, John witnessed seven trumpet plagues that will literally blast a defiant earth into submission. Notice again that each trumpet is blown in succession. As each trumpet sounds, it signals a new and awesome destructive plague hurled at the earth:

The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up. And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed. And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of

waters; And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter. And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise (Revelation 8:7-12).

Terrible as these four plagues will be, more terror and destruction will come. Before the fifth trumpet is blown, an angel flies through the midst of heaven announcing that the next three blasts are so devastating that they are called woes (Rev. 8:13).

When the fifth angel sounds, the bottomless pit is opened. This symbolism likely portrays the demons who have been imprisoned for thousands of years being released in the form of hideous locusts (2Pet. 2:4). These supernatural creatures will torture men for five months which is, coincidentally, the normal life-span of one of these insects. The pain inflicted by these creatures will be so great that those who have been stung will wish for death, yet their anguish will be aggravated by the fact that they cannot die (Rev. 9:1-12).

The sixth trumpet then sounds bringing the second woe upon mankind. An army consisting of two hundred million men will wreak havoc on humanity. The ensuing war will be so devastating that it will destroy one third of the world's remaining population (Rev. 9:13-21).

Finally, the seventh trump will sound and the third woe will be unleashed upon humankind.

The second woe is past; *and*, behold, the third woe cometh quickly. And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in

heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become *the kingdoms* of our Lord, and of his Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever (Revelation 11:14-15).

The seventh trumpet signals the fulfillment of several prophesied events. As its blast rends the air, the earth is put on notice. The Almighty God is about to reclaim the world that has been ruled by Satan for 6,000 years.

This trumpet also fulfills the great hope of God's servants from the beginning of time. Like an alarm clock set to raise the sleeping dead, the sound of this trump will signal the highly anticipated first resurrection. Not only will the dead in Christ be raised, but those faithful who are still alive will be miraculously changed (1Ths. 4:16-17).

Like the trumpet sounded at the coronation of Israel's kings, this last trump will also announce the ordination of those whom God will inaugurate as kings and priests in His government on the earth. God will raise His chosen and crown them as rulers under Christ (Rev. 5:10). This final blast will also serve as a call to the wedding supper and the marriage of the Lamb. However, this does not fulfill all this trump portends. Its blare is also a sound of war. It is a warning to the world of yet another round of devastating plagues. As John witnessed:

I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God (Revelation 15:1).

Amazing as they are, and as devastating as they will be, the trumpet plagues do not fill up the wrath of God that has been generated by the iniquity of man! God's anger will not be fulfilled until another round of seven dreadful plagues has been completed.

The Seven Vials

After the resurrection, and during the marriage supper, another series of seven divine punishments are destined to take place. The Apostle John explained that Christ will direct seven angels to pour out seven vials—the last plagues to rain down upon a pummeled, yet still defiant people:

And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast... And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead *man*: and every living soul died in the sea. And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood... And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat... And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain... And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet... And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done. And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, *and* so great... the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled

away, and the mountains were not found. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, *every stone* about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great (Revelation 16:2-21).

The book of Revelation reveals a sequence of seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven vials; all of which are in successive order. However, these are not the only sevens in this unique book of prophecy. There are four other sets of sevens which also occur in succession.

Seven Thunders

The book of Revelation speaks of seven thunders, and many have wondered what these represent. Can we know, or are they destined to remain a mystery until their utterance finally rumbles on this earth? The Apostle John wrote:

And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow *was* upon his head, and his face *was* as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and *his* left *foot* on the earth, And cried with a loud voice, as *when* a lion roareth: and when he had cried, **seven thunders uttered their voices**. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not (Revelation 10:1-4).

Because God commanded their utterance to be sealed, we can only speculate on the meaning of these thunders. However, the Almighty does give us clues. By comparing these verses with other related Scriptures, we can

understand what these thunders might be.

First, consider that the angel has one foot on the land and the other on the sea. Only after the angel cries out do the thunders begin to sound. Therefore, we can conclude that the thunders take place on the earth.

Next, consider that the seven thunders “uttered their voices.” This is the Greek expression *laleō heautou phōnē*, and means to talk, preach, or speak with a tone or voice in the form of language (*Strong’s*, G2980; G1438, G5456). The original word for “voices” is conveying the idea of disclosing a thing to others by the use of spoken word. This tells us that when John was told not to write what the thunders declared, he must have heard a message that was spoken in a language he could understand. But, exactly who, or what, proclaims these seven thunderous messages?

The timing of these utterances gives us insight. The Scriptures reveal that the seven thunders take place before the seventh trumpet sounds. As John explained:

The angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer: But **in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished**, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets (Revelation 10:5-7).

By these verses we see the seven thunders take place during the great tribulation. Understanding that powerful messages from God are thundering at this time, who is mightily proclaiming God’s truth during this period of enormous upheaval? The answer is found in the very next chapter where God reveals two end-time prophets sent to

preach to the world. They are known as the two witnesses. As John wrote:

And I will give *power* unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred *and* threescore days, clothed in sackcloth... And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will (Revelation 11:3-6).

These two servants of God will openly preach the truth with passion and power during the great tribulation. During their ministry, they will indict and warn a rebellious world filled with iniquity. As Moses and Aaron confronted Jannes and Jambres, these two prophets will also courageously confront Satan's human instruments—the beast and false prophet!

As a means of protection, God will give the two witnesses powers similar to those He gave to Moses and Elijah. They will be able to turn rivers to blood, stop and start the rain at will, and call fire down from heaven to strike their enemies. During a rainstorm, and when lightning strikes, it is followed by loud peals of thunder. In this context, it certainly appears there is a correlation between the miracles performed by the two witnesses and the seven thunders.

Sons of Thunder

In light of this truth, it is interesting to consider the time when Jesus called the twelve disciples to a mountain alone where He ordained them as the twelve apostles. A rarely observed detail also took place on that day which

provides another clue to the mystery surrounding the seven thunders. Christ gave a unique surname to the disciples, James and John:

And James the *son* of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, **The sons of thunder** (Mark 3:17).

Why did Christ give this unique title to James and John? It may well have been that the Savior called these two disciples by this term because of a specific experience they shared while on a trip through Samaria.

At that time the Jews hated the Samaritans. In fact, they would go to great lengths, even traveling many miles out of their way, to avoid any contact with them. The Savior had no such hatred, and He took the natural, shorter, route through Samaria on His way to Jerusalem. Knowing that He was Jewish and that His destination was Jerusalem, the Samaritans refused to accept Him in one of their towns. When these two disciples witnessed this, they suggested an unusual response, saying:

Lord, wilt thou that **we command fire to come down from heaven**, and consume them, even as Elias did? (Luke 9:54).

These two disciples wanted Jesus to give them the miraculous power to call fire down from heaven like the prophet Elijah. After this incident, Christ did not call these two the sons of fire, sons of lightning, or sons of Elijah. He called them “the sons of thunder.”

Could it be that, when James and John desired to call fire down from heaven, it reminded Jesus of the power He will give the two witnesses? Is it possible that *sons of thunder* is the name used in heaven to refer to the two

witnesses, and that is why the request of these two disciples prompted Jesus to affectionately call them by this term?

With this as a backdrop, could it be that the seven thunders will occur when the two witnesses are forced to use their God-given power? When they choose to stop or start the rain, will the ensuing downpour be accompanied by a rumbling roar? When they are attacked, will peals of thunder follow as they call fire down from heaven? Do these turbulent events occur seven times during the tribulation as the two witnesses preach an indicting message to the world? If so, it would make perfect sense for God to command John not to record these profound messages. If the meanings were disclosed, they might reveal the identities and events that were to take place before the appropriate time.

One thing is certain. If all the thunders were uttered at the same time, their message would be indistinguishable. It would even be difficult to tell how many thunders there were. These seven thunders must have been separate and clear messages. The Apostle John heard them and was about to write their messages before God ordered him to stop. From this we can be assured that, like all the previous categories of prophecy, the seven thunders will also occur in succession.

Seven Kingdoms of the Beast

As John's vision continued to play out, another series of sevens was revealed. This next prophetic category begins by describing a terrifying creature that is empowered by Satan the devil. The Apostle John described his vision, stating:

I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw **a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads** and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his

feet were as *the feet* of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority (Revelation 13:1-2).

John described the features of this beast as having the likeness of a lion, a bear, and a leopard. Can we know who or what this symbolic monster is? The answer is yes! We can identify this beast by comparing John's description with the identical features of the beasts found in the book of Daniel. God's prophet of old saw these same creatures in a dream, and wrote:

And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another. The first *was* like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it. And behold another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and *it had* three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. After this I beheld, and lo another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns (Daniel 7:3-7).

The four creatures Daniel saw represent four specific empires; one of which was further split into four separate entities. These beasts correspond to King Nebuchadnezzar's dream whose image Daniel interpreted to represent four

political powers that would rise and fall over time.

The lion pictured the strong and fierce Babylonian empire. The bear reflected the Persian Empire whose people migrated into Russia; leaving their symbol of the bear as this nation's logo. The winged leopard pictured the Greek Empire whose first king, Alexander the Great, used blitzkrieg-like speed to attack and bring other nations under his control. The four heads of this leopard represent the four-fold division of Alexander's empire by his four generals after his death. Finally, this fourth dreadful creature represents the powerful Roman Empire.

Just as God's revelation to Daniel foretold, the rise of these empires took place in successive order, culminating in the great Roman Empire. The following graph depicts the seven heads of the beast, and the empires they represent.

<i>Head</i>	<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Ruler</i>	<i>Empire</i>
<i>First head</i>	Lion	Nebuchadnezzar	Babylon
<i>Second head</i>	Bear	Cyrus	Persia
<i>Third head</i>	Leopard	Seleucid	Syria
<i>Fourth head</i>	Leopard	Lycimachus	Asian Minor
<i>Fifth head</i>	Leopard	Cassander	Macedonia
<i>Sixth head</i>	Leopard	Ptolemy	Egypt
<i>Seventh head</i>	Dreadful	Caesar	Rome

From Daniel's vision, we learn that the beast described in the book of Revelation symbolizes a federation of gentile nations. God often refers to these nations in terms of wild animals because they rip and tear at each other in acts of war. This final beast will be no different. It will be an unholy political, military, and economic system that is a composite of those empires that preceded it. As John's vision

continues, we are informed that this last kingdom would suffer a fatal wound, but that wound would be healed:

I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast (Revelation 13:3).

This deadly wound occurred when Rome fell in the 476 A.D. Uneducated, barbaric tribes consisting of the Vandals, Ostrogoths, and Heruli repeatedly attacked the weakened empire until it finally collapsed in defeat—Rome fell! However, this fourth beast was prophesied to live again, but its restoration would occur in seven separate revivals.

Seven Resurrections of the Roman Empire

Savage tribes dealt Rome a deadly wound, but this dreadful empire would not remain dead for long. Destined to rise again, the kingdom was restored in 554 by Emperor Justinian. However, with this restoration he brought something new—an intimate relationship with a religious entity. From this time forward the kingdom would no longer be known as Rome. It would now be recognized as the “Holy Roman Empire.”

This relationship of a blasphemous church and state is reflected in John’s vision in which he sees the symbol of a woman riding a beast:

There came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw **a woman sit upon a scarlet**

coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication (Revelation 17:1-4).

Who is this woman riding the beast? Prophetically, a woman symbolizes a church (Eph. 5:31-32). For example, the book of Revelation used this same personification 18 times in its 22 chapters. In some of these instances, the woman represents God's Church. In other cases, it reflects a counterfeit faith. In Revelation 17, the woman is a symbol of a great false religious system that rides a beast—the Roman Empire.

This end-time beast has seven heads and ten horns. The seven heads refer to seven revivals of Holy Roman Empire. The first of these was the imperial restoration by Justinian. The Frankish Kingdom followed, and then came the Empire under Otto the Great. After this, the Hapsburg dynasty arose, followed by Napoleon's kingdom. Garibaldi's empire formed next, and it was ruled by the two tyrannical leaders—Hitler and Mussolini.

The final revival of the Roman Empire will take place when ten horns, or nations, give their power to a single man. It is this seventh head and this beast that the Church of God understands to be the king who has "not yet come"—the end-time empire of the beast and false prophet (Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10).

<i>Head</i>	<i>Leader</i>	<i>Date</i>
First head	Justinian	554 A.D.
Second head	Frankish Kingdom	800 A.D.
Third head	Otto the Great	962 A.D.
Fourth head	Hapsburg dynasty	1520 A.D.
Fifth head	Napoleon	1805 A.D.
Sixth head	Axis Powers (Hitler and Mussolini)	1930 A.D.
Seventh head	Yet to Come	-----

The Seven letters to Seven Churches

So far, six categories of prophecy have been presented, and each one includes seven events that play out in a chronological sequence. God consistently uses this pattern of seven throughout the book of Revelation. Understanding this, we should expect there to be one more category of prophecy consisting of seven sequential events to complete God's precedent of using sets of seven, and only one category can fulfill this pattern—the seven messages to the seven churches!

Thus, the first set of seven presented in John's vision is the prophetic category of God's Church. Understanding that the number seven pictures completion, these churches must represent the entire Church throughout time. In addition, the letters to the Churches follow the same exact pattern as the other six categories of prophecy. The seven letters are related events that play out in chronological succession. The fact that there are seven sets of seven in the book of Revelation is another profound evidence for eras.

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- *7 Church Eras*
 - *7 Seals*
 - *7 Trumpet plagues*
 - *7 Vial plagues*
 - *7 Thunders*
 - *7 Kingdoms of the Beast*
 - *7 Resurrections of the Roman Empire*

Chapter 5

~ Exhibit 5 ~

The Evidence of Christ's Imminent Return

Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast,
that no man take thy crown.

~ Revelation 3:11 ~

Another compelling piece of evidence for Church eras is the fact that the end-time is not discussed in every letter. Only the last four mention Christ's return. Of those, the events immediately preceding His arrival become a focal point in the letters to the last two churches. The theme of Christ's return is of such prominence in the last letters because their message is intended for those who would live at the end of the age and witness this monumental event.

While Christ does mention His return to the first three churches, it is not in the context of returning to establish the Kingdom on earth. Instead, He speaks of intervening to rebuke them for their lack of faithful obedience. Notice His words to these congregations.

To Ephesus

I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent (Revelation 2:5).

While Christ does speak of coming quickly to Ephesus, He did not refer to His triumphant return. As a result of their waning love for God, the Messiah threatened to remove their candlestick—their light to the world.

To Smyrna

...and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

Christ spoke of Smyrna having tribulation for ten days. This is not the tribulation that comes upon the entire world during the end time. Instead, the Messiah spoke of a great trial that would come upon this second era of the Church. He admonishes them to be faithful, and promises a reward for their courageous endurance.

To Pergamos

Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth (Revelation 2:16).

To this era Christ said He will come to fight against them if they do not repent. Again, He is not speaking of the time when He comes to set up His Kingdom on earth. Instead, He was threatening these people with a reprimand; warning them to repent of their polluted religious practice or suffer the consequences.

Only after His first three letters does Christ begin to speak of His second coming. He exhorted Thyatira to hold fast till He returns. He warned Sardis that He will descend upon them as a thief. Philadelphia is admonished to hold fast because He comes quickly. Finally, speaking to Laodicea, Christ implied that they will have to endure the great tribulation before His dramatic intervention in man's affairs. Notice His words to these last four churches.

To Thyatira

But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations (Revelation 2:25-26).

To Sardis

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 (Revelation 3:3).

As the letters progress through each of the last four churches, the emphasis on the return of Christ becomes greater. The messages to the 4th and 5th churches indicate that individuals from these eras will be alive during the end.

However, when the last two are addressed, the end time becomes a central issue. The subject of the great tribulation takes precedence in these final messages.

To Philadelphia

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. Behold, I come quickly... (Revelation 3:10-11).

Enormous passion for God motivates the Philadelphians to consistently strive to overcome. These people refuse to let down, even during the lax period prior to sudden destruction when peace and safety is proclaimed (1Ths. 5:3). God tells them that, because they faithfully keep His Word, He will keep them from this terrible time of trial and punishment.

To Laodicea

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 (Revelation 3:18).

The Savior also spoke of the tribulation to Laodicea warning them that, because of their self-satisfied, lukewarm attitude, He will spew them out of His mouth. He then admonishes them to repent immediately so that they will not have to suffer being brutally tested, tried, and even martyred!

In other words, if they do not put forth the effort at this time, the merciful Christ will still give them the opportunity to obtain the righteous character they failed to develop. However, now they will have to build moral fiber in the great tribulation, and the Messiah advises them to “buy gold tried in the fire” (Rev. 3:18).

The symbols of gold and fire are of enormous significance. The Bible reveals gold to be symbolic of righteous character (1Cor. 3:12-15). Fire is used as a symbol for trial or tribulation (1Pet. 4:12). As fire refines gold, the tribulation will be Christ's instrument to refine the character of those lukewarm members of His Church.

The last two letters indicate that Philadelphia and Laodicea both exist during the time of the great tribulation. This terrible time of trial begins a period of 3½ years before the resurrection of the saints (Dan. 12:7; Rev. 12:14). The Church of Philadelphia is promised protection from this horrific trial. Laodicea must endure it in order to achieve their place in the first resurrection.

The letters to the last two churches should be all the evidence needed to confirm the doctrine of Church eras! These final missives undeniably speak of end-time events, and yet the churches that once existed in these ancient cities have long ago disappeared.

Philadelphia Today



Laodicea Today



Obviously, these last two messages were not intended for the churches in John's day. The words of warning and admonition contained in them were meant for those who would live during the end-time. They were written to us!

The Two Witnesses

Another point of interest reinforces the fact that these last letters were intended for Christians living at the end of the age. In the beginning of the book of Revelation, Christ revealed Himself as being in the midst of the seven candlesticks or lamp stands. He then stated that these lamp stands were the churches (Rev. 1:20).

The Scriptures also show us that, at the end of the age, only two lamp stands will be reflecting God's light to this spiritually dark world. Christ began to illustrate this point in Revelation 11 where He spoke of the ministry of the two witnesses. In so doing, He made this curious statement:

And I will give *power* unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred *and* threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. **These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks** standing before the God of the earth (Revelation 11:3-4).

Christ stated that the two end-time witnesses are "the two candlesticks." However, He also stated that "the candlesticks **are the churches**" (Rev. 1:20). Therefore, the two witnesses are directly associated with the two churches. Could this mean they are leaders or representatives of these two assemblies?

