

THE SEVEN ERAS OF ANCIENT ISRAEL — TYPE OF THE ERAS OF THE TRUE CHURCH?

by Craig Martin White

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

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

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

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

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

Historical Background

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ancient Israel— optional concepts in interpreting eras

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

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

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

Correspondent to Israel in Wilderness:

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

Correspondent to Israel in the Land:

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

In his excellent *Commentary on Revelation* (c1900), Bullinger discusses the topic more fully on pages 73-102. Here he enunciates the outline referred to in his

Companion Bible: Ephesus is the day of Israel’s espousals (Exodus); Pergamos the wilderness period (Numbers); Thyatira the period of Israel’s kings (1 & 2 Kings); Sardis the period of Israel’s removals (1 & 2 Chronicles); Philadelphia the period of Judah’s kings (2 Chronicles) and Laodicea the period of Judah’s removal (the minor prophets). Whether this was a concept unique to Bullinger or whether he was drawing upon ideas raised by others, is not known.

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

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

It is interesting that Joachim indicates these parallels between the Christian era and Israel without reference to the seven churches. We have no knowledge if he even had them in mind when drafting these parallels, but it is likely. In any event, what is interesting is that he has regard to seven phases. Today, few Bible commentators accept the Church era or prophetic teachings of Revelation 2 and 3.

The Ephesus Era—Beginnings

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

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

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

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

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

over heresy and doctrine.

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

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

The Smyrna Era—Persecution and Exodus

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

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

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

The Pergamos Era—wonderings in the wilderness

2:12 And to the angel of the **church in Pergamos** write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; 2:13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, [even] where Satan's seat [is]: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not

denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas [was] my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. 2:15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 2:16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 2:17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth [it].

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

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

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

The Thyatira Era - Joshua & former Judges

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

The True Church survived centuries of hounding and afterwards was able to pronounce the Gospel in parts of

Europe and America. Nevertheless, at certain times, the teachings and doctrines of the Babylonian Mystery Religion made its way into the Church. The great Jezebel seduced many of God’s people with incorrect ideas and made them drunk with false doctrines.

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

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

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

3:1 And unto the angel of the **church in Sardis** write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. 3:2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. 3:3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. 3:4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. 3:5 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. 3:6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

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

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

Some groups have been labelled as ‘Sardis’ by other groups. But if we look at the scriptures carefully, if there is or was a Sardis Era then they are God’s people whose Work was almost dead. If they were spiritually dead (ie without the Holy Spirit), they

would not be God's people and not even be Sardis.

Now if there is or was a Sardis era, this particular period of theirs where they were considered "dead" may have been from about 1802 to about the 1840s when the Churches of God disappeared from view. Obviously they later revived due to the efforts of those that did not defile their garments by not adopting false doctrines and not bearing the fruits of the Spirit. Today, if there is a Sardis Church, it certainly is not dead and is very much a living branch of God's Church.

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

The Philadelphia Era— King David

3:7 And to the angel of the **church in Philadelphia** write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; 3:8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. 3:9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. 3:10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. 3:11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. 3:12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, [which is] new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and [I will write upon him] my new name. 3:13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

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

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

After the Judges and Saul, David restored administrative structure, like HWA did with HQ at Pasadena ("Crown City") in the Los Angeles ("City of Angels") metropolitan region (IChron 27:1). He had men filling various functions in administration (see IChron 27:25-31). David had several key 'pillars' around him

(IChron 11:10-12; 27:32-34; see Gal 2:9; Rev 3:12a) as HWA had key evangelists around him.

God protected him from the enemy (see IChron 17:42, 49; also ISam 26:24) as the Philadelphia Era will be protected from the Great Tribulation to come. Here Goliath is a type of Satan, the Philistines a type of the demons and David a type of the Philadelphia Era (see Rev 3:10; 12:15-16).

