

The Church in the End Times

Week #4 – Letters to Sardis and Philadelphia

Seeking the blessing promised to those who
read these words, hear them and take them
to heart. Rev. 1:3



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Suggested Reading

- **Week 2:**
 - Ephesus: Acts 18-20; Ephesians 3; 5
 - Smyrna: Acts 15
- **Week 3:**
 - Pergamos: Num 22-24; Balaam, Num 33; Acts 15; 1 Cor 6
 - Thyatira: 1 Kgs 16; 21; Jezebel, Naboth's vineyard; 2 Kgs 9:36
- **Week 4:**
 - Sardis: Galatians; Romans
 - Philadelphia: Thessalonians
- **Week 4/5:**
 - Laodicea: Colossians

Agenda for This Week

- Review of what we covered last week
- The Church at Sardis – The Dead Church
- The Church at Philadelphia – The Faithful Church

Review from Last Week

- The Seven Churches
- Analysis of the general structure of the letters
- The Church at Ephesus – Love Grown Cold
- The Church at Smyrna – Purified by Persecution

Intro to the 7 Letters to 7 Churches

- They were written to 7 real churches
- They have a very regular structure – but the differences are intriguing
- They have several apparent levels of meaning
 - Local, pastoral level
 - Each church typifies churches throughout the Church Age
 - Believers can align their lives with Jesus' evaluations
 - Prophetic history of the Church filling the gap from Acts to the Rapture
 - More speculative, not universally accepted, and it seems to fit only the western church
 - This can be helpful in understanding the role of the Church in the end times.

Seven Churches, Described and Identified

Name of Church	Ephesus 2:1-7	Smyrna 2:8-11	Pergamum 2:12-17	Thyatira 2:18-29	Sardis 3:1-6	Philadelphia 3:7-13	Laodicea 3:14-22
Period described	The early church, to AD 100	The church under pagan persecution, to 313	Paganism enters the church, to 500s	Papal supremacy of Dark Ages, to mid 1500s	Protestant reformation and fossilization, to late 1700s	Awakening, Bible printed and studied, to mid 1800s	The end-time church, content but sinful, to End.
Opening	To the angel of the church . . . write						
Description of Christ	Holds 7 stars, walks among 7 lampstands	First and Last, Died and came to life	The One with two-edged sword	Eyes of fire, feet like brass; searches minds	Holds 7 spirits and 7 stars	Holy, true, holds keys, opens and shuts	Amen, true witness, Beginning of creation
What Christ knows	Works, labor patience	Works, trials, poverty; blasphemy of false Jews	Works, living where Satan's throne is	More works, love, service, faith, patience	Works, (and see "What you have")	Works	Works: neither cold nor hot
Commendation	Tested false prophets, perseverance	Rich in spite of poverty	Held to My name & faith (see above) even in time of martyr		Have a few names undefiled (later)	Kept command to persevere	
Rebuke	Left first love		Ones with doctrine of Balaam	Jezebel with immorality permitted	Works imperfect		Lukewarm, wretched, blind, naked
Counsel	Remember, repent, do first works	Do not fear suffering	Repent	Hold fast till I come	Watch, strengthen remainder	Hold fast, preserve crown	Buy gold, clothes, eye ointment
Warning	Lampstand will be removed		Will fight with sword of mouth	Jezebel into sickbed, children killed	I will come as thief if you do not watch		I will spit you out; rebuke and punishment
What you have	My hatred for Nicolaitans	Tribulation coming	Also have ones with Nicolaitans doctrine	Rest do not have false doctrine, not Satanic depths	A name as alive, but dead (and see above)	A little strength, My word and name	Not what you think you have
Reward for overcomers	Eat from tree of life	Not hurt by second death	Hidden manna, white stone	Power over nations; morning star	Clothed in white, name in book, confessed	Made pillar, inscribed with new name	Sit on my throne
Other promises	Eternal life to ones faithful to death			Rest are given no other burden	Undefiled ones will walk in white	Submission of false Jews; Kept from hour of trial	Eat with those who open door
Closing	Listen to what the Spirit says to the churches						

Can you remember what each name means and what each letter's theme is?