The answer begins to emerge as we explore the book of Zechariah where lamps and olive trees are also mentioned. With the understanding that the term "candlesticks" actually refer to lamp stands, the prophet Zechariah relates a unique vision from God, stating:

I have looked, and behold **a candlestick** all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and **his seven lamps thereon**, and **seven pipes to the seven lamps**, which *are* upon the top thereof: **And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.** So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What *are* these, my lord? Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This *is* the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts (Zechariah 4:2-6).

Here, God is speaking to Zerubbabel who was chosen as governor to restore the temple during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Zerubbabel must have felt completely overwhelmed facing such a monumental task. In this context, the angel reminds this great man that the work of God is accomplished by the power of God's Holy Spirit and not by the strength of men.

Since God's Spirit works through men, this vision includes the two olive trees. Oil is a symbol of God's spirit (Mat. 25:1-5), and the olive trees symbolize the source of oil feeding two of the seven lamps. As Christ had stated, these olive trees and the lamp stands are the two witnesses—leaders who will feed the end-time Church.

On the Right and Left Side

It is important to note that this lamp stand has seven individual lamps, and each is fed by one of seven separate golden pipes. Since each olive tree feeds only one lamp, only two lamps are burning at this time. This reveals that during the end-time fulfillment of these verses, only two churches

will be shining their lights to the world. As the angel continues to explain:

Then answered I, and said unto him, What *are* these **two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof?** And I answered again, and said unto him, What *be* *these* two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden *oil* out of themselves? And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these *be*? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, **These are the two anointed ones**, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth (Zechariah 4:11-14).

Like a jigsaw puzzle slowly coming together to reveal a clear picture, these verses in Zechariah complete those in the book of Revelation. The two olive trees are individuals who are anointed by God and set apart for His holy use. That use is to feed the two lamps—the churches. Thus, the spirit of each church and the light provided by the message each preaches is fueled by God's Holy Spirit flowing through these two individuals.

With this understanding, it is interesting to note that the two olive trees are not found standing side by side. Instead, one is on the right and the other on the left. Could it be that this is also symbolic? Does this reflect that each one is associated with a different era—either Philadelphia or Laodicea? Is it possible this separation is indicative of the conservative as opposed to the liberal element in the church? Could this mean that, while one more conscientiously adheres to the scriptures, the other takes more liberties in how they live? If so, the difference in zeal certainly would be expressed in Christ's admonishment to each of these churches.

It is evident that the two witnesses are the two olive trees, the two anointed ones, and they are inextricably tied to

the two end-time churches! This means they are the representatives of the two churches. While the two witnesses are but men, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they are able to fuel God's last light and witness to the world before Christ's return.

Since these churches no longer exist in Asia Minor, and because Philadelphia and Laodicea are shown to be associated with the two end-time witnesses, there can be no other conclusion. The letters addressed to them could not have been written solely to Christians living during the lifetime of the Apostle John. They must have been intended for specific eras of God's Church in existence during the climactic return of our Savior.

Chapter 6

~Exhibit 6 ~

The Evidence of History

Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

~ Isaiah 46:9-10 ~

Perhaps the greatest evidence for eras is found within the historical narrative. When these seven letters are compared with the actual chronology of the New Testament Church, we find that the historical account parallels Christ's message to the churches.

Before comparing the history of the Church to the letters in Revelation, notice that Christ addressed each congregation separately. Every assembly is referred to by the name of the city in which it was located. Embedded in each name is the predominant trait the Church would display during its respective eras. As Christ made this association, He described Himself as the One who remained faithful while experiencing similar circumstances. By His example, the Savior conveyed a valuable lesson to each era.

The following chart demonstrates this unique relationship comparing the name of the church, its primary characteristic, Christ's description of Himself, and the lesson to be learned.

Church Name	Meaning of the Name	Trait of the Church
<i>Ephesus</i>	The one desired	She lost her desire
<i>Smyrna</i>	Bitterness	They experienced bitter persecution, prison, and death
<i>Pergamos</i>	Lifted up high	They allowed stumbling blocks such as idols and spiritual fornication
<i>Thyatira</i>	Sacrifice	They feared to make the sacrifice of standing out and committed spiritual fornication
<i>Sardis</i>	Remnant	They still have the name Church of God, but are dead in their works
<i>Philadelphia</i>	Brotherly love	They patiently keep God's Word
<i>Laodicea</i>	The people judge	A people who judge and who are fit for judgment

How Christ Describes Himself	A Lesson in the Names
He walks in the midst of the candlesticks	He is always with them. He loves them, but many lose their love for Him.
He is the first who rose from the dead	They are not the first nor will they be the last to suffer. Christ rose from the dead and will they too.
He fights against them with His sharp sword	This Church sat up high, but allowed members to stumble by their laxness. Christ would cut them down.
His feet are like burning brass, His eyes like a flaming fire	Failing to make the sacrifice of standing up for the truth, they must make a sacrifice in the fiery trial of tribulation.
He has the seven spirits and the seven stars	This Church is a remnant. They have lost much, but Christ has lost nothing.
He that is holy and true	By keeping God's Word, they are judged to be holy and true. Christ considers them His loving brothers.
He is the faithful and true Witness (martyr)	They are lukewarm toward the things of God. They judge people and doctrine by their own criteria. By doing so, they will suffer God's judgment and must now become faithful martyrs.

- The Church of Ephesus -

Born in the first century, this first era of the New Testament Church was filled with the excitement generated by personal experience. Many Christians were eyewitnesses to the arrival of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Having seen the miracles of the apostolic age and the transforming power of God in their lives, they were on fire for God. They took their calling seriously as they supported the apostles who preached the gospel throughout the empire.

As the name of this era implies, Christ had a great desire for them. One of the gifts arising from His love was that they were taught by two leading servants of God—Paul and John. However, it is their waning love that becomes the Messiah's primary concern:

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; 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: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 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. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 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 (Revelation 2:1-7).

Losing Their First Love

Inspired by the Holy Spirit after the day of Pentecost, the Church was electric with passion at the expectation of Christ's return. As time passed, circumstances did not turn out as expected. The Messiah did not return during their age and they became disheartened.

It was during this era, in approximately 58-59 A.D., a sixteen year old, paranoid child named Nero ascended to the throne in Rome. During the first year of his reign, Nero's paranoia led him to kill his mother. Then, in 64 A.D., with a desire to rebuild Rome, he set a section of the city on fire. The blaze burned viciously. Hundreds died, and thousands lost their homes and belongings.

After six days, the inferno was thought to be extinguished, but it broke out once again and raged for another three days. Some of the soldiers were aware that Nero had ordered the fire to be set. Word began to leak out, and the Emperor had to do something to shift the blame. Christians became the perfect target.

The Church had publicly taught that Rome was the seat of evil and that Christ would return and burn the city with unquenchable fire. Some believed this conflagration was the beginning of Christ's prophesied punishment. Consequently, they refused to help extinguish the blaze. They were convinced it was the work of God. In his book titled *Nero the Singing Emperor of Rome*, Arthur Weigall related the Christian sentiment during this tragic time for God's people:

Also, it was reported that during the blaze, when asked by their distracted fellowmen if, then they were glad to see Rome burn, they had replied that this was heaven's fiery vengeance for which they were waiting, nor would they raise a hand to extinguish the flames. The Lord's immediate return, in actual fact, was the main spring of their

faith, the Second Coming being the supreme event which the elect were hourly expecting; and so great a disaster could not have been thought to be anything but the beginning of this tremendous advent. They thought Jesus was coming! The heavens would open now at any moment, and they would see Him riding upon the fiery clouds (pp. 295-296).



Statuary of Nero
64 AD

Because of their open discontent toward Rome, the Church became the perfect scapegoat for Nero. This emotionally disturbed child-king began to publicly blame the Christians for the fire. The persecution became so widespread that it resulted in horrific and sadistic entertainment for the pleasure of the perverted emperor. As the famous historian Tacitus wrote:

Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace... Mockery of every sort was added to

their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed (*Annals*, XV, 44).

Christians became the subject of persecution throughout the empire. Yet, this was not the only difficulty the new Church faced.

False Apostles and Nicolaitans

Having absorbed some of the Christian beliefs into their faith, some Gnostic teachers appointed themselves to the office of apostle and began to preach a perverted gospel. The propagation of truth mixed with error had a profound effect on the Church's struggle to survive during this era. As Christians experienced this influx of Gnosticism, the faithful resisted the intrusion, but ultimately the false teaching took its toll.

Chief among these heresies was that of the Gnostic teacher Nicholas. While he did not live in, or attend, the Church in Ephesus, he was one of the first antinomians (a sect which taught against the law). This movement infiltrated the entire church; infecting many believers in the first century.

Like other Gnostics, Nicolas came to believe that anything physical was evil. He taught that Jesus did not actually come in the flesh, but that He was only a spirit who

left no footprints when He walked. Nicolas was also known to propagate the time-worn lie that as long as men had love in their heart they could perform any kind of wicked deed and it would not be imputed as sin. It was this sect the Apostle John addressed when he said:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 John 1:8-10).

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God (1 John 4:1-2).

In addition to the permeation of such false doctrine, the first Christians witnessed the destruction of the temple. After miraculously hearing a voice telling them to flee Jerusalem, these believers escaped to Pella and lost the holy city as their headquarters. This era also experienced severe anti-Semitic persecution emanating from Rome. Finally, they lived to witness the martyrdom of all the apostles except for John who was later taken prisoner by Emperor Domitian and banished to the island of Patmos.

The Last Apostle of the First Era

Having been exiled, John could do little to combat the Gnostic heresy and the Church's first love continued to diminish. However, some time after being given the astounding vision of Revelation, John was freed from the rocky prison of Patmos and returned to the city of Ephesus which became the headquarters of this last apostle of the first era. As the famous historian Eusebius wrote:

But after Domitian had reigned fifteen years, and Nerva had succeeded to the empire, the Roman Senate, according to the writers that record the history of those days, voted that Domitian's honors should be cancelled, and that those who had been unjustly banished should return to their homes and have their property restored to them. It was at this time that the apostle John returned from his banishment in the island and **took up his abode at Ephesus**, according to an ancient Christian tradition (*Church History*, Book III, ch. 20:10-11).

From Ephesus, John continued to serve the churches in Asia Minor. When he died, the “disciple whom Jesus loved” was buried in this same town. The fact that John lived, worked, and died in the city bearing the name of this first era stands as further historical evidence for eras.

John was the last living apostle personally trained by Christ. His passing brought an end to what historians call “the apostolic era.” In addition, the Church in that age left a record of initial passion followed by persecution, the influx of false teachers, and a letdown in their devotion. Thus, the history of the first century Church conforms to Christ’s message to Ephesus.

- *The Church in Smyrna* -

After the death of John, a notable transition took place. The Church that followed was radically different from the one he had helped to raise up. Making note of this dramatic shift, historian Jesse Hurlbut wrote:

We name the last generation of the first century, from 68 to 100 A.D, “The Age of Shadows,” partly because the gloom of the persecution was over the church; but more especially because of all periods in the history, it is the one about which

we know the least... for fifty years after St. Paul's life a curtain hangs over the church, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about 120 A.D. with the writings of the earliest church-fathers, we find a church in many aspects very different from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul (*The Story of the Christian Church*, p. 33).

As Hurlbut explained, the next Church era was “very different.” This difference was foretold by Christ as He addressed Ephesus and then Smyrna in Revelation 2.

As the bishop serving from the city of Ephesus, the Apostle John ordained a younger man who was to succeed him upon his death. This new elder no longer served as the pastor ministering from Ephesus. He lived and worked in the city which carried the name of the next era—Smyrna. As Eusibius wrote:

At that time **Polycarp, a disciple of the apostles**, was a man of eminence in Asia, having been entrusted with **the episcopate of the church of Smyrna** by those who had seen and heard the Lord (*Church History*, Book III, Ch. 36:1).

After John's death and the transfer of leadership to Polycarp, the Ephesian era came to a close. To the angel of the next era, Christ recorded a profound letter in which He explained the trials to occur in their time as well as what they must do to remain faithful. The Savior stated:

Unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; these things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; 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. 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. 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 (Revelation 2:8-11).

Smyrna means bitter, and certainly it was a bitter time for God's people during this age. The Church experienced great poverty, but perhaps the most devastating experience for them involved the infamous heresies that shook the Church regarding the Sabbath and Passover. This era suffered great persecution over these issues, and some even lost their lives for standing firm in the faith.

Surely one of the bitterest moments these people experienced was to witness the Apostle Polycarp being burned by a mob in his home city of Smyrna. After being miraculously unhurt by the flame, he was finally stabbed to death. Perhaps in anticipation of the horrific death of this leader, Christ encouraged this era by reminding them of the resurrection stating that as He "was dead, and is alive" so will the faithful live again.

During this time, the Church was referred to as "Nazarenes." This was a term originally stemming from Jesus having come from the city Nazareth, but the name eventually came to mean "despised ones." When we consider the disdain many had for Christ, it is almost fitting that His followers would carry this same burden.

Despite the great persecution, the Church endured. Many held fast to their faith—even to the end. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* documented the beliefs of these people, stating:

[The Nazarenes] ...dated their settlement in Pella from the time of the flight of the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem, immediately before

the siege in 70 A.D... They recognized the new covenant as well as the old, and believed in the resurrection, and in the one God and His Son Jesus Christ. They used the Aramaic recession of the Gospel according to Matthew, which they called the Gospel to the Hebrews, but, while adhering as far as possible to the Mosaic economy as regarded circumcision, Sabbaths, foods and the like, they did not refuse to recognize the apostolicity of Paul or the rights of heathen Christians (11th, p. 319).

Persecution Ten Days

Perhaps the most dramatic evidence for this second era is found Christ's statement that Smyrna would experience tribulation for ten days. However, there is no record of a ten day persecution in all of Church history. What, then, did Christ mean?

It must be remembered that the book of Revelation is both prophetic and symbolic. Therefore, the book's reference to ten days should be understood as a symbolic period of time. According to Ezekiel 4:6, a day is used in prophecy to represent a year. Therefore, Christ revealed that this era would suffer persecution for ten years.

As far as can be determined, the little congregation of Smyrna in John's day did not suffer persecution for either ten days or ten years. However, a terrible period of affliction known as the Diocletianic Persecution came upon the entire Church for a ten year period during the fourth century.

At that time, Emperors Diocletian and Galerius held councils in which they sought to shed blood of Christians. They proceeded to portray believers as enemies of the state citing their God (Christ) as a political criminal for claiming to be the King of the Jews. In addition, they perceived the New Testament texts as a threat to the Roman state because they predicted that system's ultimate destruction.

After a vicious raid on a church meeting place in Nicodemia, an edict was published. This is documented in the history of the *Anti-Nicene Fathers* which reads:

Next day an edict was published, depriving the Christians of all honours and dignities; ordaining also that, without any distinction of rank or degree, they should be subjected to tortures, and that every suit at law should be received against them; while, on the other hand, they were debarred from being plaintiffs in questions of wrong, adultery, or theft; and, finally, that they should neither be capable of freedom, nor have right of suffrage (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*; Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries, Chap. XIII).



Statue of Emperor Diocletianus, 284-305 AD
(Photo by Giovanni Dall'Orto)

Beginning in 303 A.D., the Emperors Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius, and Constantius issued a series of edicts rescinding legal rights of all Christians and demanded that they comply with traditional Roman religious practices. Persecutory laws were nullified by different emperors at

different times in differing areas of the empire, but Constantine and Licinius' Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. marked the official conclusion to the horrifying prophesied ten years of widespread persecution of Christians (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11707a.htm>, retr. 11/15/2012). This proclamation stated the following:

When I, Constantine Augustus, as well as I, Licinius Augustus, fortunately met near Mediolanum (Milan), and were considering everything that pertained to the public welfare and security, we thought, among other things which we saw would be for the good of many, those regulations pertaining to the reverence of the Divinity ought certainly to be made first, so that we might grant to the Christians and others full authority to observe that religion which each preferred; whence any Divinity whatsoever in the seat of the heavens may be propitious and kindly disposed to us and all who are placed under our rule. And thus by this wholesome counsel and most upright provision we thought to arrange that no one whatsoever should be denied the opportunity to give his heart to the observance of the Christian religion, of that religion which he should think best for himself, so that the Supreme Deity, to whose worship we freely yield our hearts) may show in all things His usual favor and benevolence. Therefore, your Worship should know that it has pleased us to remove all conditions whatsoever, which were in the rescripts formerly given to you officially, concerning the Christians and now any one of these who wishes to observe Christian religion may do so freely and openly, without molestation... (*Edict of Milan*, 313 AD; <http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/bible/milan.stm>, retr. 11/15/2012).



Statue of Constantine I, 313–324 AD

(Photo by Markus Bernet)

Not only was toleration of the Christian religion declared during this time, it was written that all property and places of worship were to be restored to those professing Christianity. When considering the time frame of Christian persecution during this era of the Church, we see that Christ's prophecy of ten years of tribulation occurred from 303 to 313 A.D.

Consider the importance of this ten-year period in the light of Church eras. It did not, nor could it, occur in a single city. The city of Ephesus was about thirty five miles to the south of Smyrna, and Pergamos was forty miles to the north. Had this letter been written to the Church existing in the Apostle John's time, anyone experiencing persecution could have simply followed Christ's instruction; "If they persecute you in one city, flee to another" (Mat. 10:23). If a ten day persecution had fallen only upon the small congregation in Smyrna, these Christians would have easily escaped by moving to Ephesus or Pergamos where there would have been safety.

Christ's letter to Smyrna was prophetic. Therefore, this is additional evidence that the doctrine of Church eras is true. The prophecy that Smyrna would be persecuted for ten days was directed to the Church that would exist 200 years after the Apostle John transcribed this letter. This persecution during the Church's second era encompassed Christians living throughout the entire Roman Empire, and it lasted ten years. In this respect, the letter to Smyrna stands as a powerful testimony for eras.

- *The Church in Pergamos* -

The city of Pergamos was located 15 miles inland and about 75 miles north of Ephesus. The city was built on a steep hillside, terraced to accommodate the slope. Pergamos means "fortified" (*Strong's*, G4010) and this city was fortified by virtue of its high position atop a hill. To this Church, Christ stated:

To the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; 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. 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 stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 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* (Revelation 2:12-17).

