

How Many Ages Are There?

By Gerry Watts

This short article should be read as though it were an updated appendage to the article [God's Plan of The Ages](#). It will be assumed that the reader is familiar with the doctrine of the Ages, as well as the use of the Greek words *aion* (correctly translated as Age or Eon) and *aionian* (correctly translated as age-abiding or age-during or Eonian).

We shall consider very clear biblical texts and phrases to establish how many Ages of time there are within the unfolding plan and purpose of God as revealed in Scripture. Let it be noted first that there are many phrases that are used by Bible teachers to describe specific eras of time, such as the age of Promise, the age of Passover, the age of Law, the age of Pentecost, the age of Grace, the Church age, etc. I firmly believe that the majority of phrases such as these should more correctly be called Administrations or Eras, rather than ages. We shall see that the Ages are much longer periods of time, and it is within these ages that there are various administrations or eras that have certain characteristics. [1]

It will be shown that there are at least Five ages, and possibly a few more, but it is my conviction, without appearing too dogmatic, that there are actually five ages in the age-abiding times, at the end of which, God's plan and purpose will be complete. (This doesn't mean that Time, as such, will cease to exist after this Consummation - as some suggest by using the phrase 'eternity future' - but the Plan and Purpose of God, which is being implemented through the ages, shall be fully accomplished. There is little doubt that after this, further ages will probably begin a new cycle of ages!)

Before The Ages

Firstly, there was a 'time' before the Ages began, before the material universe was first created. At this point, there was only God and His Son, and that's as far back as Scripture takes us (cf. Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2-3). Then with the beginning of creation, Time officially began in accordance with the elements of the universe. The Son of God was the Channel through Whom God made the ages of the world, that is, Time itself - the ages and the world (the cosmos) being intricately linked together. [2]

"...in the last of these days (God) speaks to us in a Son, Whom He appoints enjoyer of the allotment of all, through Whom He also makes the eons..."

(Hebrews 1:2)

"...God, Who saves us and calls us with a holy calling, not in accord with our acts, but in accord with His own purpose and the grace

which is given to us in Christ Jesus before times eonian" (*or age-abiding times*)

(2 Timothy 1:9)

"...in expectation of life eonian, which God, Who does not lie, promises before times eonian" (*or age-abiding times*)

(Titus 1:2)

"...but we are speaking God's wisdom in a secret, wisdom which has been concealed, which God designates before -- before the eons, for our glory, which not one of the chief men of this eon knows, for if they know, they would not crucify the Lord of glory."

(1 Corinthians 2:7-8)

Past Ages

Secondly, Paul talks of past ages in the plural, which means that there were at least two ages previous to the present age. I think it's clear from the texts that he was referring to these past ages in particular, as opposed to all the ages in general, because he talks of things being previously hidden in the plan of God, YET NOW (in the present age of redemptive history) these things are revealed. This indicates that progressive revelation occurs through the ages, heading towards a particular goal.

"...and to enlighten all as to what is the administration of the secret, which has been concealed from the eons in God, Who creates all, **that now** may be made known to the sovereignties and the authorities among the celestials, through the ecclesia, the multifarious wisdom of God, in accord with the purpose of the eons, which He makes in Christ Jesus, our Lord;"

(Ephesians 3:9-11)

"...the secret which has been concealed from the eons and from the generations, **yet now** was made manifest to His saints"

(Colossians 1:26)

The Present Age

Thirdly, we come to the present age. It is evident from the New Testament that both Jesus and Paul used such terms as *this age*, *the present wicked age*, *the current age*, and *the end of the age*, which means that the present age that we are in (before the full manifestation of the kingdom of God in the age to come) is at least two thousand years old (or as good as). So more than likely, this age began with Christ's First Advent. The present age is largely identified with the present world and its characteristics in a number of places, hence it is temporal. In Ephesians 1:20-21, Paul refers to Christ's heavenly reign as occurring in this

present age also. So it would seem that 'this present age' is describing the period between Christ's First and Second Comings.