Provided by Jane Willard

<http://www.bibleexplained.com/revelation/r-seg01-3/rev03c-smaller-table.html>

Map of the Seven Churches



Found at: <http://oelberg.info/Smyrna.htm>

Previous Churches

- **Ephesus: Left their first love**
 - The word “Ephesus” means darling, they were faithful in doctrine but not love
 - Jesus shown as intimately involved in the church as typified the early apostolic church
- **Smyrna: Purified by persecution**
 - Weak and destitute, the church characterized by myrrh (crushed unto death but yielding a beautiful fragrance) was pure and undefiled
 - Typified the persecuted church under Nero (67 AD) – Julian the Apostate (361 AD)
- **Pergamum: “Bad Marriage” – the church that married the world**
 - Jesus comes as a figure of judgment to fight against the church unless they repent
 - Represents the Holy Roman Empire after Constantine
- **Thyatira: Tolerates pagan idolatry, fornication and world conquest**
 - Jesus comes as a figure of judgment (fire, brass) to cast this church into tribulation
 - Only a remnant are holy

The Church at Sardis

“...but you are dead”

Message to the the Church at Sardis

1 “To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: ‘ I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. 3 So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. 4 But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Opening to Sardis

- ***“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:***
 - First city to mint gold coins in the sixth century BC
 - Kings were fabulously wealthy, Croesus and Midas
 - Located atop sheer cliffs that were considered impregnable
 - Twice in its history (Cyrus in 529 BC) it was conquered because it thought its position impregnable only to be scaled one-by-one by invaders
- **This false confidence in its reputation as a strong city was reflective of the church’s main problem.**
 - They had a name in which they had false confidence
 - This letter was a wakeup call for them

Jesus' Title

- **Jesus' title: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars**
 - For a dead church, this is not so bad, not threatening
 - **Seven Spirits: Probably a reference to the “sevenfold spirit” of Isaiah 11:2**
 - To be resting on the Branch of Jesse: (1) Spirit of the Lord is described as the Spirit of (2) wisdom and (3) understanding, (4) counsel, (5) strength, (6) knowledge and (7) fear.
 - This describes the Holy Spirit in the fullness (7) of His operation.
- **He also has the seven stars (messengers in 1:20)**
 - Not as intimate as in Ephesus where He was holding them in His hand.
 - Was the sin of this church that it had rejected the power of the Holy Spirit working through godly leaders

The Report Card – What They Did Well

- **You have a name but...**

The Answer: Not Very Well

- ***“I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.***
 - What a wakeup call for a church with a good reputation
 - They had a name (“denomination”) that bespoke of greatness but were really dead
 - Death speaks of sin (Eph. 2:1, “dead in trespasses and sin”; Rom. 5:12, “death by sin”)
 - Those who are spiritually dead are unregenerate, unsaved
 - This is a dead church that is being lead by spiritually dead leaders rather than the Holy Spirit
- ***2 Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.***
 - They looked good on the outside; they “played church” but they were just going through the motions
 - They were “mostly dead” and didn’t have to die completely

Commentary to the Dead Church

- Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.
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The Remedy

- ***3 So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent.***
 - Again similar to the Ephesian church which was told to remember what they did at first.
 - This church didn't really have the works of the Ephesians but they had been given something to "keep" or obey and were held accountable
- **The Risk**
 - ***"Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you."***
 - Is he talking about those spiritually dead people who will still be hear after the Rapture (1 Th 5:2, ***"the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night."***)?

There Is a Righteous Remnant

- ***4 But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.***
 - Garments speak of spiritual condition
 - These people have not soiled their garments but they are not spotless
 - Because they have kept their garments humanly clean, Jesus will give them clean garments from and for heaven
- **These righteous can overcome**
 - ***“5 He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”***
 - The few people who have not soiled their garments need to overcome
 - In that day, they kept rosters in the cities and if one died or was put in prison, their names were taken out of the roles of the citizens of that city.
 - This does not imply that Jesus might erase our names from the book of life
- ***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”***
 - Is it those who will repent who have the ears to hear? Let's labor to have ears to hear

Prophetic View

- If Thyatira represents the Roman Catholic Church then Sardis would symbolize the Reformation church
- See if this fits:
 - Known by their name (or denomination) v. 1
 - Heralding back to their reputation, v. 1
 - Dead churches full of people going through the motions
 - (ordaining and marrying gays, forsaking the faith for the ways of the world)
 - Deeds weren't complete – they still had an amillennial view of the end times and didn't give Israel her proper place in scripture
 - There is a little fire but it is ready to go out
 - Only a remnant will be saved
 - Subject to excommunication (having their names taken out of the book of the supposedly saved)

What Can a Sardis Church Do?