Satan's Seat

In Christ's message to Pergamos, the Church is described as being located where "Satan's seat is." This may be a reference to the fact that the original city was the seat of the Roman government in Asia. In addition, Pergamos was once the center of the Babylonian mystery religion and Attalus III was the last god-king to rule there in 133 B.C.

In addition, in 321 A.D., Emperor Constantine issued an edict stating that work should be done on the Sabbath and Sunday was to be the official day of rest. As a result, many true Christians were forced to move into the wilderness; migrating to areas within the mountains of Armenia and the northern Euphrates. This area was originally the location where Satan had led Nimrod to set up his seat of authority, and it was from this area that most false religion originated (Gen. 10). Because these people now resided in this location, the third Church era fulfilled Christ's statement that they would dwell where Satan's seat existed.

On another level, is it possible that this is the actual location of Satan's throne? God has a seat of authority upon which He sits, and it is located in a specific place in heaven. As the god of this world, it is likely that the devil also sits on an invisible throne somewhere on this earth. From this location, he rules over a vast numbers of demons as he manipulates the kingdoms of this world (Mat. 4:8-9).

Further evidence indicates that this wilderness may have been in the vicinity of the once beautiful Garden of Eden. Could it be that such a throne existed in this area of man's first sin (Eze. 28:13)?

The Paulicians

Christ's letter to this third era coincides with the

history of a people called Paulicians. While some believe this name originated from one of the sect's earliest leaders, others are convinced it referred to them as followers of Paul. Notwithstanding, the origin of this group can be traced back to an individual named Constantine who translated the text of the New Testament into the common language. He also taught the plain, simple truths expounded by the Savior. Historian Edward Gibbon explained:

...these books of the New Testament became the rule of his faith and the Catholics who dispute his interpretation, acknowledge that his text was genuine and sincere. He attached himself with peculiar devotion to St. Paul. The name of the Paulicians is derived, by their enemies, from some unknown and domestic teacher, but I am confident that they glorified in their affinity to the apostle of the Gentiles (*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, pp. 57-63).

This group of faithful believers certainly stood out in the world that existed in their time. George Fischer wrote of these people in his book, *The History of the Christian Church*, stating:

While the Christian world, as it has been the fashion to call it, was thus sunk into an awful state of superstition—at a moment when darkness seemed to cover the earth, and a gross darkness of the people—it is pleasing to contemplate a ray of celestial light darting across the gloom. About the year 650, a new sect arose in the east, under the name of Paulicians, which is justly entitled to our attention (p. 443).

Antipas My Faithful Martyr

The first prominent leader of this era was a man known as Constantine of Mananali (620-681 A.D.).

Constantine was a well educated man who was anonymously given a copy of the Bible—a rare possession at that time. Amazed at the truths he discovered, Constantine began to preach the gospel about 654 A.D. His efforts revitalized the floundering group of Christians who had fled Greece and Asian Minor over two centuries earlier.

Among other truths, Constantine taught the people that the trinity was false and crosses were idols. He condemned the sprinkling of water for baptism and the observance of pagan holidays. This powerful leader vigorously resisted the idea that there existed an apostolic succession in the Roman church. For this he became known as one “against the Papacy.”

Consequently, many believe that when Christ spoke of “Antipas” a faithful martyr the term actually meant *antipope* and was a direct reference to the martyrdom of this Church leader. This belief is supported by the definition of the Greek expression which means “opposite, or opposing, a father” (*Strong's*, G493; G473; G3962). Understanding that the pope calls himself “the most holy father” it is obvious that a true Christian leader would be directly opposed to this false religious figure.

Because Constantine's beliefs contradicted those of the apostate Roman church, the Papal authority took measures to silence his voice. In 681 A.D. they sent a group of Byzantine soldiers, commanded by an officer named Simeon, to seek out and murder Constantine of Mananali. It is said that, after finding the Paulicians, Simeon threatened to kill them one at a time until they confessed the identity of their teacher. One of their members finally betrayed him, and Simeon put Constantine to a faithful martyr's death.

In a turn of events that is reminiscent of the Apostle Paul's persecution of Christians, and how he later repented and was converted, Simeon was so impressed with the faith of these people that he returned in 684 A.D. and began to study with them. Simeon repented, became converted, and

eventually replaced Constantine as their new leader. Ironically, now a zealous preacher of the truth, he was martyred three years later in much the same fashion as Constantine.

In 1828, Fred Coneybeare discovered and translated the last remaining book belonging to this sect titled *The Key of Truth*. From these texts, he concluded that the Paulicians kept the Ten Commandments and the biblical holy days just as God's people had done from the beginning. Coneybeare wrote the following about this era of God's people:

There were no special Sunday observances... Wednesday and Friday were not kept as fast days. Of the modern Christmas and of the Annunciation, and other feasts connected with the life of Jesus prior to his thirtieth year, this phase of the church knew nothing. The general impression which the study of it leaves on us is that in it we have before us a form of the church not very remote from the primitive Jewish Christianity of Palestine (p. 193).

While this work reveals the Paulicians connection to true Christianity, and that they were a central part of the third Church era, the *Key of Truth* was a book written late in their history. Because of this, the text displays elements of compromise and, although these people did not deny the faith, as the Savior had foretold (Rev. 2:13), they began to compromise and eventually embraced the doctrine of Balaam. But, what exactly is that doctrine?

The Doctrine of Balaam

The book of Numbers recounts Balak who was a king of the Moabites. This leader feared the Israelites because of their military victories and called on a respected soothsayer known as Balaam for help. He desired Balaam to put a curse on Israel, and promised the seer great reward for doing so. Inquiring of the Almighty, God revealed that Balaam must not to do such a thing.

Balaam heeded God's command at first, but because of his self serving attitude, he eventually found a way to compromise. Unable to curse Israel, he planned a means to circumvent God's will and eventually provoked the Israelites to sin by leading them to marry women of Moab. Associating with the ungodly worship of these foreigners influenced and polluted God's people; resulting in a curse being brought upon them by God Himself (Num. 22-25).

The New Testament era of Pergamos eventually fell to the same sort of compromise prompted by Balaam. As the Roman church assimilated many of the beliefs of pagans, it became a perverted form of Christianity that was backed by a powerful military force. The apostate church and Roman State exercised its strength; imposing tremendous pressure on surrounding nations and people.

At this time, motivated by fear, many Christians attempted to blend in to the religious community by participating in various practices of the heretical Roman church. Some avoided persecution by having their children christened. Others attended mass to evade detection. By participating in such acts, these Christians committed spiritual fornication, thus, fulfilling Christ's prophecy.

The Doctrine of the Nicolaitans

According to the words of our Savior, the Pergamos era was also affected by the Nicolaitan heresy. It is believed that the Nicolaitans were a people who followed the deacon named Nicolas (Acts 6:5). After being ordained, this man set out to pervert the faith by infecting it with a form of Gnosticism. As stated earlier, this teaching professed that the thoughts of the mind were spiritual and that only knowledge and matters of intellect were important. This outrageous doctrine eventually led them to believe that if they simply had love in their heart they could sin and it would not be imputed to them.

The Gnostic influence deceived the Paulicians into believing they could compromise their religious practice. Armed with this mindset, many were lured into performing various Roman Catholic practices. They believed that God would not attribute this sin to them because, in their minds, they really knew the truth.

In the 8th and 9th centuries the Byzantine emperors forced the Paulicians to resettle in the Balkans where they became known as Bogomils. Having strayed further from the truth, the Bogomils armed themselves and began to engage in war for personal protection instead of relying on God. Once again God's message to this era of the Church correlates with the circumstances found in secular history.

The Hidden Manna and a White Stone

To those who overcame during the era of Pergamos, Christ promised a unique reward. He would give them hidden manna and a white stone with a new name written on it (Rev. 2:17). What did Christ mean by this statement?

Like the manna which Christ provided sustained ancient Israel for 40 years in the wilderness, He is the bread of life. Those who believe on Him will never hunger (John 6:35). Thus, the hidden manna is related to having our daily provision and eternal life which can only be supplied by Almighty God—our Sustainer.

When Christ returns, He will raise the saints, give them eternal life and take His bride to a glorious marriage supper in heaven where they will receive a white stone and a new name (1Ths. 4:16; Rev. 19:9). But what does this mean?

In the ancient Middle East, it was common practice at a trial for the judges to give the guilty a black stone and the innocent a white one. Those who overcome will receive a like verdict. They will be found *not guilty* as a result of our Savior who paid the price for our sin.

In a physical marriage relationship, the groom traditionally gives His bride a diamond—a white stone! The

wife then takes on the last name of her husband. It is a new name for her. Further, the married couples often give one another unique nicknames such as *sweetheart* or *honey*. These are personal names of endearment between the two of them.

Could this white stone symbolize Christ's marriage to His bride, the Church? Is it a symbol of their holy wedlock? Could the Bride's new name be that of the Father's or an intimate term known only by the Messiah and the one who receives it?

The Bible tells of several instances in which Jesus gave new names to those who had overcome. Jacob was given the name Israel—prince of God (Gen. 32:22-32). God changed the name of Abram to Abraham meaning the father of many nations, and Sarai to Sarah meaning a princess or queen (Gen. 17:1-15). God will also give those who overcome a unique name that reflects their new status and position in the Kingdom of God (Rev. 3:12).

- *The Church in Thyatira* -

The fourth era addressed by Christ was that of Thyatira. As we consider the portrayal of the Church in this letter, we again find that the historical record corresponds to Christ's admonition. The Apostle John recorded the message to these people, stating:

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; 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. 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. And I gave her space

to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. 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 (Revelation 2:18-23).

During the middle ages, God's people migrated to Europe, spreading across the Alps, through France, and into Italy. As the Church expanded into these areas, several individuals rose up to provide leadership to the scattered brethren. These men passionately encouraged God's people to be diligent in holding fast to the truth found in the Bible. Waldo of Lyons was one such leader who stands out in the pages of history.

A successful merchant, Waldo was called to teach repentance and adherence to the Word of God. He gave much of his wealth to the poor and used the rest to translate the scriptures into the common language. Many throughout France, Italy, Hungary, and into Russia, were converted through his work. These people became known as the Vaudois, Insabbati, Albigenses, and later Waldenses. Historian Peter Allix wrote of these people, stating:

...the Albigenses made the following confession: "That the Church of Rome was not the spouse of Christ, but the Church of confusion, drunk with the blood of the martyrs. That the polity of the Church of Rome was neither good nor holy, nor established by Jesus Christ..." The Albigenses expressly declared that they received the canonical books of the Old and New Testament, and that they rejected every doctrine that was not grounded upon, or authorized by them, or was contrary to any one point of doctrine that may be found there. According to which maxim, they

confessed that they rejected and condemned all the ceremonies, traditions, and ordinances of the Church of Rome, which they declared to be a den of thieves, and the whore that is spoken of in the Revelation (*The Ecclesiastical History of the Ancient Churches of Piedmont and of the Albigenses*, pp. 178, 194).

Henri Arnold, a Waldensian pastor, also wrote of their ancient origin. He claimed that these people had:

...descended from those refugees from Italy who, after St. Paul had there preached the gospel, abandoned their beautiful country and fled, like the woman mentioned in the Apocalypse, to these wild mountains, where they have to this day handed down the gospel from father to son in the same purity and simplicity as it was preached by St. Paul (*The Glorious Recovery*, p. xiv of preface).

One of the main traits of true believers is keeping the Ten Commandments and this Waldenses did; including the seventh-day Sabbath. Some have argued that these people did not keep the Sabbath because historical records find them not observing it in their latter years. However, this was after they began to compromise which Christ strictly warned them against, and a number of historians documented their long standing seventh day observance. For example:

Insabbati [they were called] not because they were circumcised, but because they kept the Jewish Sabbath (*History of the Sabbath*, p. 410).

Observance of the Sabbath by ceasing from worldly labours, is enjoined (Blair, *History of the Waldenses*, Vol. 1, p. 220).

They say that the blessed Pope Sylvester was the Antichrist of whom mention is made in the Epistles of St. Paul as having been the son of perdition. [They also say] that the keeping of the Sabbath ought to take place (*Ecclesiastical History of the Ancient Churches of Piedmont*, p. 169).

That we are to worship one only God, who is able to help us, and not the Saints departed; that we ought to keep holy the Sabbath day (*Luther's Fore-runners*, p.38).

In 1310, two hundred years before Luther's theses, the Bohemian brethren constituted one fourth of the population of Bohemia, and that they were in touch with the Waldenses who abounded in Austria, Lombardy, Bohemia, north Germany, Thuringia, Brandenburg, and Moravia. Erasmus pointed out how strictly Bohemian Waldenses kept the seventh day Sabbath (Armitage, *A History of the Baptists*, p.313).

For centuries evangelical bodies, especially the Waldenses, were called Insabbati because of Sabbath-keeping (Gui, *Manuel d' Inquisiteur*, Vol. 1, p.37).

The Waldenses were peaceful, virtuous, and industrious in their work. Because of this, they were initially tolerated and even protected by some civil authorities, and the Church flourished for centuries. However, as their numbers grew, their teaching became a threat to the Catholic Church. Rome then used their powerful military to hunt them down like vicious, wild animals.

That Woman Jezebel

Christ likens this era to the time of ancient Israel when Jezebel, using her power to control King Ahab,

seduced him into leading Israel deeper into apostasy and idolatry. In like manner, during the time of the Waldenses, there was a church corresponding to this infectious Jezebel. As we have already learned, a woman in prophecy symbolizes a church. Thus, the woman who rides the beast is referred to as the “mother of harlots” (Rev. 17:5). It was the Roman Catholic Church, a spiritual Jezebel that corrupted members of God’s Church during this era.

The fear of persecution propagated by the Roman system caused many Waldenses to compromise doctrine. History reveals that they eventually turned to the observance of Sunday instead of the Sabbath. This is noted by the Catholic Encyclopedia which states:

This period of peace was followed in 1488 by a crusade summoned by Innocent VIII against the Waldenses. The war did not succeed in stamping them out. But, soon after, the Reformation profoundly modified the sect’s history and doctrinal development (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15527b.htm>, retr. 11/14/2012).

Great Tribulation

As a result of the corrupt influence of the Roman church, Christ told these people that if they do not repent He will cast them into “great tribulation.” This statement does not refer to the great tribulation that comes on the entire world at the end of the age, but is a reference to the period of the inquisition and crusades. After living peacefully for decades, God’s people came head to head with the greatest, most ruthless religious power in the world. Pope Innocent III introduced this tribulation with the following Papal Bull:

Therefore by this present apostolical writing we give you a strict command that, by whatever means you can, you destroy all these heresies and expel from your diocese all who are polluted with

them. You shall exercise the rigor of the ecclesiastical power against them and all those who have made themselves suspected by associating with them. They may not appeal from your judgments, and if necessary, you may cause the princes and people to suppress them with the sword (*A Source Book for Medieval History*, Oliver J. Thatcher, E. H. McNeal, p. 210).

Targeting true believers for such severe persecution, the Roman church began to mark them so they could not buy or sell. Perhaps this was a type, or forerunner, of that which will occur in the end time. Regarding the treatment of these people, Professor Philippus van Limborch wrote:

It was the entire study and endeavour of the popes, to crush, in its infancy, every doctrine that any way opposed their exorbitant power. In the year 1163, at the synod of Tours, all the bishops and priests in the country of Tholouse, were commanded to take care, and to forbid under the pain of excommunication, every person from presuming to give reception, or the least assistance to the followers of this heresy, which first began in the country of Tholouse, whenever they shall be discovered. Neither were they to have any dealings with them in buying or selling; that by being thus deprived of the common assistances of life, they might be compelled to repent of the evil of their way. "Whosoever shall dare to contravene this order, let them be excommunicated, as a partner with them in their guilt. As many of them as can be found, let them be imprisoned by the Catholic princes, and punished with the forfeiture of all their substance." Some of the Waldenses, coming into the neighbouring kingdom of Arragon, king Ildefonsus, in the year 1194, put forth, against them, a very severe and bloody edict, by which 'he

banished them from his kingdom, and all his dominions, as enemies of the cross of Christ, prophaners of the Christian religion, and public enemies to himself and kingdom. He adds: "If any, from this day forwards, shall presume to receive into their houses, the aforesaid Waldenses and Inzabbatati, or other heretics, of whatsoever profession they be, or to hear, in any place, their abominable preachings, or to give them food, or to do them any kind office whatsoever; let him know, that he shall incur the indignation of Almighty God and ours; that he shall forfeit all his goods, without the benefit of appeal, and be punished as though guilty of high treason" (*History of the Inquisition*, pp. 88-89).

Seducing God's Servants to Commit Fornication

Under enormous pressure from the great false church and Rome's powerful armies, the Waldenses eventually began to compromise. At first, they practiced true faith in the secrecy of caves or the homes of members. As their lives became more unbearable, some began to partake of Catholic communion to avoid standing out as different. Through such practices they committed spiritual fornication.

Most of these people eventually adopted Sunday worship, a practice that has continued over the centuries by their descendants the Moolikins. Yet a Ukrainian remnant continues to hold fast to the Sabbath to this very day.

The destructive nature of such compromise is borne out by the history of this era. Because of their spiritual adultery, God allowed a time of tribulation to come upon this era. Christ boldly forewarned these people, explaining what would become of believers who would allow such heresies to creep into their lives. The Savior then followed with words of enormous comfort and great hope for those who would hold fast unto the end:

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. But that which ye have *already* hold fast till I come. 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (Revelation 2:23-29).

It is interesting to note that some of the European Waldenses displayed an emblem that reflected their calling and work. The logo displayed a single candlestick with seven stars in a half circle at the top. The light from this candle coincidently pointed to the fourth star. Surrounding the logo were the words LUX LUCET IN TENEBRIS, which in English means, *a light shines in the darkness*.



The Waldensian Emblem

Is it possible that the light from the candle pointing to the fourth star was inspired? Did they understand that they were the fourth era and that their light came through the fourth angel?

- *The Church in Sardis* -

In the 16th century, preachers began to emerge from obscurity caused by severe persecution in the middle ages. These believers owed much of their new freedom to the English scholar and theologian John Wycliffe who was martyred in the 14th Century. Though he was ordained in the Catholic Church, Wycliffe had a zealous insistence that the scriptures and not the church was the authoritative center of Christianity. He was the first to translate the Bible into the English language and his teaching spawned a movement that led to the Protestant Reformation.

Wycliffe's English translation encouraged many to read the Bible, and this led to God's Church being able to preach the true gospel to increasing numbers of people. From this sprung the fifth era of the Church known as Sardis. Unto these people, Christ said:

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. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. 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 (Revelation 3:1-3).