It is possible, though, that 'this present age' could be referring to the whole era from the great Flood of Noah's day to the Second Coming of Christ. Peter refers to the terms heavens of old and the world that was then or ancient world to describe the earth before the Flood, which was subsequently cleansed by water; and then he also states that the present heavens and earth are stored with fire awaiting the cleansing judgments of the coming kingdom.

"For they want to be oblivious of this, that there were heavens of old, and an earth cohering out of water and through water, by the word of God; through which the then world, being deluged by water, perished. Yet the heavens now, and the earth, by the same word, are stored with fire, being kept for the day of the judging and destruction of irreverent men."

(2 Peter 3:5-7)

This would indicate that there was a previous age before the Flood, which would have begun with Adam, and that the present age began after the Flood and will last until the Coming of Christ. Peter indicates above, in accordance with Christ's teaching, that the ultimate Day of the Lord, the Second Coming of Christ, will cause the present heavens and earth to pass away, introducing a New Heavens and a New Earth in the age to come. Peter confirms this by what follows.

Now the day of the Lord will be arriving as a thief, in which the heavens shall be passing by with a booming noise, yet the elements shall be dissolved by combustion, and the earth and the works in it shall be found. At these all, then, dissolving, to what manner of men must you belong in holy behavior and devoutness, hoping for and hurrying the presence of God's day, because of which the heavens, being on fire, will be dissolved, and the elements decompose by combustion! Yet we, according to His promises, are hoping for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness is dwelling.

(2 Peter 3:10-13)

So this gives us at least three ages from the time of Adam to the New Creation.

It is possible, though, that there was another age (or ages) before the creation of Adam, a 'First Creation' Age, which predominantly included the creation of the Spirit beings (or angels), and possibly included Adam and Eve before their Fall into sin. Nevertheless, the Biblical evidence is lacking in this regard, so it is a matter of speculation really. It is clear that the creation of the material universe, described in Genesis 1, automatically included the creation of Time, that is, the Ages or Eonian Times. We are not told exactly when the spirit beings were created, only that they were there in the beginning (cf. Job 38:4-7). [2]

Here are some of the key texts that relate to this present age. [3]

"Who gives Himself for our sins, so that He might extricate us out of the present wicked eon, according to the will of our God and Father"

(Galatians 1:4)

"Those who are rich in the current eon be charging not to be haughty, nor yet to rely on the dubiousness of riches"

(1 Timothy 6:17)

"...for Demas, loving the current eon, forsook me and went to Thessalonica, Crescens to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia"

(2 Timothy 4:10)

"And you, being dead to your offenses and sins, in which once you walked, in accord with the eon of this world, in accord with the chief of the jurisdiction of the air, the spirit now operating in the sons of stubbornness"

(Ephesians 2:1-2)

"And whosoever may be saying a word against the Son of Mankind, it will be pardoned him, yet whoever may be saying aught against the holy spirit, it shall not be pardoned him, neither in this eon nor in that which is impending (this age nor the age to come)."

(Matthew 12:32)

"Now the enemy who sows them is the Adversary. Now the harvest is the conclusion of the eon. Now the reapers are messengers. Even as the darnel, then, are being culled and burned up with fire, thus shall it be in the conclusion of the eon."

(Matthew 13:39-40)

"Now He said to them, "Verily, I am saying to you that there is no one who leaves house, or wife, or brothers, or parents, or children on account of the kingdom of God, who may not by all means be getting back manyfold in this era, and in the coming eon, life eonian." "

(Luke 18:29-30)

"...which is operative in the Christ, rousing Him from among the dead and seating Him at His right hand among the celestials, up over every sovereignty and authority and power and lordship, and every name that is named, not only in this eon, but also in that which is impending..."

(Ephesians 1:20-21)

The Messianic Ages

It is clear from the above texts that both Jesus and Paul, in accordance with Jewish beliefs, taught that the present age is a worldly wicked age, largely under the jurisdiction of Satan, and that at the end of this age, the Messianic kingdom will be fully manifested, introducing the age to come. In the Old Covenant era, the Jewish belief was that this present age would end when the Messiah would come and establish His kingdom. The New Testament reveals that the Messiah has now arrived in Jesus of Nazareth, and that the kingdom of heaven is already here. So in one sense, the New Age or Order of Messiah's kingdom is already here, in spirit, yet as far as world history is concerned, the present age still continues on. This paradoxical tension between these two lines of thought are revealed throughout the New Testament - that which now is, and that which is yet to come.