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

3:14 And unto the angel of the **church of the Laodiceans** write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; 3:15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. 3:16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. 3:17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: 3:18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and [that] the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. 3:19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. 3:21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. 3:22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

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

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

Like Laodicea, Solomon was very rich. He had knowledge, but it was a mixture of truth with error. He and his sons "fell away" (apostasied) from the Truth and God's Way. This falling away was followed by Pharoah Shishak sacking the Temple just as the

climax of the final falling away will be followed by great persecution upon the Laodiceans

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

Are there Church Eras?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Who or what will be the persecuting power of the various branches of the end-time Church of God?

The Beast Power Rising Again!—Ancient parallels

Why is it that the constant excuse is that all we need at this time is for sermons on Christian living and the Holy Days? As if prophecy, typology and other vast areas of His Word have nothing to do with Christian living. I can almost hear Herbert Armstrong roar "Nothing could be further from the truth!". Of course detailed, accurate prophecy is closely related to Christian living for the following reasons:

- it keeps the bride excitedly anticipating the bridegroom (Matt 25:1-13);
- it leads you to repentance, to God's Law and to a close relationship with Him (this is the theme of the prophets and the greatest prophet of all, Jesus Christ);
- if we understand it, we will be in a position to escape the terrors which will descend upon the earth. We are charged to watch (this includes watching world events, the Laodicean condition of the Church and our spiritual states) (Luke 21:36; Matt 24:42; 25:13);
- as we are living in the Latter Days, it behoves us to know the signs of the times and how world events line up with prophecy to enable us to warn a sick and dying world (Ezek 3:17; 33:1-7; Jer 6:17, 27);
- "Where there is no vision the people perish" (Prov 29:18). The RSV translates "vision" as "prophecy". The Hebrew word "hazon" is translated similarly elsewhere (see IIChron 32:32; Dan 8:1; Ob 1). Should we neglect these futuristic warning words of God, we will perish (see ISam 3:1; Lam 2:9);
- prophecy is a major proof of the Bible;
- and prophecy, by its very nature, encourages us to want to dig deeper and deeper into God's Word, to uncover its precious nuggets.

The Apostle Peter wrote:

“neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ [Christ’s knowledge – the Word of God]. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off ...

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy: whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (IIPet 1:9, 19. See IICor 4:6)

I see nothing in Peter’s statements which legitimises the watering-down of His truths or prophecy.

Instead of undermining the faith of many, now is the time to restore the **faith once delivered and get back on the track**. This is no time to relax and to take it easy. We need real Christian concern for one another; concern to warn our National brethren of approaching invasion, slavery, captivity in strange lands and murderous death camps.

With that said, let us explore an aspect of God’s Word which many have watered-down tremendously.

Strange Bulls

Scripture is replete with types – typological items, people, practices or creatures which portray spiritual counterparts or future events. This duality of Scripture takes digging and a figurative magnifying glass to find these wonderful and pleasurable treasures. It is not easy to dig deep into the Word of God – it takes some mental exercise and self-discipline.

We find typological bulls sacrificed during the Feast of Tabernacles (Numbers 29:12-38) in reduced numbers each day, viz:

Day 1	13
Day 2	12
Day 3	11
Day 4	10
Day 5	9
Day 6	8
Day 7	7
Total	70

Another is counted for the Last Great Day, but of the 70 sacrificed during the Feast of Tabernacles, the Jewish Talmud asks: “To what do these seventy bullocks correspond? To the seventy nations” listed in the mysterious Table of Nations. A footnote reads: “Seventy

is the traditional number of Gentile nations, and the seventy bullocks are offered to make atonement for them”.

In Israel, the priests were the ruling class. In God’s sacrificial system, bullocks were offered to make atonement for them (Lev 4:3) while Israel as a nation were also to sacrifice a bullock for national sins (Lev 4:13-14). In contrast a leader was to sacrifice a male goat (Lev 4:22-23) while the common people sacrificed a female kid or female lamb (Lev 4: 27-28, 32). Thus the Jewish interpretation of the 70 bulls seems reasonable as they relate to rulers, leaders and nations. In Genesis 10 where we find the Table of Nations, we find, beside the name of Noah, 70 other names, representing the 70 nations.