This letter is clearly reflected in the history of God's people. By the 1500s Bible reading led to the emergence of

several groups called Anabaptists. The historian Closeau noted their commitment to the Sabbath as well as the rejection of Catholic instituted holidays. In his book, *Anabaptism* he wrote:

The Anabaptists not only rejected the traditional feast days as Catholic inventions but also advanced strange views concerning Sunday. Anabaptists in Franconia, Thuringia, the Tirol, and southwest Germany and the Hutterites in Moravia maintained that there was no difference between Sunday and the other days of the week (p. 148).

In the latter part of the 15th century, a man named Andreas Eossi began to teach the truth. His work led to a movement of Sabbath keepers known as Sabbatarians. Besides the doctrine of the Sabbath, they also taught God's holy days, proper baptism, clean & unclean meats, and real repentance. In an article printed in 1890, Abrahams and Montefiore documented beliefs of the Sabbatarians stating:

About 1600, there was compiled 'the old hymn-book of the Sabbatarians,' probably by Eossi himself. This book is the most important source whence acknowledged of the doctrines of the sect may be derived; it is the oldest monument of their literature, and contains paraphrases of the Psalms and other poetical passages of the Bible, metrical renderings of a few extracts from the Jewish prayer book.... Of the 110 poetical compositions, which are to be found in three manuscripts of this old Sabbatarian hymnbook, no less than 44 relate to the Sabbath, which, on account of the special regard in which its celebration was held, gave the sect the name they bear. Five songs belong to the New Moon, 11 to the Festival of Passover, 6 to the Feast of Weeks, 6 to Tabernacles, 3 to the

New Year and 1 to the Day of Atonement.

They did not celebrate Purim and Chanukah. But even the Mosaic Laws they did not observe in their entirety, for they kept the dietary laws only up to a certain limit, and circumcision not at all. The Sabbath played the most important part in their religious life... They called the Sabbath celebration a 'spiritual marriage,' and adorned themselves for it in wedding attire. The Sabbath service consisted of prayers and hymns, introduced and concluded by the sermon or 'instruction.' ... they maintained that, in adhering to these observances, they were following the example and teaching of Jesus. 'He who keeps not the Sabbath will have no portion in the inheritance of Christ'; they celebrated 'the Passover of Israel, according to the command of our Christ.' They bound up with the Passover festival (in accordance with the views which they entertained regarding the millennium) the hope of the future redemption which Jesus will bring, in order to build up his millennial kingdom.

They declared the Christian festivals to be inventions of the popes, and even protested against the ringing of church bells. They regarded the Lord's Supper, not as a new institution of Jesus, but as an old Jewish custom. On the first night of Passover they ate unleavened bread, 'the bread of the Messiah,' calling to mind the Redeemer, who had appeared, and would one day come again (*Jewish Quarterly Review*, #4, v. II, p. 472-475).

During this time, a Church member named Steven Mumford came to America where he fellowshipped with a Puritan-separatist movement known as Baptists. Some of these people were converted and became known as Seventh Day Baptists. History reveals that several Puritan writers also became converted to the Sabbath and other scattered

congregations emerged referring to themselves as the Church of God.

Because these groups experienced a shortage of ministers, they sometimes mingled with the churches not of their faith. They believed that the biblical charge to have love for everyone gave them license to congregate with those who held different doctrinal opinions. In so doing, they compromised the truth and the Church eventually became contaminated with error.

In this divided state of the 1800's, some of God's people began to associate with those who followed the prophetic teaching of William Miller who was not a Sabbath keeper. This preacher studied extensively in the book of Daniel and believed He had found that Christ would return between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844.

When his predicted date came and went without any sign of the Messiah, Miller went back to re-study his figures. He then produced another date based upon the Kararite calendar, teaching that Christ would return April 18th 1844. People sold their possessions and waited for the Savior to show up. He did not return according to their schedule. Realizing that no one would know the day or hour of Christ's return (Mat. 24:36), Miller proceeded to apologize to his followers, stating:

I confess my error, and acknowledge my disappointment; yet I still believe that the day of the Lord is near, even at the door (*Memoirs of William Miller*, J. Himes, p. 256).

That incident became known as the "great disappointment" in history books. However, many of Miller's followers would not accept that they were wrong. They concluded that Christ must have returned, but they simply couldn't see Him. Armed with this conclusion, they created the doctrine of "investigative judgment" in which

they believed that Christ did come, but that He was now in the clouds going over the books before completing His return to the earth. Many who held this belief became known as Seventh Day Adventists, and this doctrine is still a part of that church's teaching today.

I have not found Thy Works perfect

After the "great disappointment," those who had always believed in keeping the Ten Commandments, God's food laws, the holy days, and rejected the world's holidays, retained the name Church of God (Eph. 3:15). They reorganized and became known as the Seventh Day Church of God; eventually publishing *The Bible Advocate*, and sponsoring hundreds of congregations around the world.

As a result of their differing opinions, this era of the Church was unable to do a large or effective work of preaching the gospel. Although they did retain the name Church of God and taught the necessity of keeping the Ten Commandments, they left little in the way of a mark on the world. They were alive, but it was as if they were dead (Rev. 3:1).

For example, the Seventh Day Adventists are one sect that came out of this fifth Church era. Although they faithfully observe the Sabbath, they became indifferent to the annual holy days and came to accept observance of "Christianized" pagan holidays such as Christmas and Easter. Another offshoot of the Sardis era is the Church of God 7th Day. Though these people keep the Sabbath, and reject Christmas and the traditional Easter observances, most teach that Christians are not obligated to observe the Feasts outlined in Leviticus 23.

However, to those of this era who would remain faithful, Christ said:

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. 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (Revelation 3:4-6).

Again we see this amazing truth. The letter to Sardis is accurately reflected in the secular history of God's Church.

- The Church in Philadelphia -

As we move even closer to our present age, it becomes obvious that the letter to the Church of Philadelphia also coincides with the record of Church history. As the prophetic scroll to the sixth era was unrolled, it stated:

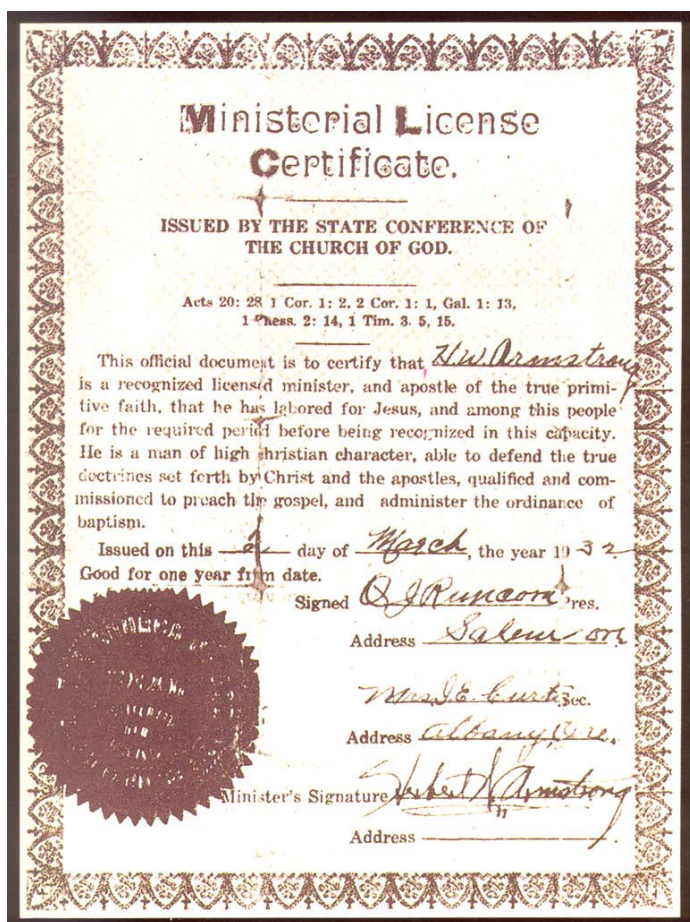
And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name (Revelation 3:7-8).

Just as Christ had prophesied, the sixth era started small and with little strength. Loma Armstrong, a quaint woman with exceptional character, was called as this era began. Once exposed to the truth, her conscience was pricked. She was convinced that Christians were required to keep the Saturday Sabbath and that Christ would one day rule on the earth for 1,000 years. Loma excitedly brought this understanding to her husband Herbert.

Convinced that mainstream Christianity could not possibly be wrong, Mr. Armstrong began a day and night

study in an attempt to refute his wife's newfound beliefs. With the guidance of God's Spirit, this intensive study led him to conclude it was he who had been wrong! He found that the Bible made this subject very clear. Christians were obligated to keep all of the Ten Commandments!

Herbert and Loma became converted and Mr. Armstrong was soon privileged to serve in Christ's ministry where he would ultimately be ordained the office of an apostle by the Conference of the Seventh Day Church of God.



In those days, ordinations were reissued annually. This is a copy of the second one issued to Herbert W. Armstrong by the Church of God.

At the time, Mr. Armstrong could never have known that, from these small beginnings, his profound calling would become a radical departure from the previous era of God's Church.

Under the leadership of God, this passionate man continued to grow in his understanding of the Scriptures. Mr. Armstrong then brought the truth regarding the annual holy days and the identity of modern day Israel to the attention of the present Church organization, but the leadership of the fifth era was resistant to change. Because they refused to accept the understanding God was giving him, the apostle felt compelled to separate from the parent body. In so doing, the Philadelphia era was born. Mr. Armstrong spent the rest of his life removing error and restoring God's truth to the Church. This great leader indicted counterfeit Christianity and powerfully proclaimed the gospel message of the coming Kingdom of God!

An Open Door

The work of the Philadelphia era was characterized by love, zeal, and a conviction for wholeheartedly seeking to obey God. As a result their 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).

In 1934 Mr. Armstrong began using personal campaigns and radio to preach the gospel to the public. For this reason, the Church was first called the Radio Church of God. One year later, the first *Plain Truth* magazine was published as the beginning of an evangelistic outreach. In 1951 another magazine was published for members titled



The Good News. This first humble effort mushroomed into a powerful arm of the Church of God, and for the next 35 years the Church grew steadily at an average of 30 percent a year.

By the late 1950s the Church was broadcasting its World Tomorrow radio program seven nights a week and using more wattage than any other radio program on the planet. The subscription list for *The Plain Truth* grew to an astounding 7.5 million issues being printed in seven languages every month.

Over the next five decades, nearly 100 different books and booklets would be published, and over 1400 articles written. To prepare a people to be kings and priests in the Kingdom, a thorough *Bible Correspondence Course* was created for adults. The Church also offered an introductory program for kids and teenagers in an attempt to turn the hearts of the children to the faith of their parents (Mal. 4:6).

A Little Strength

In 1947, with very little money, but armed with monumental faith, Mr. Armstrong opened Ambassador College in Pasadena, California. This Bible based educational institution was created as a means to train new ministers. In 1960 a second campus was opened in Bricket Wood, England, and in 1964 a third campus was opened in Big Sandy, Texas. The commission of the Church had become a worldwide endeavor so the corporate name was changed in 1968 to The Worldwide Church of God—a name that accurately reflected the growing scope of the work.

Soon after, the Church became the largest purchaser of both radio and television for religious programming in the entire United States. Church membership grew to 470 congregations around the world with nearly 140,000 people attending the annual Feast of Tabernacles. By the 1980s, the work had earned such positive recognition that Mr. Armstrong was given the opportunity to fly around the world

and meet with various kings, ambassadors, and dignitaries; bringing God's message of hope to millions.

Not Denied My Name

As the Church became a powerful witness to the world, the money and power generated by this growth began to attract individuals with a different spirit. Mr. Armstrong's various trips abroad created a leadership vacuum at headquarters.

Liberal-minded men eagerly filled that void bringing with them personal agendas such as Systematic Theology Project. This was a self-appointed committee set up to review and publish doctrinal articles that brought in subtle changes which were designed to water down the work and teachings of the Church. Summarizing these events, Mr. Armstrong wrote:

Late in 1971 many of our members became confused over propaganda reaching our people over a "sacred names" teaching. This purported that whenever the names of God or of Jesus are mentioned, they must not be spoken by their names in the English language, but in the Hebrew language...

At that time, it was suggested that a special Doctrinal Team be appointed to research the question more technically to verify the real truth. We wanted the teaching and doctrines of the Church to be verified beyond any room for doubts. I appointed a Doctrinal Research Committee to pursue an in-depth research of the subject...

The first committee I had assigned to research the "sacred names" error did reaffirm the truth on that question beyond doubt. But soon a few would-be scholars had established themselves into a "Doctrinal Team." What started as an honest effort to find and establish real TRUTH in due

time turned into a group of “would-be scholars” not appointed by me, seeking to destroy the true doctrines of the Church.

This brought controversy into the Church. These self-professed “scholars,” influenced by teaching in universities, in which they were enrolling for higher degrees, were becoming more and more liberal. They wanted to skirt as close as possible to the precipice of secularism, falling off the cliff into Satan's world.

These were the years when my commission required that I be absent from Pasadena, and traveling overseas to almost all parts of the world as many as 300 of the 365 days of the year. This liberal group, small at first, came to be in executive positions at Pasadena, surrounding and influencing the one responsible for day-to-day administration at headquarters during my absence. Much of what they did was carefully kept from me...

Just before the January, 1978, conference I was determined to prevent doctrinal controversy. I was also due to leave on another 'round-the-world trip. I had decided to postpone the trip until after the conference in order to keep controversy out of the conference. But the one to be left in charge in my absence urged me to remain for the opening morning session, so that I could open the conference, and keep my departure at 12 noon, and he gave me his word no doctrines would be discussed in the conference, only administrative matters.

I agreed to this. I opened the conference, left immediately for the airport and had lunch on the plane... I had not gotten very far out over the Pacific Ocean that afternoon, until in the afternoon session of the conference a voluminous printed work called “Systematic Theology Project,” or “STP” for short, was distributed to

the ministry with specific instructions that this was a definite outline of basic Church doctrines, and no minister was to preach anything contrary to this treatise.

I knew absolutely nothing of this STP, or that it had been in preparation. It had been carefully concealed from me. It was a flagrant violation of the promise made to induce me to leave so this doctrinal change in Church teaching could be given to all ministers without my knowledge. I knew nothing of this STP in spite of claims made by others, until a copy was brought to me by some loyal ministers in late April or early May of 1978 when I then notified every minister in the world to return his copy immediately and ignore all its liberal doctrines and teachings...

Some of these liberal ministers who worked on and produced the STP and the one who was in charge of executive administration in my absence were disfellowshipped and others left the Church (*The Worldwide News*, June 24, 1985, p 2-3).

The politics and power struggles that resulted from this liberal spirit ultimately led to an attack on the Church by the State of California. As Mr. Armstrong continued:

At the time of the Feast of Tabernacles that fall, 1978... a conspiracy was hatched to attack and destroy the Church by the legal process of a class action lawsuit. Some six or seven liberals, former members, signed the suit against the Church. This resulted in an ex parte order by a judge. Secretly without prior notice, deputies on order of the Attorney General's office swooped down on the Church on the morning of Jan. 3, 1979. The ex parte order had been signed by a judge late the day before.

A very severe struggle for the existence and life of the Church ensued. Some months later the State dropped the case, and still later an appellate court judge issued a declaration from the bench that the lawsuit was groundless and should never have been filed (ibid, p. 3).

Following these dramatic events, Mr. Armstrong suffered from cardiac arrest, but was miraculously brought back from death's door to put the Church back on track. He shut down the colleges for restructuring and took over the television production himself. He proceeded to re-issue the 18 restored truths; an inspired set of doctrinal positions. There was also a series of ministerial terminations which seemed to eliminate much of the liberal element. The Church was restored under his renewed leadership. Its doctrines were put back in place, but as Mr. Armstrong had written:

For some years now, there have been some, like vultures, waiting for me to die. They would like to come back and take over the leadership of the Church in my stead. I have been deeply concerned about this (ibid, p. 4).

The Synagogue of Satan

Through these events, the seeds for the birth of the next era were sown. Just as Mr. Armstrong had predicted, the same liberal element resurfaced after his death. The new leaders began to use the resources of the Church to destroy everything that God had built through him. They formulated a plan to subtly remake the Church in the image of mainstream Christianity. The new liberal ministry disfellowshipped the faithful who protested the changes and the prophecy of a falling away was realized (2Ths. 2:3; 2Tim. 4:3-4; Jer. 23:1; Eze. 34). To the remnant of the sixth era that would remain faithful, the Messiah comforts them with these words:

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 (Revelation 3:9).

Those false teachers, who acted as if they were true Christians, infiltrated and infected the Church of God with liberalism. Christ reveals that in the Kingdom they will come to worship at the feet of those who remain faithful. However, before this takes place, God made another promise to those who would hold fast. He will protect them from the great tribulation that is to come:

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. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (Revelation 3:10-13).

As the apostasy deepened, those who remained faithful either left or were cast out of the church. Various splinter groups formed from the exodus. The once unified Church devolved into numerous scattered groups holding different doctrinal positions. The remnant of this monumental era would now have to hold fast within confused and diverse environments.

The Key of David and the Open Door

Many have wondered what is meant by the key of David and the open door that Christ promised the Church of Philadelphia. The answer to this question is found in a prophetic message that God revealed to His servant Isaiah centuries earlier.

During Isaiah's ministry, Shebna, the king's royal treasurer, usurped a position God intended for Eliakim who was the son of the high priest. God said he would remove this imposter and restore the office to Eliakim. The office in question was that of the key holder to King David's house. Speaking to Shebna, Isaiah wrote:

It shall come to pass in that day that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open (Isaiah 22:20-22).

God referred to a unique key that admitted an individual to the king's house. In the days of Eliakim, the office holder wore this key as a badge of enormous authority on his shoulder. There, it could be seen by all. Anyone wishing to visit the king was required to first have the approval of this trusted man. Only he could admit individuals to the king's house.

Christ chose this specific example to make a profound point to those of the Philadelphian era. Christ revealed that, as the Son, He alone holds the key to the King's house. Only He has the authority to admit or reject those desiring to enter the Father's palace.

To the faithful who find themselves cast out for holding fast to God's Word, Christ promises that He will give them an open door to the Father's house (Isa. 66:5; Rev. 3:12).