So in effect the age of the New Creation in Christ is superimposed onto this present age - because Jesus ushered in a New Covenant age of the Spirit. Therefore, through the eyes of the New Testament, 'this present age' incorporates the New Covenant age of Christ's spiritual kingdom and heavenly reign, i.e. the Church age.

According to Revelation 20, the heavenly reign of Christ and His people is described as a period of 1000 years, and is therefore commonly called the Millennium. It is commonly believed that this millennium is a literal 1000 year period yet to come, which I accepted for many years, but I have come to believe that it is, in fact, symbolic of the majority of the Church Era, allowing for a period of Satanic deception to follow at the end of this age (which I believe we are already experiencing). This age then ends with a cataclysmic judgment of fire, which is the Second Advent of Christ.

Either way you look at it, this 'Millennium' is the final age of this present heavens and earth, that is, the Old Creation; though, at the same time, it is an age of spiritual restoration and glory in which the kingdom of God is increasing. The kingdom of the heavens was established at Christ's First Coming, particularly on the Day of Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit, yet the kingdom will be fully manifested at Christ's Return, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ in a New Creation.

This coming Age of the New Creation would be the fifth age from Adam [\[4\]](#) and it is often being alluded to throughout Scripture in the Hebrew phrase *to the age and beyond*, usually mistranslated as *forever and ever*. Revelation 21-22 reveals that this New Creation Age, which will include all the generations of humanity, whether they are in the New Jerusalem experiencing eonian Life or in the Second Death experiencing punishment, follows on from the Millennial kingdom. The Old Creation will then give way to the New Creation. Therefore, both 'this age' and 'the age to come' are viewed as Messianic ages in the New Testament, yet the full manifestation of a New Creation is still future.

Paul refers to these two ages in Ephesians 2.

"...that, in the oncoming eons, He should be displaying the transcendent riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

(Ephesians 2:7)

In the same letter he also refers specifically to the final Age of the New Creation, the Age of all the Ages.

"...to Him be the glory in the ecclesia and in Christ Jesus for all the generations of the eon of the eons! Amen!"

(Ephesians 3:21)

As confusing as it may appear, to talk of future ages in the single and the plural does actually make sense in accordance with some Hebrew idiom. These ages (which includes the present spiritual 'millennium' as well) are viewed as the holiest ages of all the ages, the ages of the ages, yet the one to come is also the greatest Age of all the ages. I'll explain this shortly.

The Tabernacle

Be that as it may, the thing that convinces me that there are Five Ages is that which was suggested by A. E. Knoch, among others, and that is, that the Tabernacle pictures this five-fold division.

When considering a diagram of the Tabernacle layout as described in the books of Moses, we have the following divisions or boundaries.

1. Outside the Israelite Camp
2. Within the Camp
3. Within the Courtyard of the Tabernacle
4. Within the Holy Place of the Tabernacle (the First Room)
5. Within the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle (the Second Room, the Most Holy Place)

The two rooms of the Tabernacle itself (literally two tabernacles within one tabernacle) were called *the Holy Places* or more literally *the Holies of the Holies*. They were the holiest places of all the holy places, bearing in mind that there were other holy items in the courtyard, as well as outside. The Camp of Israel itself was considered holy to God compared to the other nations beyond the camp. These were all differing degrees of holiness.

The Inner room, the Most Holy Place, representing the dwelling place of God, was literally *the Holy of the Holies*. This room was the Holiest of all the Holy places.

These five boundaries can be viewed as a typological analogy or allegory that represents the five steps which brings humanity closer to the Divine Presence. And yet in the Old Covenant system of the Law, only priests, born of the tribe of Levi, could enter the first Holy Place, and only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement. So only a small portion of all the people of Israel could get close to God! It is only through the New Covenant in Christ that all mankind, Jew or Gentile, can now come into the Holy places.