- **Wake up – strengthen what remains**
 - Calls for an honest evaluation of that which honors God and the Holy Spirit
- **Remember what they had been given**
 - Submit to the truth of salvation by grace with works to back it up (James 2:17). They had the apostolic writings collected (~90 AD).
 - Go back and see that you “keep” (obey) the truth of the scriptures.
- **Do not soil their garments**
 - Forsaking the Spirit’s leading by living in the flesh (In 1 Th 5, the chapter about the Rapture, they were admonished to not quench the Spirit or despise prophetic words.
 - How fitting that this church that is largely set to miss the rapture is being instructed to pay attention to the sevenfold Spirit.)
- **Stop incomplete acts of worship and give yourselves fully to the worship of God and obedience to His call. Practice your faith with works (James 2:14-26, faith without works is dead)**
- **If these churches don’t wake up, they will be thrust into the tribulation. Jesus will come like a thief and take what little they have (Mt. 13:12) and they will be joined to the one world church in the Tribulation in Rev. 17.**

The Church at Philadelphia

The Faithful Church

Message to the Church at Philadelphia

18 “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:

19 ‘ I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. 20 But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. 22 Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 23 And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds. 24 But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you. 25 Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come. 26 He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; 27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Title of Jesus

- *He who is holy,*
 - He was Holy at His birth (Luke 1:35)
 - Holy at His death (Acts 2:27)
 - Holy in His present priestly office (Heb 7:25)
- *who is true,*
 - “True”: Alethinos, real, genuine; vs. alethes, truth in contrast to falsehood (Jn 17:3 “I am the way, the truth... none come to the father except through me”; 1 Jn 5:20).
- *who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens*
 - For Key of David, see Isaiah 22:22-23 (Google found this)
 - 21 ...I will entrust him with your authority,
 - And he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.
 - 22 “Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder,
 - When he opens no one will shut,
 - When he shuts no one will open.
 - Also reminiscent of Jn 17 (*“I am the way”*)
 - who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens
 - Jesus is the gate and the door to heaven
 - He dispenses access to Heaven and to heavenly blessings on earth

Opening to Philadelphia

- Rich agricultural area, lived in constant fear of earthquakes and volcanic activity
- “Philadelphia” means brotherly love
 - John 13:35, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”
 - John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments”
- Philadelphia was an eastern outpost with a Greco-missionary role
 - Philadelphia was a gateway to the orient and was involved in promoting Grecian culture to the world
 - This impacts the churches role as we shall see

The Report Card – What They Did Well

- ***8 ‘ I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut***
 - Jesus refers back to his title as one who opens doors
 - Elsewhere in the NT, an open door meant an opportunity to minister the word of God. (Col 4:3, “that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ”; Acts 14:27, “He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.”; 1 Co 16:9, “a wide door for effective service has opened to me”
- ***...because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.***
 - “Power” is translated from “dunamis” from which we get the word “dynamite”. (In NAS, it’s translated as ability 4, meaning 1, mightily 1, mighty 1, miracle 2, miracles 17, miraculous powers 3, power 83, powers 6, strength 2, wealth 1. It does not connote weakness)
 - They have power that Jesus knows will not get wasted so He gives them an open door of opportunity.
 - They have also been obedient (“kept My word”) and loyal (“have not denied my name”, the source of power)

Missionary Outreach in Persecution

- ***9 Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie***
 - Again the synagogue of Satan as for the church at Smyrna, the other good church
 - They were persecuting this little church at Philadelphia
 - In our times, could this refer to those who believe that the Church is Israel?
- ***...I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.***
 - These Jews-in-name-only will see the power of their testimony and will submit to the reality that Jesus was their Messiah
 - This was anathema to Jews who were promised that the world would come and bow down to them (Is 45:14)
 - Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, writing a few years later than Revelation records that these Jews repented and were converted in contrition

The Reward

- ***10 Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.***
 - For the specific historical church, it meant that the persecution that Smyrna was experiencing was going to get much worse throughout the whole Roman Empire.
 - This church persevered with the perseverance of Jesus (submission, suffering and death – the gospel)
 - For the modern church, it seems to be a promise that the true church will not suffer the great tribulation (1 Th. 5:9-10, “9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.”)
 - They will be kept from the time or hour of the tribulation, not preserved through it.
 - The Rapture will happen to us as it did to Enoch (he was pre-flood)
- ***“Those who dwell on the Earth”*** is code in Revelation for unbelievers – look it up