- *The Church of the Laodiceans* -

The apostasy occurring after Mr. Armstrong's death rocked God's Church, greatly affecting those who would find themselves in the last era. The shock wave it produced worked to create an attitude that would characterize the time in which we now live. As the Apostle John wrote:

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; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. 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 (Revelation 3:14-17).

Lukewarm—neither Cold nor Hot

Those who rejected the Protestant changes of the apostasy were either cast out or eventually withdrew from the parent body. This had a unique result. The longer people stayed in the corrupt environment, the more they internalized the liberal spirit and watered-down doctrine. The membership watched as a great number of ministers, whose job it was to protect God's people, protected themselves instead. Brethren felt as if they had the rug pulled out from under them. Stunned and numbed by what God had allowed to occur, many lost faith and zeal.

Believers began to leave the now apostate church; forming new, independent organizations. To some, it was an exciting sense of liberation. A kind of euphoria grew regarding what they were doing as an organization. However, many individuals would display little zeal for the primary purpose of their calling; conforming to the character of Christ. Instead, thousands became half-hearted toward

Christ's commission to preach the gospel of the Kingdom and warn the world of the tragedy prophesied to come.

As a result of the apostasy, enormous distrust developed among Church members. Many of those first to leave developed an attitude of superiority becoming critical toward those who came out later. Brethren began judging each other based on their opinion that they were Philadelphian while others were Laodicean.

Because of the relative failure of the ministry, people started trusting their personal judgment regarding spiritual matters; evaluating and criticizing the leadership according to what they thought should be taught. This judgmental attitude has led many to have little respect for authority in the Church of God and few are willing to accept legitimate correction. We now see that it is not a coincidence that the name of this last era fits its prevailing attitude.

What's in a Name?

God names things for what they are or the function they perform. The name Laodicea comes from a combination of two Greek words, *laos* and *dikē*. The first of these is defined as "people" and the second is a word meaning "judgment, punish, or vengeance" (*Strong's*, G2992; G1349). Putting the two definitions together we find an expression that means a *people who judge* and a *people fit for judgment*.

The definition of this name is not coincidental. Christ addressed this era with a title that fits its prevailing attitude. This is a time when Church members judge others, decide doctrines for themselves, and will face God's judgment. As Christ stated:

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you (NKJ, Matthew 7:1-2).

In Need of Nothing

This is the era in which we now live. God's Church is no longer united in belief, but exists in an environment that is a blend of truth and falsehood. With no true apostle to lead and correct the Church, personal preferences have become deciding factors when determining the meaning of Scripture.

Some have created pet doctrines in self-righteous attempts for others to follow them. Other groups, afraid of losing members and tithes, refuse to make changes when they discover additional truth; choosing instead to cater to what the people want to believe (2Tim. 4:3-4).

In addition, many Church leaders have become proud and arrogant. One man claims to be "that prophet," and another presumptuously teaches that he is God's apostle. One minister says that he and his wife are the two witnesses; another stated that he will train the two witnesses; and one more boldly calls himself the "end-time prophet of the God of Abraham." Thinking that they are superior, these men condemn others who do not accept their teaching, or are not part of their personal work.

Numerous leaders and brethren claim to keep the commandments, but do so according to their own biases instead of the clear teachings of the Bible. Consequently, the Church of God has become sloppy in our obedience or even selective in what we will or will not believe and observe. In fact, many have become independent. They harbor their own unique beliefs, they no longer associate with others, yet they are convinced that they are fully in the faith.

**The time of warning has almost come to its end!
We are asleep and absolutely must wake up!**

Be Zealous and Repent

Christ admonishes the end time Church that, if we do not change we will have to experience the fiery trial of the great tribulation. Those who must be corrected in this way will have to endure unimaginable pain and suffering in order to obtain the golden character necessary to enter His Kingdom. The Messiah warned:

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. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. 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. 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. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (Revelation 3:18-22).

Conclusion

Down through the ages, the Church of God has experienced exactly what was written in these seven letters. We can be certain that the epistles in Revelation were recorded as an admonishment—a warning to the seven Church eras.

The historical record assures us that we are now living in the last of these eras. A spirit of complacency and superiority permeates the scattered Church. Thankfully, among the various congregations, a faction yet remains with a spirit of Philadelphia. This gives us enormous hope. If we will repent, we can still have the opportunity to rule with Christ at His return.

- Seven Church Eras -

<i>Era</i>	<i>Historical Name</i>	<i>Approximate Date of Existence</i>
Ephesus	Christians	31 - 135
Smyrna	Nazarenes	135 - 450
Pergamos	Paulicians	450 - 1050
Thyatira	Vaudois, Insabbati, Albigenses, Waldenses	1050 - 1600
Sardis	Seventh Day Church of God	1600 - present
Philadelphia	Worldwide Church of God <i>now among the scattered churches of God</i>	1933 - present
Laodicea	Scattered - with various names	1972 - present

Chapter 7

~ Exhibit 7 ~

The Evidence of the Old Covenant

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.

~ 1 Corinthians 10:11 ~

The New Covenant is an agreement between God and His Church. In like manner, the Old Covenant was an agreement made by the Eternal and the nation of Israel; making that nation God's Church in the wilderness.

The word church is taken from the Greek *ekklēsia* meaning "a calling out, meeting, congregation, assembly" (*Strong's*, G1577). In its most basic sense, it means *a people called together by God*. Because Israel was the assembly that God called out of Egypt, they were His Church during the Old Covenant. Luke pointed this out when he wrote:

This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he that was in **the church in the wilderness** with the angel which spake to him in the Mount Sina, and *with* our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us (Acts 7:37-38).

The fact that ancient Israel was God's Church follows a pattern of duality found throughout the Bible. In His plan, the Almighty consistently provides a physical representation that is a forerunner of a spiritual reality.

For example, there was an Old Covenant and a New Covenant. There was a first Adam and a second Adam—Christ. There was physical Israel and there is spiritual Israel—the Church. There was a physical Jerusalem and there is a spiritual New Jerusalem to come. And these are only a few of the many parallels between Old Covenant events and their New Testament fulfillment.

Within this duality, the record of ancient Israel also reveals seven distinct physical eras. Those historical periods were like a remarkable mirror foreshadowing the spiritual eras that would occur in the in the New Testament.

Seven Golden Lamps

Like the seven lamp stands displayed in the book of Revelation, the Old Covenant eras were also symbolized by a lamp stand. This unique structure was built for the temple and constructed exactly as God commanded Moses:

Thou shalt make a candlestick *of* pure gold: *of* beaten work shall the candlestick be made: his shaft, and his branches, his bowls, his knops, and his flowers, shall be of the same. And six branches shall come out of the sides of it; three branches of the candlestick out of the one side, and three branches of the candlestick out of the other side... and thou shalt make the seven lamps thereof: and they shall light the lamps thereof, that they may give light over against it. And the tongs thereof, and the snuff dishes thereof, *shall be of* pure gold. *Of* a talent of pure gold shall he make it, with all these vessels. And look that thou make *them* after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount (Exodus 25:31-40).

This magnificent lamp was made from a divine blueprint, reflecting that which is in heaven (Heb. 8:5). After this design was given to Moses, it was constructed and positioned in the holy place opposite the showbread. This beautiful piece of art was not just for show. It was symbolic; foreshadowing the light that was to shine forth through the people of Israel. Like the set of lamps described in the book of Revelation, each lamp represented one of seven eras that occurred during the history of the Old Covenant.



Eyewitnesses to Moses and Joshua—Ephesus

The first era of the Old Covenant took place during the time of Moses, Joshua, and the elders. These people experienced the establishment of Israel as a nation in Canaan. The great patriarch Moses had also prophesied that one day God would send a prophet like himself to Israel (Deu. 18:15). By this, God made a direct comparison between Moses and Christ. As an instrument used to redeem Israel from Egypt, Moses prefigured the Savior who would one day redeem spiritual Israel—the Church.

Those who assisted and supported Moses also foreshadowed the early followers of Jesus. They were eyewitnesses to the miracles performed by God through His anointed servant. As the Scriptures explain:

When Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land. And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, **who had seen all the great works of the Lord**, that he did for Israel (Judges 2:6-7).

We see that the first Old Covenant era comprised of those who witnessed the works that God performed through Moses and Joshua. They observed great miracles that generated awe and enormous enthusiasm. However, as this period came to an end, the people began to lose heart. The original leaders were no longer there to guide them. The people failed to continue to follow God, and this resulted in persecution from the inhabitants of the land.

The New Testament Parallel

The Church in Ephesus paralleled the first Old Covenant era. The disciples were eyewitnesses to the dramatic miracles that Christ performed. They experienced the establishment of the New Testament Church as newly begotten believers received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. These new converts followed Christ's chosen leaders as they also performed miracles. The beginning of the New Testament Church was exciting!

However, after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the Church found that they had to fight a constant stream of persecution from without as well as false teachers who were creeping in. The Kingdom did not come when they expected, and many lost their first love.

The first Old Covenant era ended with Joshua who was the most faithful last eyewitness to Moses. The New Testament era of Ephesus ended similarly. It concluded at the close of the first century under the leadership of John, the last living apostle who was the closest eyewitness to Jesus.

The Period of the Judges—Smyrna

The passing of those remaining individuals who were eye witnesses to God's miracles performed through Moses and Joshua signified a definite turning point in Israel's history. Like the corresponding New Testament era, the next generation was dramatically different. As the book of Judges continues to document:

All that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim (Judges 2:10-11).

After the first generation passed, zeal for God also withered. The people let down and lost much of the truth God had given them. The Israelites began to worship false gods and, as a result, they suffered persecution at the hand of their neighbors. Their enemies would run forays into their land, often stealing their produce. Israel was in a fluctuating state of fear and poverty. This began the second Old Covenant era—the time of the Judges. As the Scriptures testify:

And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger. And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. The anger of the lord was hot against

Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies (Judges 2:12-14).

The New Testament Parallel

During the Old Covenant era of the Judges, Israel suffered poverty as they were raided by their neighbors. They claimed to be God's people and called themselves Israelites, but many worshiped false gods. By this, they foreshadowed the New Testament era, Smyrna, of which Christ said:

I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, and **the blasphemy of those which say they are Jews, and are not**, but are the synagogue of Satan. (Rev 2:10).

After the death of the Apostle John, a notable transition took place in the New Testament Church. Because Rome was the capital of the empire, the Roman church came to believe it had the right to act as the official headquarters for the entire body. They claimed to be Jews, that is true believers of God, but they were not (Rev. 3:9). They were deeply infected by Gnosticism and the influence of Rome's paganism. Just like Israel during the period of the Judges, the Church let their loyalty for God slip and they experienced poverty and persecution as a result.

The United Monarchy—Pergamos

The third era of the Old Covenant occurred during the united monarchy. At this time, God's people were protected and they prospered. The word Pergamos means "fortified" (*Strong's*, G4010) and like the New Testament era of Pergamos, the nation was strengthened.

After the unification of Israel under the leadership of King David and Solomon, God's promise was fulfilled. The nation had become the "promised land" they had always hoped for—a land of milk and honey. They were built up, enjoyed peace, and were generally well off. Regarding this period, the chronicler wrote:

Judah and Israel *were* many, as the sand which *is* by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry. And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life. And Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meal, Ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep, beside harts, and roebucks, and fallowdeer, and fatted fowl. For he had dominion over all *the region* on this side the river, from Tiphseh even to Azzah, over all the kings on this side the river: and he had peace on all sides round about him (1 Kings 4:20-24).

The nation experienced enormous affluence. However, like the corresponding New Testament era of Pergamos, ancient Israel also fell into the same apostasy—the doctrine of Balaam. Intermarriage with unbelievers became the driving force in the demise of this era of God's people. Solomon entered into relationships with foreign women, and this led to the worship false Gods. As the Scriptures document:

But king **Solomon loved many strange women**, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, *and* Hittites; Of the nations *concerning* which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto

you: *for* surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, *that his wives turned away his heart after other gods:* and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of David his father. Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as *did* David his father (1 Kings 11:1-6).

Desiring to cement relations with other nations, Solomon married the daughters of foreign kings and allowed them to retain their gods. He erected places for them to worship and eventually participated in their abominations. Israel accepted and even welcomed this spiritual fornication. Consequently, the monarchy began to deteriorate and Israel became divided as the third era of the Old Covenant Church came to a close.

The New Testament Parallel

The corresponding New Testament era began with an age of fortification and expansion. The Taurus mountain range provided the Paulicians a degree of safety that permitted growth. However, as the heretical Roman church became more powerful, invasive, and threatening, many felt they had to either go along with various aspects of false doctrine or migrate elsewhere.

Under the influence of the Nicolaitian teaching, some believed that it did not matter what a person did as long as they had the love in their heart. Therefore, many found they could avoid persecution by conforming to Catholic practices such as christening their children. Others attended mass to

avoid detection. This fulfilled Christ's words that they would participate in spiritual fornication (Rev. 2:14). Rather than obeying God and seeking His protection, they eventually took up arms and suffered tremendously under the sword of the Byzantine Empire.

The Divided Monarchy and Captivity—Thyatira

The fourth Old Covenant era of God's Church existed during Israel's divided monarchy. Because of their many sins, God allowed civil war and separated the northern ten tribes from Judah. The northern tribes were led by Solomon's servant Jeroboam whom God had ordained to be their king. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin followed the leadership of Solomon's son Rehoboam in the south.

Because the Temple was located in Jerusalem, the priestly tribe of Levi also allied with Judah. The result of this conflict led the northern ten tribes to pull away, eventually forming a nation of apostate believers.

This fourth Old Covenant era corresponds to the New Testament Church of Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29). Christ told John to write that Thyatira would allow Jezebel to seduce them into fornication which is exactly what occurred during the time of the divided monarchy of the Old Covenant.

The successive kings of the northern tribes became progressively more evil. King Ahab not only continued in the sins of Jeroboam, but he married a gentile woman by the name of Jezebel. He allowed her to lead the people to worship Baal which resulted in one of the worst reigns in Israel's history. Apostasy spread throughout the land and nearly everyone came to worship a false god. As the Scriptures explain:

And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and

served Baal, and worshipped him. And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him (1 Kings 16:31-33).

God punished the ten tribes for their sins by allowing them to be taken captive. The brutal armies of Assyria transported the Israelites to Persia and then transplanted Persians into the land of Israel where the new inhabitants became known as Samaritans.

Nearly 100 years later, Judah also sinned by boldly breaking the Sabbath and committing idol worship. As a result, they also suffered great destruction and were taken captive to Babylon where practice of the true faith required the consent of gentile kings such as Nebuchadnezzar and Darius. While the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was preserved, it certainly did not flourish. As the Chronicler wrote:

And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia (2 Chronicles 36:19-20).

The New Testament Parallel

The events of this time in Israel's history are again reflected in the corresponding New Testament era of Thyatira. This fourth era also compromised their faith and had to suffer the consequences. The great whore of Rome was like Jezebel who led Israel astray and, during the Middle Ages, Church members made similar concessions in their worship. As a result, they experienced great tribulation.

This era endured the horror of the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition. Church literature was burned and the gospel message was almost completely eliminated. God's people suffered terribly and, although they were not completely destroyed, they were no longer a visible entity in the world (Mat. 16:18). The commission to powerfully preach the gospel was no longer being fulfilled. Thus these New Testament events mirror what transpired during the era of the divided monarchy.

Return and the Diaspora—Sardis

After conquering Babylon, the Persians took a dramatically different approach to their subject nations. They believed in cultural pluralism—a system of rule in which the inhabitants of occupied territories were allowed to live in their land and worship their own gods. Believing this approach would give them the favor of all deities within the empire, King Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their land and worship their God. Thus the fifth era of the Old Covenant began as God's people came out of captivity.

Once freed, a number of believers went back to their homeland. God used Ezra to lead His people in rebuilding the temple and re-establishing true worship. Once again known as the people of YHWH, they carried His name and the faith remained alive. However, for the most part, the work was weak and ineffectual. It seemed barely alive.

The majority of the people did not share the zeal exhibited by a relative few leaders such as Ezra and Nehemiah. They wavered in their enthusiasm to support rebuilding the wall, the temple, and establishing God's law throughout the land. While the return of Judah to Jerusalem was certainly God's doing, the entire work was performed under the control and sponsorship of a gentile king (Ezra 5:13-17; 6:1-13; Neh. 2:7-9).

In addition, most of the Levites had no desire to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 8:15-17). Making matters worse,

the people intermingled and married gentile women (Ezra 9). Many also seemed reluctant to complete the work. As a result, God chided them for caring more about building their own homes than constructing His temple (Hag. 1:6-10).

When Nehemiah heard of the terrible state of the Jews and the rebuilding project in Jerusalem, he sought permission from the King of Persia to visit Judah. Upon arrival, he found unbelievers persecuting God's people for their work (Neh. 2:1-6; 4:6-8). Moreover, the people were not fully committed to God. They lost His blessing resulting in a lack of basic necessities. Many had to borrow from their neighbors to continue planting their land. Nehemiah was shocked to find that wealthy Israelites had exacted usury from their poorer brethren; even selling some of them to the heathen as slaves. Nehemiah reprimanded the people and convinced them to take an oath of obedience to the Eternal (Neh. 5:1-12).

Soon after this, the high priest had a great chamber built in the temple for Tobia who was an Ammonite and friend of Sanballat. By doing this, the very leader of the priesthood broke God's law (Deu. 23:3; Neh. 13:1-9). Worse yet, many of the people let down in supporting the Levites with their tithes, and the priests were forced to go back to the fields in order to earn a living. As a result, God's law was not being taught publicly. Upon His second return, Nehemiah corrected these errors—chastising the people for not properly keeping the Sabbath and other laws of God (Neh. 13:10-31).

Another piece of evidence demonstrating that this was the fifth era of the Old Covenant Church is found in the two reactions of the people when the foundation for the second temple was laid. The younger ones who had never seen the first temple rejoiced in what they had accomplished, but for those who had seen the former edifice it was a bitter moment. This reflected the spiritual state of this era. As Ezra wrote:

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because *he is* good, for his mercy *endureth* for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. **But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off (Ezra 3:10-13).**

Those who had seen Solomon's temple believed that they had a good reason to grieve. Not only was this sanctuary smaller in size, it was inferior in the quality of its workmanship. Further, upon gaining their freedom, many Jews chose not to return to Jerusalem. Instead, they thought it best to use their new found liberty to spread out west in search of a better life. To preserve their culture and language in these new lands, they built synagogues in the cities they inhabited.