The book of Hebrews clearly reveals that the Tabernacle/Temple worship system of the Old Covenant is an allegory of spiritual things fulfilled in, and through, Christ Jesus (see Hebrews 8-10). Not only can these things apply to individual believers in Christ, but they also carry meaning when related to the historical-redemptive process within the ages of time. Each step or age in the historical process brings a larger portion of humanity nearer to the Divine Presence.

In the age to come, all believers in Christ who compose the true Israel of God are represented as the New Jerusalem, the very dwelling place of God, which is typologically the Tabernacle/Temple; while in contrast, all unbelievers and hypocrites are placed outside in the symbolic Lake of Fire, which is typologically the courtyard where the Laver of cleansing was situated (cf. Revelation 21-22). Everyone has to come through the courtyard where the Altar of Burnt Offering and the Laver of Water was situated - which represents the Sacrifice and cleansing work of Christ and His Word. In the present age, this Laver of cleansing is primarily one of grace (water), yet in the age to come it will be a Laver of Judgment (fire).

This view is confirmed by the fact that the phrases used to describe the Holy Places of the Tabernacle have equivalent phrases to describe the Messianic Ages:

1. [Eon of the eons](#) or [Age of the ages](#) (Holy of the Holies) (Ephesians 3:21, quoted above) - The Holiest Age of them all; the ultimate Age of the New Creation
2. [Eons of the eons](#) or [Ages of the ages](#) (Holies of the Holies) - The two Messianic Ages, the Holiest ages of all the ages, when Christ and the Servant/Sons of God are reigning over all Creation as a royal priesthood

There are also similar phrases in Hebrew to describe the heavens. The Heaven of the heavens is the Third Heaven, the dwelling place of God's Throne, the Highest Heaven; while the heavens of the heavens indicates the celestials, both material and spiritual, which can also include the Third Heaven.

"...to the only, and wise God, through Christ Jesus, be glory for the eons of the eons. Amen!"

(Romans 16:27)

"And the seventh messenger trumpets. And loud voices occurred in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of this world became our Lord's and His Christ's, and He shall be reigning for the eons of the eons! Amen!" "

(Revelation 11:15)

"And they (*Christ's Servants*) shall be reigning for the eons of the eons."

(Revelation 22:5)

Nevertheless, I don't wish to appear too literal and dogmatic about the phrase 'ages of the ages' because ancient Hebrew and Greek often uses plurals a little differently than in English, but what is clear is that, by the way that this phrase is used in Scripture, it is obviously referring to the glorious ages of the kingdom of God and of Christ, the Messianic ages - of which the New Creation is called the Age of all the ages. But it is also possible that 'the ages of the ages' could be describing further ages that will unfold in the age to come! There is so much concerning the New Creation that has not been revealed in Scripture, but one thing is for sure - "of the increase of His kingdom and peace there shall be no end!" (Isaiah 9:7).

The Conclusion of the Ages

Finally, there are a couple of texts that refer to the Conclusion and Consummation of the Ages that, for some, have proved a little difficult to understand.

"...since then He (*Christ*) must often be suffering from the disruption of the world, yet now, once, at the conclusion of the eons, for the repudiation of sin through His sacrifice, is He manifest."

(Hebrews 9:26)

This scripture states that Christ appeared once, at the conclusion or end of the ages, to do away with sin through His sacrifice on the cross. Now it is clear that Jesus didn't appear the first time, literally and chronologically, at the end of all the ages, as this text *seems* to suggest, for both Jesus and Paul talk of at least another age to come. Yet from the Divine viewpoint, which sees the end from the beginning, and calls that which is not as though it were, Christ's Sacrifice for sin *has* occurred at the conclusion of the ages, in the fullness of time, because the blessings and glories of the ages to come are all based on His Sacrifice - and they conclude God's plan of redemption.

"Now all this befalls them typically. Yet it was written for our admonition, to whom the consummations of the eons have attained."