Several other scriptures bear this out: in Ps 68:30 gentile kings are likened to bulls; as is the arrogance of Assyria (Is 10:13); the rulers and leaders of Edom (Is 34:7) and Babylon as well (Jer 50:27). We know from the Scriptures that there is organisation in Satan’s Kingdom (Eph 6:12; Col 1:16) which he uses to manipulate and control this world’s nations. One such evil spiritual leader over a nation is described by Daniel as the “prince of the kingdom of Persia”, a very powerful demon (Dan 10:13, 20). These spirit rulers of nations may be the bull demons of ancient mythology – very powerful gods in the religious belief systems of these civilisations. David himself may have been surrounded and attacked by these vile bull forces when he cried out to God to deliver him from them (Ps 22:12, 21).

A Woman Rides the Beast

All over the ancient Middle East we find reference to the bull which is used as a symbol of strength and fertility as well as to bull gods. El, the supreme deity of the decadent Canaanite pantheon, was often called “the Bull El” (he was a fertility god). Baal, the god of fertility, storms, rain and vegetation is also called the Bull. Similarly among the Hittites, Aramaeans and Babylonians, the bull gods were a dominant feature of their religions, not to mention the many bull and calf-cults linked closely to the Egyptian god Horus. Cattle cults among the Cushitic peoples of Ethiopia and India may be found to this day! In Mithraism, bull worship was an important aspect of their beliefs.

In Babylonia, figures of bull gods guarded the entrance into temples, houses and gardens (in contrast the lion of Judah was utilised extensively in

the British Empire). During the Assyrian period a human face was added: at Khorsabad colossal human-headed winged bulls were found at the palace of Sargon II. To the Babylonians these bulls were actually spirits which brought both good and evil upon mankind (demons sometimes bring good upon someone to deceive and to lead astray) and which filled the air and they produced storms and thunderbolts. Demons may indeed bring good to deceive, followed by evil. Their practices and ministers may appear to be of the light, but in reality they represent the darkness (II Cor 11:13-15). Note also that these bull gods or extremely powerful demons, filled the air which is one of the thoughts Paul may have had in mind when he condemned the “prince of the power of the air” and “spiritual wickedness in high places” (Gr *the heavenlies*) in the letter to the Ephesians (Eph 2:2; 6:12). There may also be another connection to the heavenlies: the bull was in reality the constellation of Taurus of the star Gud-ana – the bull of heaven.

Such bull-worshipping practices were condemned and outlawed in the Bible: Ex 32; Josh 24:2; IKings 12:28; Hos 8:5; 13:2. The sexual perversions, false doctrines and weird practices were such a stench to God that Israel was to wipe out these religions from their land. Unfortunately this was never successfully accomplished.

In pagan Rome, a bull was killed for the baptism of blood at the Roman Taurobolium in honour of the deities such as Mithra. In a trench, the blood of the bull dripped over (or ‘baptised’) the initiate and drenched his body. He even drank the warm blood. Afterwards he came from this literally bloody baptism, believing that he was purified from sins and ‘born again for eternity’. In contrast, a Christian is covered in water at his or her baptism, washed clean metaphorically by the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, and must then absorb Christ’s flesh and blood by symbolically eating and drinking of it (John 6:53-56), undertaking a process of spiritual growth until finally being born again at the resurrection.

In any event, the mythology surrounding one bull is fascinating. The supreme deity of Greek mythology was Zeus. He had various other names such as Ombrios (rain god), Keraunos (lightning), **Pater (father)**, and Soter (Saviour). In the myths he fell in love with **Europa**, a beautiful daughter of Agenor, king of Phoenicia. Entranced by her, he assumed the shape of an animal or beast - a white bull, and mingled with the herds of Agenor while Europa was gathering flowers. When she came upon him she gently caressed him and had the courage to sit upon his back. Taking advantage of this situation, they went to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea where he whisked her over the sea off to Crete at which point he took on his normal form and she bore him

3 sons. This Hellenic tradition, was, however, derived from pre-Hellenic ideas of the moon-priestess triumphantly riding on the sun-bull. Figurines of this lady riding the bull beast may be found throughout the eastern Mediterranean region.