Those who did return were restored as a nation. They survived and continued to carry the name Israel, but they were less than effectual in restoring commitment and passion for God in the land. There were no great exploits such as those done by the Judges. They won no significant wars and produced no great fortifications or building projects like those of kings David and Solomon. Once again, a body of

God's people existed, but when it came to their works, it was if they were dead (Rev. 3:1).

The New Testament Parallel

Following the middle ages, the corresponding New Testament era arose during the 1500's when God's Church came out of hiding. The terrible persecution they had endured eased, and to a degree the Church was revived. Some of these believers were called Anabaptists but during the next century they were dubbed Sabbatarians.

While they seemed to have more freedom to practice their faith, they received early persecution just like the returning Jews in Ezra's day. People such as John Trask and his faithful wife were dragged out of church and jailed. Many fled such discrimination and, as a consequence, the Church experienced its own Diaspora. A man named Stephen Mumford was one such Christian who migrated west.

Like the Jewish people who had built synagogues where ever they went, Mumford and others brought the faith to distant lands. Several small congregations rose up in America calling themselves the Church of God. Having few to fellowship with, Church members often mixed with other congregations—thus paralleling the Israelites who intermarried with Gentiles.

Under the leadership of Dugger and Dodd, many people came to believe in the seventh-day Sabbath. The main body of these believers called themselves the Seventh Day Church of God, which still exists today.

The Church once again became visible. They had the name Church of God, but were splintered and lacked enthusiasm for the whole truth. They accomplished little in terms of a unified, visible work. For this reason the general public knows little about them today. However, it was out of this work that the next New Testament era arose—one that would be noted for its zeal.

The Maccabees Restore the Faith—Philadelphia

The sixth era of the Old Covenant began with a people who came to be known as the Maccabees. While this monumental era of Israel is not specifically mentioned in the canonized books of the Bible, their history was recorded in the book of *Maccabees*. Virtually all biblical scholars recognize the first volumes of the book as an authentic documentation of Judah and the events of God's people during the 2nd century B.C. For this reason, many publishers include them in their printing of the holy Scriptures.

Small in number and having little physical strength, this movement rose to power and influence during a time of overwhelming dominance by the next beast power—the Greek empire. The first book of Maccabees tells the story of this era's struggle for religious and political liberty under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus. This courageous man led his faithful family and friends in a heroic revolt against the powerful Greek army.

In 167 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanies was the commander of the Greek war machine. This general was a prophetic type of the future beast who will crush all its enemies during the last days of man's rule on earth. In like manner, Antiochus brutally killed thousands of innocent men, women, and children. He even went so far as to turn the temple in Jerusalem into a temple for Greek gods and forced the Jews to worship heathen idols. Jewish history recorded the tragic story of the tyranny and barbarism of Antiochus as he attempted to unite the world under his rule:

Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that all should give up their particular customs. All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath. And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns

of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane Sabbaths and festivals, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. He added, "And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die. In such words he wrote to his whole kingdom. He appointed inspectors over all the people and commanded the towns of Judah to offer sacrifice, town by town. Many of the people, everyone who forsook the law, joined them, and they did evil in the land; they drove Israel into hiding in every place of refuge they had. Now on the fifteenth day of Chislev, in the one hundred forty-fifth year, they erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. They also built altars in the surrounding towns of Judah, and offered incense at the doors of the houses and in the streets. The books of the law that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the law, was condemned to death by decree of the king. They kept using violence against Israel, against those who were found month after month in the towns. On the twenty-fifth day of the month they offered sacrifice on the altar that was on top of the altar of burnt offering. According to the decree, they put to death the women who had their children circumcised, and their families and those who circumcised them; and they hung the infants from their mother's necks. But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat

unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die. Very great wrath came upon Israel (1 Maccabees 1:41-64).

Before the revolt of the Maccabees, the Jewish resistance to this powerful empire was passive and amounted to little more than prayer and patience. However, in time, a small cadre of Jews resisted with adamant resolve. Against all odds, Mattathias Maccabeus led his five sons, grandchildren, and a band of faithful men to a daring victory against the Greek army. This small faction of believers exhibited such strength that they came to be called *Maccabees* meaning “hammers” (*Strong’s*, H4717). This name related to the family who led God’s people, and it was a reflection of their unrelenting pounding of the Greek forces.

After several successful forays began to break up the Greek ranks, Jewish resistance became much more active. This small but determined group finally drove out the Greeks and restored the temple, rededicating it on Kislev 25 (*The Original Maccabees Bible*, p. 16-17).

Following this amazing victory, the Maccabees restored courage and great zeal for God among the people. Faith in God was given a monumental boost. The air was electric with an enormous passion and dedication to God’s law and way of life. This ardent family revived enthusiasm throughout the land. Even though they were often outnumbered many times over, they overcame armies and nations much more powerful than themselves. They regained and maintained control over the temple in Jerusalem as well as the land of Judah. God’s people even found favor and admiration in the eyes of surrounding nations. On a number of occasions, foreign dignitaries would send Israel gifts along with documents of goodwill in an effort to promote peace.

The renewed faith generated by this family caused the Jews to overcome great obstacles. God’s people were

once again a great nation in the midst of the Promised Land. Their success was an obvious sign of God's intervention as He gave them repeated victory over their enemies. These faithful people left an enormous mark on 100 years of Church history.

The Jews continue to celebrate their phenomenal success by the feast of Hanukkah—a celebration that pictures the eight days during which God purportedly continued the supply oil in the lamps of the brave soldier's until they attained victory. The Maccabees ruled faithfully until 63 B.C., when Rome became the dominant empire in the area.

The New Testament Parallel

There is an obvious parallel between this Old Covenant era and the era of Philadelphia. The sixth era of God's New Testament Church is also characterized as having little strength. It too started small with one man and his family.

Herbert W. Armstrong opposed the paganization of Christianity and was the instrument the Almighty used to restore the spiritual temple. He was uncompromising in this regard. With a **strong arm** he **hammered** the unbending truth of God's law and Christ's message of hope into the ears, minds, and hearts of all who would listen.

As a result of Mr. Armstrong's efforts many members responded with renewed zeal. Others were converted, and tens of thousands wholeheartedly supported the work. This era of the New Testament Church ultimately left a monumental mark on the world and in the lives of untold numbers. A remnant of this work is still alive today and, in the end, those who remain faithful will not run out of oil—God's Holy Spirit (Mat. 25:1-13).

The Pharisees—Laodicea

About 100 years after the temple was restored by the Maccabees, General Pompey defeated all opposition and gained control of the Middle East for the Roman Empire.

During this time, two main groups formed within the ranks of those exercising leadership in Judea—the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Thus, as the sixth era of the Old Covenant waned, a new group of spiritual leaders arose out of the Maccabean successes, and the seventh era of the Old Covenant began.

The Sadducees were aristocratic families of the priestly line who recognized only the precepts derived from the first five books of the Bible. They interpreted the law literally and denied the concept of immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, and the existence of angels. It was this group of religious leaders who performed the temple worship and its rites which included the sacrificial work.

Because the Sadducees were composed primarily of the upper class, they tended to be less popular with the common people. Thus, the Pharisees enjoyed the approval of the general populous. It was this Pharisaic sect of Judaism that dominated the seventh and final era of the Old Covenant.

The Pharisees accepted the prophets and writings, believed that angels exercised influence in the affairs of men, and taught a form of the resurrection of the dead. However, they emphasized the oral law over the Scriptures and strictly adhered to their religious traditions rather than God's commandments.

By the first century A.D., the Pharisees had come to represent the beliefs and practices of the majority of the Palestinian Jews. However, much of their doctrine was driven by their desire for personal recognition and power. Their faith eventually became a show of their perceived religious superiority, and they eventually came to believe their own facade. Armed with the idea that they were the most righteous, they felt justified in slandering and persecuting true followers of God to preserve their position and power base. Christ identified them with the following words:

Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites!**
for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which

indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity (Matthew 23:27-28).

The Pharisees created various traditions that eventually became their rules for religious conduct in Israel. They believed their sect's opinion raised them to a higher spiritual plane, and they condemned others who did not accept their doctrines. Their oral rules became the focus of their religion; causing them to miss the spiritual point of God's truth. Outwardly they had an appearance of righteousness, but they were filled with sin. For this reason they suffered a type of the end time tribulation. The powerful beast of the Roman Empire eventually stamped them out, destroyed the temple, and scattered the priesthood. This destruction occurred over a period of time lasting more than three years.

The Modern Church Parallel

Today, we see several striking parallels between the last era of the Old Covenant and that of the New Testament. For example, Christ came to the earth at the end of the last Old Covenant era and He will return at the conclusion of seventh era of the New Testament Church. Moreover, just as John the Baptist was an Elijah figure before Christ's first coming, Jesus explained that another Elijah is yet to come (Mat. 17:10-12; Mal. 4:5).

One of the two witnesses will likely be this Elijah figure; a prophet having the power to call fire down from heaven and start or stop the rain at will (Rev. 11:5-6). This powerful spiritual leader will restore all things to a divided and doctrinally confused Church just prior to Christ's second coming.

Another parallel lies in the fact that, like the

Pharisees who were willing to kill Christ to protect their positions, most Church leaders today are more interested in protecting their status rather than God's truth! Therefore, maintaining the status quo has become a major concern.

When the New Testament Church was faced with an apostasy taking place among the top leadership, ministers feared losing their jobs. Instead of speaking the truth directly to the brethren, the ministry preached "safe" sermons to protect themselves. Others who resisted the apostasy came to think that they had sacrificed a great deal. They came to believe they had "held fast" as a result of their righteousness. An attitude of superiority developed among many, and as the doctrines were restudied, an atmosphere of intellectualism developed among many of the leaders.

On the other hand, because of the great work done under the leadership of Mr. Armstrong, some came to believe that he could do no wrong. They refuse to accept any new understanding; thinking that if Mr. Armstrong didn't teach it, then it could not be true. Ironically, like the Pharisees of old who quoted their favorite Rabbi, many now cite Herbert Armstrong or their leading minister's statements rather than God's Word. As a result of these varied paths, many members judge one another and condemn those who do not follow the doctrinal choices of their corporate sect.

This is where we find ourselves today. In the last era of God's Church, many have succumbed to attitudes possessed by the people of this world. In this way, they have become much like the Pharisees. Vast numbers in the Church of God have a form of godliness, but deny His power to rule over their lives.

In yet another set of remarkable parallels, the last era of the New Testament is warned that if they do not repent, they will suffer severe persecution during the great tribulation (Rev. 3:18-19). During this time, a man called "the beast" will be allowed to scatter the power of God's people (Dan. 12:7; Rev. 12:17).

This also occurred during the last era of the Old Covenant—the Pharisees. Christ warned that a terrible tribulation would come upon them. He said “not *one* stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Mat. 24:1-3). Further, when some of the people lamented Christ’s crucifixion, He explained:

Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed *are* the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us (Luke 23:28-30).

This prophecy is dual in its warning and fulfillment. It referred to both the end time as well as the end of the Pharisaic age when the Roman army destroyed the temple, its priesthood, and scattered the Jewish people. It was during its first fulfillment that Nero ascended to the throne of Rome. This young emperor was a type of the end-time beast during the age of the Pharisees. When written in Aramaic, the language of Jesus’ time, the letters of Nero’s name add up to 666; just as will occur with name of the end time beast (Rev. 13:8).

In addition, as the record of history reveals, it appears that the Messiah gave the people approximately 40 years from the time of His ministry to repent; after which a terrible tribulation came upon them. During the spring of 66 A.D., a revolt by a number of Jews broke out in Caesarea. Nero then ordered General Vespasian to put a stop to this uprising. The Roman military began their terror in 67 A.D. and in a bloody whirlwind campaign they had taken Galilee by year’s end. They viciously massacred many of the Jews and destroyed the temple by September 70 A.D.

In a final parallel, just prior to the destruction of the temple by the Roman army, true Christians who kept the words of Christ were protected. As Josephus wrote:

I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding cities. Moreover, at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the] temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, "Let us remove hence" (*Wars of the Jews*, Book. 6, ch.5, par. 3)

A small number was saved from this devastation. The vast majority suffered terribly until they were completely destroyed. By this we see amazing direct parallels between the eras of the Pharisees and Laodecia.

Christ comes to both of these eras. He preaches repentance to them. In each case, He is preceded by an Elijah type figure. The Savior teaches God's truth, is rejected by most, and the people who repent and hold fast to the Scriptures are protected. Those who do not repent must suffer a terrible tribulation under the hand of the beast power.

Parallels between the Old and New Covenant Eras

<i>Old Testament Era</i>	<i>New Testament Era</i>	<i>Similar Characteristics</i>
<i>The Exodus</i>	<i>Ephesus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Those first called</i> – <i>Eye witnesses of God's power</i>
<i>Judges</i>	<i>Smyrna</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Spiritual let down</i> – <i>Persecution</i> – <i>Bitterness</i>
<i>United Monarchy</i>	<i>Pergamos</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Fortified</i> – <i>Strengthened</i>
<i>Divided Monarchy</i>	<i>Thyatira</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Affected by Jezebel</i> – <i>Apostasy and tribulation</i> – <i>Captivity</i>
<i>Ezra's Restoration</i>	<i>Sardis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>God's work restored</i> – <i>Divided in approach</i> – <i>Lack of Zeal</i>
<i>Maccabees</i>	<i>Philadelphia</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Zealous</i> – <i>Restoration of the faith</i> – <i>Cleansing God's people of pagan influence</i>
<i>Pharisees</i>	<i>Laodicea</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Self-righteous</i> – <i>Judgmental</i> – <i>Tribulation</i>

Chapter 8

The Evidence is in

Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said...

Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?

~ Acts 2:37 ~

Seven exhibits have been presented. The evidence they contain overwhelmingly demonstrates that the seven letters in the book of Revelation were written to seven eras of God's Church existing down through the corridor of time. In proving this truth, the following points have been made:

First, these seven letters are an intrinsic part of a prophetic book that is filled with symbolic imagery. As an integral part of Revelation, these letters are also symbolic and prophetic.

Second, the number seven represents completion. Therefore, these seven churches symbolize the complete Church around the world and throughout the history of God's people.

Third, the epistles were dictated, written, and read in the exact successive order Christ addressed them; even though four other congregations not mentioned by the Savior existed on this same mail route. Thus, the progression foreshadowed that the letters were to be read and understood by the Church in this same order through history.

Fourth, the book of Revelation contains seven distinct categories of prophecy; each containing seven separate events. In six of these categories the events play out in chronological order. These letters must follow this same pattern to complete seven sets of seven in chronological order.

Fifth, as the last two letters are read, the emphasis becomes Christ's return. In fact, the letters to Philadelphia and Laodecia contain admonishment regarding the great tribulation at the end of the age. Since those congregations in Asia Minor no longer exist, and the last three letters speak of future events, those congregations represent end-time Church eras.

Sixth, the messages contained in each letter match the historical record. Each letter reflects the environment and experiences of the Church during periods of time progressing up to the return of our Savior.

Finally, God commissioned ancient Israel to produce a lamp stand with seven lamps that portrayed seven eras in which God worked with His people. That first covenant was a type of spiritual Israel that would enter a new covenant (1Cor. 10:11). Therefore, those first eras foreshadowed the events that would be experienced by the New Testament Church.

Seven Sets of Evidence for Eras

I	The letters are part of a prophetic book
II	Seven Churches indicate the complete Church
III	The writing is in the same order in which they were received and read
IV	The seven letters are part of Revelation's seven sets of seven; all occurring in succession
V	The last two letters reflect events to occur just before Christ returns
VI	The letters correspond to the actual record of history
VII	Seven Old Covenant eras mirror the seven New Testament eras

Are We Convicted?

The seven letters ARE written to seven eras, and we can now be certain that we are living in the last one—Laodicea. But what does this mean for us? Is it only to validate a long held doctrinal belief, or is there something of much greater value to be gained?

Having viewed all the evidence, we are in possession of a unique opportunity of supreme importance. If these letters are written to eras, there must be one written to us! Therefore, we can both listen to and accept God's admonition to us in our era! We can change our lives. We can stop slopping over doctrine for the sake of unity and start preaching God's plain truth! We can behave in a godly manner regarding the decisions we make in life. We can resist being influenced by our perverse environment. We can beware of self-righteous attitudes that are invading the Church.

We can, and we must, stop accepting the behaviors, values, standards, and entertainment of the world. We should not be content with our spiritual state. We can be more forgiving toward others and put greater effort into living the way that God wants us to.

This should wake us up! The evidence should convict us! The last era of God's Church is like the Pharisees of old. We should be convinced of this important truth, and it should prompt us to take action!

There are steps that need to be taken—but what are they? To answer this question, Christ said something of enormous importance to all of God's people:

For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).

With this statement, Jesus gave us the criteria for

inclusion into the Family and Kingdom of God. Our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees. If not, we will not attain God's Kingdom. But, how does that square with the Laodiceans? After all, they are God's Church. Don't they make it into the Kingdom? The answer to this question is exactly why this issue is of such enormous importance.

Today, it has almost become fashionable to think that being Laodicean is not all that bad. While many might accept the fact that these letters were written to eras, and that we are now living in the last one, there is a tendency to believe that, although the Laodiceans may suffer the tribulation, they will still attain the Kingdom.

In light of this belief, there is a vital truth that needs to be understood. **The Laodiceans absolutely will NOT make it into the kingdom unless they change!** Notice Christ's admonition to this last era:

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; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because **thou art lukewarm**, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. 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** (Revelation 3:13-17).

In this scathing letter of rebuke, God accuses His people of being lukewarm. They are self satisfied and spiritually blind. Would God allow individuals with such attitudes to rule others in His Kingdom? Would Christ leaven the Kingdom with a half-hearted approach? Absolutely not! Laodiceans will NOT make it into the Kingdom the way they are. They must change!

For this reason He tells them that they must suffer the consequences of their actions. To change their attitude, they must experience the great tribulation and be painfully tried by the fiery trials of a war scorched planet. They will be subjected to the effects of loss, pain, sickness, starvation, persecution and death. Out of love for His people, Christ admonishes this era to “be zealous and repent,” stating:

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. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. 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. 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 (Revelation 3:18-21).

We who live at the end of the age must heed Christ’s warning. At this time we still have a small window of opportunity to avoid His painful and tragic rebuke. We must work to resist the negative traits now infecting the Church while we still have a chance. If we do not, Christ will use any and all means necessary to bring about our repentance. The horrors of the holocaust are likely to pale in comparison to what will soon come upon this earth, and those who do not heed Christ’s warning will suffer the most devastating time in man’s history (Mat. 24:21).