(1 Corinthians 10:11)

This is another interesting one! Paul is saying here that the ends (plural) of all the ages has already arrived or reached all believers in the Body of Christ. That is to say, the grand goal of God's plan and purpose in Christ is to save His stubborn children from sin and death, and to reconcile them back to Himself. This purpose of restoration and freedom is the ends or consummations of all the ages - past and future - and by faith, in spirit, believers have already received this now, therefore, the ends of the ages have already attained to us. This makes even more sense if

the 'Millennium' is viewed as being symbolic of the present Church Era, with the New Creation just around the corner!

The Ultimate Consummation

"...thereafter the consummation, whenever He may be giving up the kingdom to His God and Father, whenever He should be nullifying all sovereignty and all authority and power. **For He must be reigning until He should be placing all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy is being abolished: death.** For He subjects all under His feet. Now whenever He may be saying that all is subject, it is evident that it is outside of Him Who subjects all to Him. Now, whenever all may be subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also shall be subjected to Him Who subjects all to Him, **that God may be All in all.**")"

(1 Corinthians 15:24-28)

Finally, Paul is here describing the ultimate consummation of that final Age of the New Creation, which includes Christ defeating all His enemies by turning them into friends, subjecting all to God (that is, no more rebellion), death being abolished altogether (including the Second Death), and all things receiving life so that God may be all in all. Only then will the Grace and Love of God be fully manifest throughout all of His creation, as the Fifth Age of Grace and Reconciliation will come to a glorious Consummation - all will dwell in the Divine Presence, and the Divine Presence will dwell within ALL. [\[5\]](#)

All scripture quotations are taken from the Concordant Version

Footnotes

[\[1\]](#) Be that as it may, we cannot be too dogmatic on this point for the Scriptures are not always that explicit in regard to the distinctions between ages and administrations. For example, the era from Moses to Christ could legitimately be called the Age of Law (or typologically speaking, the Age of Passover), yet it could also be referred to as the Administration of Law. The whole era of the 'Old Covenant' lasted almost 1500 years - long enough to be called an Age. The same applies to the present era of Grace, i.e. the Church Age, which has already lasted over 1900 years.

[\[2\]](#) It is probable that the six 'days' of creation in Genesis 1 could be interpreted to mean long periods of time, during which, God brought everything into being. Hence, there would've been at least five ages of time before humanity was even created. This seems to be confirmed by Hebrews 11:3, which says that 'the ages were adjusted by the command of God so that what is seen (in creation) did not come out of what was visible, (that is, the creation itself).'

[3] Without trying to confuse the issue here, it is more likely that 'the present age' or 'this age' is describing the period of time which began with the ministry of Jesus as the promised Messiah through to His Second Coming at the end of this age. Both Jesus and Paul spoke of 'this age' and 'the age to come.' This age includes the present 'millennial' reign of Christ from heaven, and the age to come is the greater manifestation of the New Creation after Christ's Return. Some refer to this as 'the New Testament two-age model.'

[4] I think a good biblical case can be made to believe that there are five ages from Adam to the New Heavens and Earth (excluding 'creation ages' before Adam).

- 1) Adam to Noah (the Flood)
- 2) Noah to Moses (the giving of the Law and birth of the Scriptures)
- 3) Moses to Jesus Christ (the New Covenant kingdom; the Law and Prophets fulfilled)
- 4) First Advent of Christ to the Second Advent of Christ ('millennial' Reign; Church age)
- 5) Second Advent of Christ (the Resurrection and Judgment Day; Fullness of the New Creation) to the Consummation of All (when Christ hands the kingdom over to God the Father after defeating Death and subjecting All)

[5] Some believe that the Consummation or End mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:24 occurs at the Second Advent of Christ when the Restoration of all things occurs in the New Creation. This may be so for believers in Christ who will receive their full inheritance at this time, nevertheless, Christ's reign will not end when He returns. The Consummation that Paul is talking about involves Christ reigning until all enemies, including Death, are subjected. This has to include the Second Death as well, for the majority of humanity will be 'in it' for quite some time. Christ and His saints shall be reigning for 'the ages of the ages.' This 'reigning' shall truly begin in all its glory at Christ's Second Advent, when the sons of God shall be revealed to the whole world (Romans 8:18-23). For further info, see [Will Death Last Forever?](#)