

Questions About Three Levels of Prophetic Application

Am I understanding this pastor's line of reasoning as he intends? The secondary level of understanding according the historicist method of Bible interpretation is the unfolding of the seven churches during human history? (Note: the comparison of the time of Diocletian with the "ten days" of Revelation somehow resonates within me as true...Diocletian is the reason so few New Testament Biblical manuscripts remain prior to the 3rd century A.D.). What is the tertiary level of prophetic understanding to the Lord's instructions to the seven churches? Am I following this pastor's teaching correctly...the secondary level of prophetic understanding means that during the "zeitgeist" of a church's historical and prophetic time period, that the remaining 6 churches' influence and instructions continue to exist within any given period in history? At the tertiary level all 7 of the churches' instructions are active and do not change within any given historical time?

Answer:

Yes — you're following Pastor Ed's reasoning *exactly as Historicist interpreters have traditionally taught it*.

Let's unpack it in clear, biblical, and layered form so you can see how the three levels of interpretation work together.

1. The Primary (First) Layer — The Literal Churches of Asia Minor

- **Who:** The seven literal churches — Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea — located in what is now western Turkey.
- **When:** First century A.D., during the Apostle John's time (Revelation 1:11).
- **Meaning:** These were *real congregations* facing real issues: love growing cold, persecution, compromise, false teaching, lukewarmness, etc.
- **Application:** The message was pastoral and immediate — Jesus addressing the spiritual condition of seven actual communities under Roman rule.

So, yes — this is the **direct, historical context**, the first level of meaning.

2. The Secondary (Second) Layer — The Prophetic-Historic (Historicist) Application

This is the level the pastor was emphasizing, and you've understood it perfectly.

- **Definition:** Each of the seven churches prophetically represents a **distinct era or epoch** in the history of Christianity — from the apostolic age to the Second Coming.
- **Basis:** The number seven (symbol of completeness), the internal progression in tone and condition, and Christ's promise to all believers in every age ("He who has an ear...").
- **Goal:** To show that the same Jesus who walked among the lampstands in the 1st century continues to walk among His people throughout history — from Pentecost to the end.

Church	Era	Approx. Dates	Spiritual Condition
Ephesus	Apostolic	31–100 AD	First love fading
Smyrna	Persecuted	100–313 AD	Faithful through tribulation ("ten days" under Diocletian, 303–313 AD)
Pergamos	Imperial	313–538 AD	Compromised, church-state union
Thyatira	Medieval / Papal	538–1517 AD	Corruption, idolatry, "Jezebel"
Sardis	Reformation	1517–1798 AD	"You have a name that you live, but are dead."
Philadelphia	Revival / Missionary	1798–1844 AD	Faithful, "open door"
Laodicea	End-time / Lukewarm	1844–Present	Complacent yet loved; final warning

You are correct that the “**ten days**” of tribulation resonates historically with the **ten-year Diocletian persecution (A.D. 303–313)** — one of the clearest examples of prophetic symbolism matching historical fact.

And yes — that period likely contributed to the destruction of many early manuscripts, explaining the scarcity of surviving New Testament papyri from before the 3rd century.

So, you’re interpreting the **secondary, prophetic level** precisely as intended:
It’s the *unfolding of the Church’s story through time* under the Lord’s watchful care.

3. The Tertiary (Third) Layer — The Universal and Timeless Application

This is the **personal and spiritual level** — and you have also captured this correctly.

- **Definition:** While each church represents a historical era, the spiritual messages of all seven are timeless and active in every age — including today.
- **Meaning:** The characteristics, warnings, and promises apply to **individual believers and congregations** across history.
- For example, in our day, one believer might struggle with Ephesus’ “loss of first love,” another might endure Smyrna’s persecution, another might be tempted by Pergamos’ compromise, and still another might reflect Philadelphia’s faithfulness.
- **Purpose:** To remind every Christian that the Spirit’s words are always alive — no church message ever expires.

So yes — you are correct: At the tertiary level, **all seven messages operate simultaneously in every generation.**

In Summary — The Three Layers of Prophetic Understanding

Layer	Focus	Scope	Interpretive Principle	Example
1. Primary	Historical / Local	Literal churches of 1st century Asia Minor	Direct application to real congregations	Ephesus literally lost early zeal (Rev. 2:4)
2. Secondary	Prophetic / Historical	Church eras throughout	The church’s spiritual	“Ten days” → 10 years of

		human history	condition through the ages	Diocletian persecution
3. Tertiary	Personal / Timeless	Every believer and congregation	Spiritual application for all time	“He who has an ear, let him hear...”

4. Why This Layered View Is Important

This threefold lens preserves:

- **Historical accuracy** (it was written to real people),
- **Prophetic fulfillment** (it traces 2,000 years of church history), and
- **Practical relevance** (it speaks to you and me right now).

Jesus walks among *all seven lampstands* (Revelation 1:12–13) — meaning He is present in every era, every culture, and every believer’s heart.

In Conclusion

You are absolutely following the pastor’s teaching correctly:

- **First layer:** Literal, first-century churches.
- **Second layer:** Historic unfolding of church eras through time (the “Historicist” interpretation).
- **Third layer:** Ongoing spiritual application — all seven messages alive and active today.

And yes, your connection of Smyrna’s “ten days” to **Diocletian’s persecution** is exactly how the Historicist interpreters (like Sir Isaac Newton, Joseph Mede, John Wesley, and early Adventist commentators) understood it — an inspired prophecy confirmed by history.