Europa, according to one tradition, was the Great Goddess as mother of the continent of Europe. This is where prophecy fits in. Turn to the book of Revelation, chapter 17, verse 2. Here we are told about a great whore who sat upon many waters and in verse 3 she also sat upon a scarlet coloured beast. It may well be that what is meant is that she sat on the beast on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea in similitude to Europa. God inspired these words and it seems likely that John borrowed the basic imagery or broad concept, at least in part, from this Hellenistic legend. Why? Because in so doing He is indicating how thoroughly pagan the roots of the whore and the beast are. Further, as they spring from Phoenicia (land of the Canaanites), it shows us a little more of the origin and mind of the religion symbolised by the whore. The Canaanites were the original Babylonians, and as such the carriers of their religion. And the name of Europa shows us that the continent of Europe is deceived and seduced by her.

There is a great false church which has dominated Europe for centuries. She is the mother of many other whores which have sprung from her in protest. It may be no coincidence that this imagery is now being utilised by the great European Union – a revival of the continuum of the Roman Empire’s successor power – the Holy Roman Empire. The Roman beast system was ridden by an ancient church which roots are clearly Babylonian/Canaanite.

On the cover of *Europe* magazine (May 1984) a stamp to celebrate European Community landmarks, portray the beautiful Europa riding the bull, over the sea, assisted by a cherub. Seven years later, in the 9 December 1991 *Time* magazine (page 13) a women riding the bull while she is holding aloft the European flag is used to picture the European movement. In *The Australian* 16 September 1996 an article appeared on the approaching European currency (“Europe’s Currency of Hope”). The currency unit symbol of the Bank of Europe is portrayed as a winged bull surrounded by the European stars from the European flag. Winged bull? This was an Assyrian symbol and for those that understand history and prophecy, it may be no coincidence that the Bank of Europe will be based in Germany wherein dwell the militaristic descendants of ancient Assur (Gen 10:22). And finally, the new

European Currency Unit prototype shows a woman riding a bull beast. It may also be more than passing interest to observe that the goddess Inana was often portrayed as riding on the back of a lion, signifying her co-operation with this terrible beast.

Eventually, 10 horns of the beast (these may be bull horns) turn upon the whore and devour her (Rev 17:16). Note the following old poem:

“There once was a lady from Niger,
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger;
They returned from the ride
With the lady inside,
And a smile on the face of the tiger”

Later the beast will be destroyed by Jesus Christ Himself. Thus ends the whore and the beast—Europa and the bull imagery finding its final end.

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

[NOTE: please understand that the parallels drawn in this article and in the table below are not the final word on the subject and variations are certainly possible. It is the overall principle which is important]

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Learn the Spiritual Lesson as Well as the Speculation

The messages of Revelation 2 and 3 were actually sent to seven congregations (Rev 1:11). Each congregation was to understand the message written to them, examine themselves and repent of sins that they found in themselves and their congregation.

But these are more than just seven messages, one to each congregation. All seven of them contain the phrase: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Everyone was supposed to listen to the messages to every church. A summary of these personal lessons is:

If we have false apostles in our congregation, we need to find them liars and not listen to them.

If we have lost our first love, we need to regain it.

If we are in tribulation, we need to be faithful until death.

If we have false doctrine, we need to replace it with truth.

If we are “dead,” we need to wake up.

If we have an open door, we need to walk through it.

If we think we are rich, we need to ask God to show us our true state.

Only our Great creator could write a message that would have a current meaning for seven separate congregations, meaning for numerous other congregations believers through the next 2000 years, and multiple prophetic meanings.

Norman Edwards does not specifically support all of the ideas represented in this document, but believes that the study of these Scriptures is beneficial. From this, we can learn the power of the Eternal to guide history in minute detail according to his will, yet see that He gives individuals much free choice—but with guidance as to what he hopes we will do.

—Norman S. Edwards

Chart of Many Possible Relationships to Church Eras:

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

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