God will spew the Laodiceans out of His mouth! He powerfully warns that if we do not change, we will be forced to buy gold, a symbol of godly character, in the fire, a symbol of trial or tribulation (1Cor. 3:12, 1Pet. 4:12). If we hope to enter His Kingdom, we must change! So why not

make those changes now!?

Consider the consequences if we do not make the necessary effort to change now. In one striking example, the Scriptures show Christ fulfilling His promise to Laodicea. During the tribulation, Satan is empowered to pursue the remnant left behind. This powerful being is filled with hatred toward God's people, and he is allowed to make war on the saints (Rev. 12:13-17).

This will be a terrifying future for the Laodiceans. The very thought of Christ rejecting us is horrifying. To lose His favor and our intimate relationship with Him is unthinkable. Then consider what it might be like to face Satan as the devil uses demonic forces to unleash his hatred on the remnant of the Church who have the commandments, but do not keep them as God intended. We need to consider what it would be like to have Satan make war on us. He is vicious and has no mercy. To those who will face him, his wrath will be devastating.

With such powerful forces afflicting these people, it is important for us to consider that if we are lukewarm now, how will we react when put under such enormous pressure? If we cannot be firm and have resolve at this time, will we have the ability to stand firm then? If we do not have the spiritual strength now, how will we suddenly develop it when such perilous times come? **God's people must reject this attitude now—before it is too late!**

Identifying Laodicea

It is obvious that we must resist the traits and values of Laodicea, but what exactly are those traits? Among the churches of God today there are differing views regarding the identifying signs of Laodicea. Some believe a lukewarm attitude toward preaching the gospel to the world through the media identifies them. Others teach that being a Laodicean is not believing or practicing every detail that Herbert Armstrong taught. A few teach that being Laodicean is not

having a specific form of church government. Still others claim that someone who does not call God and Jesus by the names YHWH and Yeshua are Laodicean. There are even several groups who state that Laodiceans are those who do not keep the holy days according to their particular interpretation of the calendar.

However, none of these man-made ideas truly identify the Church of Laodicea. People have created these definitions to justify themselves. By setting their own criteria for what constitutes a Laodicean, they have attempted to portray themselves as Philadelphian. For this very reason the knowledge of Church eras is of enormous value.

We now have the Biblical and historical evidence for eras. We do not have to guess. The last era of the Old Covenant foreshadowed the last era of the New Testament. Therefore, we can be sure that God's view of what constitutes being a Laodicean is having the characteristics of the Pharisees. Because of this truth, we must understand what these ancient people were like and how we reflect them today. Only then can we reject these wrong attitudes, repent, and ensure that we do not suffer the prophesied fate of the last era.

Chapter 9

The Righteousness of the Pharisees

Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why
walk not thy disciples according to
the tradition of the elders

~ Mark 7:5 ~

The Pharisees were noted for thinking they were superior to others. They believed that righteousness could be attained by being like them and following their traditions. While they appeared to keep God's commandments, they elevated their own tradition above God's law. They were zealous, but their zeal was directed toward the standards that they had created and not towards the truths expressed in God's Word. While they applauded themselves for holding to the Torah, they were unmerciful and judgmental toward anyone who was different. They would often attack those in other sects who taught even slightly different views.

It is this very same spirit that permeates God's Church as we enter the end of the age. Many members think that being lukewarm is being lethargic and half-hearted in general. As a result, they believe that, because they are zealous in their church activity, or passionately believe in their personal views of Scripture that they could not possibly be Laodicean. But when we look at the Pharisees, we see that they too were zealous. Their zeal was of the extreme nature, but without true knowledge. As Paul wrote:

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God (Romans 10:1-3).

The Pharisees were extremely enthusiastic about their sect of Judaism. They were wholehearted about what THEY were doing and deeply passionate about making converts to THEIR religion, but they were lukewarm toward what God desired of His people. This is the very same spirit found in the Church of Laodicea.

For example, they believe that they are “rich and increased with goods.” Considering that Church members today live better than kings of ancient times, the use of these terms indicates that their possessions have likely given them a false sense of security. To them, it is viewed as a sign of God’s approval and therefore they must be rich spiritually. They believe that they possess a wealth of godly knowledge and are increased with righteous character.

When Christ described the attitude of Laodicea with these terms, it is another example of duality in Scripture. The physical reflects the spiritual, and Christ’s next statement tells them they are actually “poor, blind, and naked” and must buy “gold refined in the fire.” Each one of these descriptive words is symbolic of spiritual attributes.

Yes, Laodiceans might be zealous for what they believe and what their church organization is doing. In fact, they may work hard at making converts to their particular group, or trying to convince others of their pet doctrine. However, their values are skewed and they mislead people; corrupting them regarding the pure standards of God. As Jesus said of the Pharisees:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
for ye compass sea and land to make one
proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him
twofold more the child of hell than yourselves
(Mathew 23:15).

Does this sound familiar? Today, many are zealous about their particular views on doctrine. They seek converts to their beliefs, and they work hard at persuading others. In their mind, a new member to their cause validates them and seems to confirm that their thinking is correct. It makes them feel righteous and important to see their work grow.

Thus, ministers and brethren accuse other people of being Laodicean. They speak of themselves as being “right,” “on track,” or doing a really “big work.” Perhaps this makes them feel important. However, desiring to do a big work, one group overworked its people and had to begin sending a chiropractor to their main office every week to relieve stress.

Another group teaches they are superior to others because they have the most members. One wrote on their website that they are better because they have published the most material. One exceedingly bold leader even went so far as to state that his organization was the “only standard by which God could judge His people.” This kind of arrogant behavior is a mirror image of the Pharisees and proves that such thinking is of the Laodicean era.

The Jews in Christ’s day were divided into four different sects: the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots (*Josephus*, War II:118-168, Ant:169-172 XVIII). Each believed in the Scriptures and keeping the commandments. Each had their distinctive interpretation of the law. Each claimed to have a monopoly on God’s favor, even recommending to their followers not to marry members of the other sects within the community of Hebrew believers.

Not only did the Pharisees set themselves in opposition to all the other sects, but they set themselves

against the upper and lower economic classes as well. The infighting between the Pharisees and aristocratic Sadducees, documented in the New Testament, is an example of this ongoing hostility (Act 23:6). The fact that the high priest was Sadduceean was a continual thorn in the Pharisaic side. The Pharisees had such disdain for the Sadducees, that they would say, “A learned mamzer takes precedence over an ignorant High Priest” (*Mishnah*, Horayot 3:8).

A mamzer was an outcast; a child born of adultery or incest. The Pharisees had no fear of calling others one of the lowest names possible. Perhaps it is for this reason that, after Christ told us that our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees, He then spoke of the future Church stating:

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, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire (Matthew 5:22).

While all the sects entertained basically the same core beliefs, the Pharisees fought with others over pet doctrines, rank, class, traditions, and just about any other difference they could find. Today, most organizations within the Church of God are no different. Leaders and lay members alike continue to attack one another in much the same way.

For instance, one evangelist wrote that another evangelist was “Satan’s tool.” Another leader claimed that the director of another group was “the most dangerous man on earth.” The pastor of a different congregation accused another pastor of being a “curmudgeon” because he taught against buying and selling on the Sabbath. Ministers have blatantly lied from the pulpit to make their organization appear more righteous.

This attitude of superiority and ridicule is not limited to the ministry, but has also infected the flock (Eze. 34:17-22). Various members do not hesitate to speak against other churches and are treating each other like heretics for not believing exactly the way they do. Some lay members have designed websites and use them to tear down ministers and brethren. Many have even resorted to lying and twisting the Scriptures in order to feed their ego. Instead of self denial and submission to God, pet doctrines and personal interpretations of scripture have become the “cross” that many are choosing to bear. Today, the vast majority of the Church of God is fulfilling the characteristics of the last era. It is just as Jesus foretold when He said:

But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart,
My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to
smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with
the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in
a day when he looketh not for *him*, and in an hour
that he is not aware of (Matthew 24:48-50).

The Pharisees were zealous, but their zeal was without godly knowledge. They were zealous for their sect and their personal beliefs, but not zealous for the true love of God. In like manner, a great deal of energy is expended in the Church today, but in too many cases that zeal is directed toward discrediting others and validating the self. Yes, men and women are working hard, but they are working to advance their own cause—not God’s.

We need to admit the truth. At this stage in Church history, few are conscientiously working to overcome sin. We are not striving diligently to imitate Christ. We are not working hard to purify ourselves. We are not zealous to overcome the lust of the flesh, the lust the eyes, and the pride of life. Yet this is exactly what we must do. This is why we are called to repent of self validating behaviors!

In Need of Nothing

Perhaps one of the main reasons God's people lack the zeal to overcome sin at the end of the age is due to an inflated view of ourselves. When it came to the Pharisees, they were filled with self. As Jesus said:

But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi (Matthew 23:5-7).

Looking at the Church today, it appears that little is different from the time of the Pharisees. There are those who insist that they be called "doctor." Others make the distinction that they are a "senior pastor." One claims to be a "leading evangelist." Another has designated himself an apostle, and one more arrogantly claims to be "that prophet" spoken prophesied by Moses (Deu. 18:18-22). Even lay members without ordination have made themselves out to be Church leaders and presumptuously assert they are "God's instrument of correction." Some imply that God has even spoken to them in order to validate themselves. By this, they boldly assert that God has commissioned their work.

This superior mentality has spilled into the lives of God's people everywhere. It is a terrible problem in the Church of God today. Thousands believe that because they remained faithful during the apostasy, or are following one of these men who claim to be God's only true leader, that they too are right with God. We have become little different than the Pharisees who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (Luke 18:9). To these men, as well as to us today, Jesus gave an eye opening parable, stating:

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (Luke 18:10-14).

Jesus described the difference between two prevailing attitudes. The Pharisee thought that he was in need of nothing, and it is this very mindset that is flourishing in the Church today (Rev. 3:17). We have come to feel that we are heroes. We pat ourselves on the back and congratulate ourselves for holding fast, but this is simply our duty (Luke 17:10). By choosing to do the right thing, some have come to believe that one single right choice automatically places us into the category of being Philadelphian.

It is this attitude of superiority that has bred complacency in the vast majority of Church members today. Because we think we have done the right thing in the past, or because we feel we are in the “right” organization, we have drawn a conclusion that we have arrived—we are spiritually rich and increased with goods. Ignoring Paul’s admonishment, many subconsciously feel as though they have “apprehended” (Php. 3:14-15).

As a result, we are no longer enthusiastically seeking the righteousness of Christ as we once did. We may have a zeal for what we are doing, but ultimately have little passion for what God wants us to be. We seldom fast to humble ourselves anymore. Many no longer feel obligated to be on a

search and destroy mission to find sin and eradicate it from our lives (2Cor. 13:5; Psa. 139:23). If we would honestly look at ourselves, most would have to admit we are not diligent enough. Isn't it apparent that we are now living in a different era of God's Church?

Today, we have blurred the lines of obedience to God's law. People attend congregations where pastors believe in the trinity but are under orders not to teach it. Few ministers deeply study in order to carefully answer questions that members might ask—they simply give canned answers. It has become commonplace for people to do business on God's holy Sabbath by going out to eat at restaurants. Admit it—we have become sloppy in our Christian living!

The irony is that, like the Pharisees, we think we are righteous. While we point our fingers at others, even mocking or ridiculing them, we are the ones who cannot be corrected. In our minds we are in need of nothing. However, **we are in severe need of correction!**

They Who Justify Themselves

Most people do not see themselves the way they really are. Human nature influences us to see ourselves as better than others. In like manner, it is very difficult for us to see what has happened to the Church. We don't realize how far we have slipped, and how we have created various reasons to justify our spiritual condition. The Pharisees were masters at this. As Jesus pointed out:

Ye are they which justify yourselves before men;
but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is
highly esteemed among men is abomination in the
sight of God (Luke 16:15).

One of the most difficult things for human beings to do is to admit that they are wrong. Everything in our human nature flies in the face of self abasement. This has been the

case from the time Adam blamed Eve and she in turn blamed Satan for eating the forbidden fruit. When accused of doing wrong, our internal defense mechanisms kick into gear, and we will almost always try to come up with some sort of excuse to justify ourselves.

The Laodiceans are characterized by this trait. They seem to overlook the verses reminding us that every man appears right in his own eyes and that our hearts are deceitful and wicked (Pro. 21:2; Jer. 17:9). As a result, when the churches are faced with the issue of doing business on the Sabbath, they create scenarios of handicapped people who can't make their own lunch, or various emergencies that require people to work such as those who must redirect traffic. They create these speculative situations to excuse their behavior instead of accepting the error of their ways and being corrected. Rather than looking for ways to obey God's commandments, they dream up situations to justify what they are doing, even if it directly breaks the commandments. In this, they are no different than the Pharisees of old.

God help us! We must repent of the traits associated with this era! Our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees! If we have ears to hear, this is the key to overcoming in the end time. By continuing to examine ourselves and take an unrelenting inventory of our motives and behavior, we humble ourselves before God. Then, in humility, we can admit our sins, see the weakness of our humanity, and reject the wrong in favor of God's righteousness. In this context, the writer of the proverb stated:

Most men will proclaim every one his own
goodness: but a faithful man who can find?
(Proverbs 20:6)

Yes, it is easy for us to excuse our situations and proclaim our own goodness. We do this by hopping on a soap

box and pointing the finger of accusation at others. We twist our perspective to justify ourselves and rationalize. However, they are just that—**rational lies**. This is our wicked human nature at work. Someone who is humbly honest, who admits wrong and accepts reproof, is difficult to find.

For this reason, Christ told us to be zealous and repent! We need to turn from rationalizing our behaviors. We are all human and no one is like God (Isa. 55:8). Admitting this is the initial step toward overcoming. It is the first move we must make in exceeding the righteousness of the Pharisees.

Binding Heavy Burdens

Christ excoriated the Pharisees on several levels. One of the flaws He exposed was their tendency to put burdens on others which they would not consider doing themselves. As our Savior stated:

The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. for they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers (Matthew 23:2-4).

These verses reflect a characteristic of the last Old Covenant era that is also found in the last New Testament era—the age in which we now live. The Pharisaic leaders required more of their followers than they would do themselves. Similarly, leaders in God's Church today often put burdens on others that they will not bear.

For example, at a ministerial conference sponsored by one particular group, the ministers were told that brethren should not attend a different Church of God even if it was only five miles from their home. The pastors were to instruct

members that they should be willing to travel 100 miles or more if necessary to attend with their preferred group. Even though no specifics were given to validate their reasoning, they were told that there was a great difference between the groups, and to attend with others who were not of the same organization would be harmful. Members were encouraged to make the long trek without considering that this would force some to purchase gas and make them subject to the burdens of unnecessary, time consuming, travel on God's Sabbath.

At this same time, the ministers were given new cars and the Church paid for their gas and meals while they were on the road. Understandably, ministers were sometimes caught in a preexisting system, and many may not have agreed with the policy of the Church, but it became a way in which the leadership put burdens on others that they would not lift themselves.

In another example, members were rightly told they must save ten percent of their income as a second tithe to be used at the feasts. They were taught they could spend the money only on things that were needed to properly keep the feast and were to spend the entire sum. If they did not spend the whole amount, they were encouraged to give any excess to the Church in the holy day offerings. While these instructions did not violate the Scriptures, there is no verse stating that excess second tithe must to be given to the Church and that it cannot be held up for next year. In addition, the ministry did not bear this burden. They did not have to save a second tithe. Like a bonus, it was mailed to them. They received checks twice a year before the two holy day seasons. In at least one of the larger groups, these checks were accompanied by a letter reminding the ministers that, if they did not spend all these monies on feast related activities, the remainder would be considered income, and as such, subject to taxes.

In several other cases, when Church members all stayed at one hotel, the Church would receive two or more

dollars per day, for each room. The hotels also provided a certain number of complimentary rooms based on how many members lodged there. Those complimentary rooms often were taken by the ministry who were speaking at the site instead of giving them to the widows or the poor.

In another true story, at one point the Church taught that an additional tithe should be kept every third year. A young married couple was struggling with this and could not pay their bills. They did not know what to do, but desired to obey God, so they asked a minister to counsel them. Upon learning that they did not have enough money to pay a third tithe, the minister told them to put it on a credit card. What is so hypocritical is that the ministry was never required to pay a third tithe.

Please understand that these stories are not expressed to pick on the ministry. Sometimes, the amount of work performed by God's servants is overwhelming, and their many good deeds are often taken for granted. These examples are given to ferret out, and identify, the kind of behaviors that are a part of the last era. Those in the ministry are leaders of the end time Church, and some of them are acting just like the last era of the Old Covenant. They are binding burdens on others that they will not lift themselves.

What about us? Are we any different than the Pharisees of Jesus' time? Do we expect more of others than we are willing to do ourselves? Do we expect people to give to us, yet we do not feel any compunction to give back? Do we expect our children to surpass the efforts we would have put forth at their age? What about our relationships to co-workers, or our mates? Do we smugly take them for granted? We should not expect anyone to do more than we are willing to do. This is no small issue. It is no less than the second most important commandment. We are to love others as much as we love ourselves (Mat. 22:39).

Consider that every year the Church of God observes

a unique, and vital, ceremony. During the Passover evening, we kneel and wash one another's feet. Some call this the ordinance of humility. What we do on that night each year is a reminder of how we are to live each day throughout every year! We are to be servants of one another. We are not to take more than we are given. If anything, we are to give more than we take.

God is creating a servant family—one that serves our fellow man in love. As the people of God, we must practice the way of giving and serving one another; do unto others as we would have done to us (Mat. 22:39). By living this way, our righteousness can exceed that of the Pharisees.

Swearing by the Gold

During the final era of the Old Covenant, the prevailing religious community was one that cared more about the monetary value of things than they did the true worship of God. Jesus disclosed this ungodly characteristic of the Pharisees, stating:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence
make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the
greater damnation. Woe unto you, ye blind guides,
which say, whosoever shall swear by the temple, it
is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold
of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind:
for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that
sanctifieth the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear
by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth
by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and
blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar
that sanctifieth the gift? (Matthew 23:14-19)

One does not need to look very hard to see evidence of this characteristic prevailing in the Church today. It is tragic that many value physical things more than God who

created all that is physical. This was a fault of the Pharisees, and it is no less so with us today. There is enormous irony in Christ telling Laodicea to buy gold tried in the fire. They believe they are rich and increased with goods, but they do not humbly appreciate what they have.

Things of monetary value, such as gold, are what the majority of men and women care about. Knowing this, God made it the symbol for what He cares about most—spiritual character (Rev. 3:18; 1Pe. 3:3; 1Cor. 3:12). The last era of the Church seeks gold in this life, but not the gold of righteous character. Therefore, God tells them that they will have to buy this gold in the fiery trial of the tribulation.

Those in the last era of the Old Covenant loved money. This shared passion with the last era of the New Testament may be the reason Christ caused the story of the young rich man to be recorded. It was delivered to those living in Christ's time, but do not make the mistake of thinking that it was only for them. It was also meant for us!

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is* none good but one, *that is*, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and *thy* mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions (Matthew 19:16-22).

When Christ told this man that in order to enter into eternal life, he needed to keep the commandments. The young man replied that he had kept them from his youth. However, when Christ asked him to sell everything and give it to the poor, he balked. He had great possessions, and by this statement, Jesus revealed the young man's weakness. Though he kept the Ten Commandments, he did not fully understand or keep the intent of the law. He was covetous and had little mercy for the poor.

This man is indicative of our Laodicean attitude today. Like the Pharisees, our desire for wealth, and our propensity to gather possessions, has developed over time. Because the scriptures point out that God blesses those who obey Him, the Church came to view money as a blessing from God. Many came to think that when the people were doing right, God compensated them monetarily. This kind of thinking has evolved to the point that many associate financial status with righteousness. What is not fully realized is that God's blessings may very well be a deeper understanding of Scripture, a closer walk with God, spiritual healing, and not necessarily financial security (Mat. 5:3-12)!

Further, since the Laodiceans believe they are "rich and increased with goods," it is expected they would naturally interpret income to mean that they have God's favor. What they don't seem to realize is that today we don't live anything like Church of God members in past history. We actually live better than many of the kings of ancient times! We live in efficient, well built homes with insulation, running water, indoor plumbing, electricity, heating, and air conditioning. We possess washing machines, dryers, ovens, microwaves, blenders, electric shavers, entertainments centers, and many other conveniences.

We shop in beautiful stores that are loaded with colorful, beautiful merchandise. We walk down grocery store aisles and choose from row after row of exotic and wonderful foods. We have an array of entertainment provided by

computers, cell phones, and powerful electronic equipment. We buy products that have been shipped to us from all over the world. We drive modern chariots that are luxurious, with stereo sound, power steering, climate control, and beautiful interiors. Even the wealthiest state officials of ancient times never even dreamed of having things that we take for granted. Compared to our brethren in the past, we are rich beyond belief; having vast amounts of goods and luxuries.

While many members think this wealth is a referendum on their righteousness, some Church leaders still think that it is never enough. Even though the truth has been revealed, many churches take up offerings seven times a year—not three as the Bible clearly states. One man advised his congregation to sell or mortgage their homes and give the proceeds to his organization. Some churches publish articles, and give sermons, encouraging members to preach the gospel with their last will and testament. By this, they try to take widow's houses, and ignore the scriptures by preventing children from receiving an inheritance (Pro. 13:22).

Because of obsession with wealth in this era, there is also the tendency to give preferential treatment to those who have money. While this has generally been the case with humankind, it certainly should not be so in the Church of God. For this reason, James wrote:

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith,

and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors (James 2:1-9).

While the Apostle James wrote during the first era of the New Testament, it was still the end of the last era of the Old Covenant. The spirit of the Pharisees continued until 70 A.D. when they faced their type of the tribulation as Rome destroyed the temple and disbanded the priesthood. This same spirit infects us in this last era of the Church. There is an emphasis on the power of money. As one Church leader said, “Mr. Armstrong spent money and I intend to spend it.”

In another example, a minister was transferred to a congregation in an area that had become a retirement community. When asked how he liked the congregation, he responded that there was only one new car in the parking lot. Another church leader repeatedly speaks of the possibility of a millionaire being called into the Church and giving big offerings. Then there have been cases where serious accusations were brought against wealthy Church members. Instead of following the correct application of Matthew 18 and making a righteous judgment, the ministry chose to ignore the situation to avoid losing tithes. In other cases, ministers have been ordered to give preferential treatment to wealthy members.

We must come to see this in our own lives. Today, we have much of the same spirit that the Pharisees had in their time. We care far too much about money and what it can buy. How important is money to us? Are we driven by it? Do we think we need to keep up with the Joneses—the rest of

society? Do we believe that both parents must work in order for us to have all that we desire? Or do we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mat. 6:33). Do we see this life for what it is; a training ground for that Kingdom? Or do we lean in the direction of this world and primarily seek the pleasures it offers?

Jesus said that we cannot serve God and mammon (Mat. 6:24). He warned us to avoid this trap which the Pharisees and their modern day Laodicean counterparts have fallen into.

The Traditions of Men

One of the most infamous traits of the Pharisees was their greater emphasis on their own traditions than on the commandments of God. They considered their oral law as having greater authority than that which was written in the Scriptures. For this reason, they were in error regarding many doctrines. Jesus repeatedly told them, “You do err, not knowing the scriptures” (Mat. 22:29). With a touch of sarcasm, He once asked, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?” He constantly reminded them that, “It is written in your law” (John 3:10; 10:34). In another example, Matthew recorded one of these encounters pointing out the hypocrisy of these people, stating:

Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But He answered and said unto them, why do **ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?**... Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. *Ye* hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, this people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me. But **in vain**

they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men (Mathew 15:1-9).

While reading the rebuke of Christ, we need to ask ourselves an important question. Is it possible that we are walking in the footsteps of the Pharisees? We must be honest and admit that in too many cases the answer is yes! Today, the Church of God will often teach and practice its tradition rather than what God's Word plainly says.

Consider Matthew 18 for example. In these verses Christ outlines the proper method of solving conflicts among brethren. We are to first go to our brother—alone. That failing, we are to take a witness or two, and then if that does not solve the problem, we are to take our issue to the Church.

This important procedure is seldom followed today. Most people skip the first step in reconciliation and go directly to the ministry when they have an issue with their brother. In the rare occasion a brother is first consulted, if the matter is not resolved, there are very few times that a witness is brought in. In the extremely uncommon instance when the first two steps are adhered to, it is almost unheard of to have a hearing in which the witnesses testify.

The scriptures also state that two or more must agree on a decision in order for Christ to be in the judgment. Since the tradition has been for an offended member to go right to a Church pastor, ignoring Christ's instructions in Matthew 18, the presiding minister often hears only one side of the story. He will then make a decision without a hearing, without testimony of witnesses, and without the required validation of a second minister who must agree with the judgment.

On another level, the Pharisees often created doctrines based on issues in which a particular revered Rabbi had previously judged. In like manner, leading Church ministers today have openly taught that it is acceptable to do business on the Sabbath. They teach that is appropriate to frequent restaurants on God's holy days, and they boldly justify their

position by saying “Mr. Armstrong did it.” By this, they are emulating the Pharisaic tradition of quoting their favorite Rabbi to establish doctrine—instead of quoting God!

In another example, the Church of God traditionally takes up offerings seven times a year, on each holy day. When taking up these offerings, they read the following verse:

Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; **in the feast of unleavened bread,** and **in the feast of weeks,** and **in the feast of tabernacles:** and they shall not appear before the LORD empty (Deuteronomy 16:16).

This verse plainly tells us to take up offerings three times each year. Then, the Scriptures tell us exactly when these three times are. Instead of following God, we follow our own tradition. Great irony plays out during each holy day not mentioned in this edict. While likely borne out of zeal, this mistake is propagated despite the obvious. This verse is read seven times a year in hundreds of congregations all around the world. This means that God’s instructions have been cited well over 20,000 times from the pulpit in the last decade. While most ministers continue reading “three times a year” they continue their unlawful tradition of taking up offerings seven times instead of three. (For more on this subject request our free booklet *Three Times in a Year.*)

In these ways we violate God’s statutes and place our tradition above the Scriptures. We are following the same pattern as the last era of the Old Covenant. But again, this is not only about the ministry.

Do some of our personal traditions take precedence over God’s commandments? Do we remember to keep God’s Sabbath, but forget to keep it HOLY? Do we allow ourselves unholy entertainment on this day? Do we prepare our meals during the preparation day, or do we cook on the Sabbath?

Do we dine out, go shopping, or stop at yard sales on this day? Do we plan personal activities during God's holy time? Do we treat our families and brethren with the love of Christ, or do we lash out when things do not go our way? Do we practice mercy and forgiveness, or are we quick to condemn and quick to wrath? Do we give our employers a full day's work, or do we extend breaks and take care of personal matters on their time? Have some of these things become our traditions? Are we dedicated to patiently keeping God's word, or are there times we follow a personal preference instead? Do we view those in other Church of God organizations as less than our brothers and sisters in Christ?

Jesus said our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees. We therefore must consider this truth regarding Church eras. We should evaluate our own lives by asking ourselves; how much of our existence is tradition based on human reasoning and how much of it is guided by the Word of God? What are we putting first and foremost?

Blind and Naked

Clearly, the Pharisees were a forerunner of what would become the last era of the New Testament. A final example of this fact is their spiritual blindness.

The Pharisees, and their followers, were primarily concerned with what was visible. Therefore, they focused on appearances and not the inner man. They wore broad hems around their garments accompanied by fringes. They made long their phylacteries. They washed their hands and arms up to the elbow meticulously before eating. They made their faces appear pale when fasting so that everyone would view them as suffering righteously. They prayed in public and made offerings in the market place, doing so after a trumpet was blown to get everyone's attention.

Today, this might seem like a circus of self righteousness, but to them it was a way of life. It was the culture they grew up in and all they knew. To climb the

social ladder in their culture, they had to be good at these things—and many were. Confronting these seemingly religious people, Jesus said:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. **Ye blind guides**, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. **Thou blind Pharisee**, cleanse first that *which is* within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous (Matthew 23:23-29).

Christ excoriated the Pharisees for their wrongful behavior that they thought was righteousness. He then accused them of being blind to the truth of God. It was so obvious that He made this comment on several occasions. Imagine how Christ's statements reeked with irony as He called these leaders, "blind guides." The imagery was simply too crisp, too sharp, and too cutting to avoid recognizing this obvious truth.

Do we also look through the lens of personal experience? Do we tend to judge by outward appearance?

How often do we evaluate a person by their wealth, clothing, or the type of car they drive?

In another example, many organizations measure their spiritual success by the number of hits they receive on their websites. They equate righteousness with the amount of tithes and offerings, how many booklets they publish, the income level of members, and lifestyles they are able to sustain. By this, they are looking at the outward appearance—numbers and statistics—instead of the inward spiritual dedication each person has toward God.

It is also common for some ministers to avoid dealing with with the reality of difficulties face by brethren when confronting sin. They prefer congregations to have an appearance of righteousness and would rather see an outward display of righteousness instead of facing the reality that lies underneath. Consequently, many ministers do not make themselves approachable to members of the congregation. They sometimes act aloof, superior, and distant. If they were to be more open and available, they would likely find that the Church is sick inside and needs help!

These underlying problems develop when the congregants are told how they should live, but are not shown how to accomplish it. Ministers will thunder what God expects from a family in sermons without showing the flock how to attain it. Then, when brethren realize their problems and need help, they are afraid to go to the minister and admit shortcomings. This occurs when reality based, helpful counseling is replaced by telling people that they are not trying hard enough—that they are not converted—and they simply need to pray and study more. As a result, there are hundreds of assemblies that look good on the outside, but have broken families at home. Marriages are on the rocks, children are troubled, yet at services they appear to be happy and well adjusted.

Unbelievably, some ministers actually prefer this. After all, it reflects well on them. It makes them look successful. They want a Church that appears to have no problems, a congregation that looks as if it is righteous and untroubled. But inside, where Christ sees all, mothers are forced to work outside the home. Children are being raised by so called “politically correct, tolerant” teachers, or worse yet by the values of television. Business is being conducted for personal advantage and not for the glory of God. Anger, pride, and lust are growing among God’s people instead of the peace, love, and self sacrifice we should be expressing.

The pace of life in our modern age has also had its effect on us. It has become nearly intolerable. Most people are exhausted by it all. We are constantly assaulted by information, noise, and just the sheer speed of our world as we cascade into the last days. We feel constantly rushed—driven—by the tyranny of the urgent. Life is speeding by, and we are distracted by all that is required for us to keep up. We become sidetracked by everything we feel needs to be done. These details develop into diversions that ultimately prevent us from taking long, hard looks at ourselves.

We have come to believe that we clearly see the truth. However, because we have allowed distractions, it is difficult to perceive what we are really doing and how we are actually living. In our minds, we are increased with goods. We feel good about ourselves, yet we put off that which must be done to correct the error of our ways. We have done a nice job of white washing the outside of our lives while ignoring the self serving attitude that prevails on the inside. For this reason, God told us the **plain truth**. He sees right through the facade stating that we are “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17).

Our righteousness must go deeper than this! It must exceed that of the Pharisees who were the physical type of the spiritual reality are living in today.

Chapter 10

A Call to Repentance

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

Pogo was the central character of a long-running comic strip. In 1971, author Walt Kelly published a famous cartoon relating the state of our environment. In this, he unmistakably captured the predicament that the Church finds itself in today. In the final scene, Pogo sits on the edge of a vastly polluted forest. He is saddened and confused at the sea of rubbish that has been generated. As the realization of what caused this calamity sets in, the caption reads:



Perhaps the enemy has always been us. We may have recklessly ignored the debris our sins generate as we continue polluting our lives. From childhood, it is been our nature to justify our actions and ignore the need to clean up spiritually. Sometimes we willingly distance ourselves from God to lessen the pain of our conscience (Heb. 10:22).

We are living in a very dangerous age. We need to know what spirit is affecting us. Therefore, this knowledge of Church eras is of enormous value.

It is time to wake up! Christ is coming quickly (Rev. 22:7), and we must realize that we are living in the last era of God's Church (Mat. 24:34). Right now our King and future Husband is knocking at the door of our minds and hearts. He wants us to rise from our self-righteous complacency and answer His call (Sol. 5:2; Rev. 3:20). He desires that we live our lives in Him, and He in us (John 15:4). He wants us to develop and grow so that we will become the absolute best we can be.

In that light, it is our hope that we will consider the evidence God has provided us in His word and throughout documents of history. We need to understand that these seven letters to the churches are prophetic and written to God's people living during seven eras in time. We must anoint our eyes with salve so we can see the error of our ways—realize that we are the last era—and we desperately need to repent!

Now that we have the evidence, we can be confident of this important truth. All of God's people are living during the Laodicean era. We have been given the proof, and we need to realize what this means to each of us.

We exist among those Christ spoke of saying they have a form of Godliness but deny His power (2Tim. 3). Many act as if it is too difficult to change, or we don't really believe that the Messiah has the power to transform our character. As a result, many are letting down. We seem to think that, because we cannot overcome every temptation,

there is little reason to increase our efforts. We have come to feel that we are basically good enough, and that Christ will accept us as we are.

Admit the truth! We don't fear the Almighty God the way we should! Many have become those who Jesus prophesied of and believe things are continuing as they always have, and that Christ has delayed His return (2Pet. 3:4; Mat. 24:48). We no longer hold a vivid picture in our mind of God's wrath. Preaching about the day of the Lord is being pushed aside in many of the churches. Sermons have become weak and often only deal with tangential issues (Heb. 5:12-14). They don't encourage real change and, as a result, we have been lulled into a spiritual slumber. The return of Christ is no longer the powerful and profound reality that it once was, and it seems we don't deeply revere God and fear His correction that is soon to come.

If we remain doubtful that this final letter to Laodecia was written to us, if we close our eyes to Christ's reproof and turn our heads to the insurmountable evidence for eras, if we choose to ignore Jesus' rebuke, then consider the following prophetic scenario written to us:

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matthew 7:22-23).

Vast numbers of God's people believe this statement is directed towards those who merely profess Christ. They believe this situation will play out only for members of false churches—people who are not called at this time. However, the people in this prophecy are convinced that they are true Christians. They performed works in His name, but they did

not patiently keep His word. Christ's warning is directed to those who are called!

Like the rich young man who professed that he had kept God's commandments, many of us believe that we keep them, but we truly don't observe them in their spirit and intent—the way God desires. We are half-hearted in our effort to do God's will. Christ's prophecy is speaking to people God has called, but didn't make it.

Consider that, even though the Scriptures contain words that can benefit everyone, the Bible was not written to the vast majority of humankind. God, through his printed Word, is speaking to those who are called; not those of the world! For this reason, the very next verses state:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it (Matthew 7:24-27).

Hear His words! These verses make it obvious Christ's admonition is directed primarily to those who are called. God is not trying to save everyone at this time. Now is not the only day of salvation! He is speaking directly to us! Therefore, we need to heed His warning.

Every piece of evidence declares that we are living in the last days. We are the last era of the New Testament and we reflect the characteristics of the final era of the Old Covenant—those of the Pharisees.

Knowing this, we need to ask ourselves a vital question. How much have we been affected by the spirit of Laodicea? Has it blurred our perception of right and wrong? Has it watered down our faith and our commitment to God? Have we allowed ourselves to partake of ungodly entertainment? Have we redirected our goals to that of attaining status or possessions? Have we accepted some Protestant teachings as acceptable worship of God? Have our personal opinions and inferences become the standard by which we live, instead of God's Word?

Are we zealous about our life, our career, our congregation, and not zealous for the holiness that God wants us to practice and what He wants us to become? Are we filled with self satisfaction, and do we justify sin in our lives? Are we covetous—always wanting more? Are we allowing habits and traditions to take precedence over God's will and His divine commandments? Are we concerned about how we look on the outside and close our eyes to what is going on inside? How do we feel toward our brethren throughout the Church of God? Are we resentful? Do we feel superior to others?

We need to take an honest, unrelenting inventory of our values and standards! If we are sincere, we will admit that elements of Laodicea linger within each one of us. We must change and not give in to the infectious spirit of our age, but carefully and consistently seek out the truth found in God's Word.

If we do, our righteousness can, and will, exceed that of the Pharisees. We will please the great God as we continue to maintain and build our relationship with Him. Then, when the tribulation comes, He will protect us from it. And, when Christ returns, we will be transformed—welcomed into the glorious Kingdom of our Father. At that time, our Betrothed will personally deliver the message every true Christian longs to hear. "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Mat. 25:23).

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