Call to Persevere

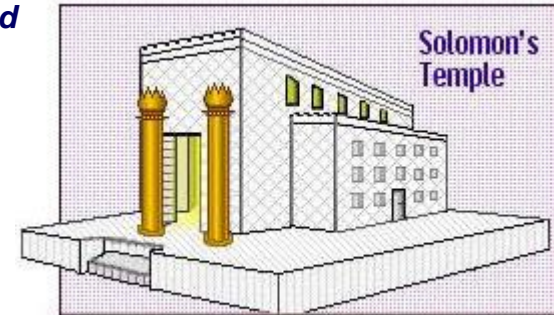
- ***11 I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.***
 - They won't lose their salvation but they can lose their reward (1 Co 9:26-27, "26 Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."
 - Interesting that they already have the crown – not a future event

Encouragement to the Overcomer

- ***12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.***

- ***Pillars***

- *Stability, permanence – important to a region beset by volcanic earthquakes*
- *Honor & maybe support, Boaz and Jachin were the two pillars by the portico of Solomon's temple supported nothing but were ornately decorated*



Solomon's Temple with two bronze pillars by its portico.

- ***New names***

- *Write on him the name of My God... the city of My God... my new name*
- *What honor is bestowed on the believer in God's kingdom and what intimacy that we get a new name for ourselves and a new name by which to call our Savior!*

Prophetic Revelation

- **What characterized the post Reformation church?**
 - Missionary outreach to the whole world
 - Reestablished an understanding of the immanency of Christ's return to establish His kingdom
 - Great Book: The Gospel of the Kingdom by George Eldon Ladd – had a big influence on John Wimber
 - Many evangelistic organizations formed in England and other European countries to bring the gospel to the Jews.
 - 1842 Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among Jews
 - 1876 the Mildmay Mission to Jews
 - 1896, Kilburn Mission to the Jews
 - By the end of the nineteenth century there was one Christian missionary for every one thousand Jews in the British Isles.
 - “Little power” it eschewed the political machinations of the Roman Catholic Church (although not blameless in the treatment of American natives) but went in the power of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit
- **This church apparently will not go into the Great Tribulation (v. 10)**
 - Thyatira was promised to go into the tribulation (except for a few) because of a refusal of “Jezebel” to repent
 - Sardis was “mostly dead” so only a few would be raptured
 - (Saved from the hour...) The Rapture apparently happens between Chapters 3 and 4. Some say the “come up” statement in 4:1 signifies the same thing.
- **Will the church be involved in saving all Israel (c.f. Romans 11)?**

What Can we Learn

- What can we learn to be more like the Church at Philadelphia?
 - Missionary outreach (open door, converting the Jews)
 - Active ministry (open door)
 - Understand how prophecy can strengthen our commitment to Jesus
 - Be faithful to Jesus' commands and to His Name (symbolizes everything that He is, Gen 32 when Jacob wrestled with God, when Jesus declared "I am he" in the garden)
 - Look for his soon coming and be filled with hope
 - Pray for Israel as the key to Jesus' return (Luke 13:34-35, *"... 34 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it! 35 Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'"*)

Prayer



Assignment for Next Week

- Review suggested reading chart on page 2 and consider reading for background on these two churches or reading ahead.**
- Pray as you read that the Holy Spirit will open your minds and spirit to the truth about Jesus Christ and His will for the church.**
- Pray for this class that we will bring glory to God as we seek to understand His Word.**

Backup

Notes on Bible Interpretation

From Mike Day's Class

The Interpretive Journey

Grasp the text in their town.
God's intended meaning in the
original context.

Measure the river of differences
between the biblical audience and us.

Cross the Principilizing Bridge:
What is the theological principle?

Grasp the text in our town. Application
of principles in parallel situations.

From *Grasping God's Word* by Duvall & Hays

Three Guidelines

- The Bible was God's word to someone else before it was God's word to us.
- When you want to find out what the Bible has to say, find out what the whole Bible says.
- The quality of your answers depends on the quality of your questions.

ASK: What is God up to? What does this tell me about the character of God?

Timeframe in History

- **Where Can We Place the Events of Revelation in Time?**
- **Here are some things to consider**
 - John 1 starts before the world was formed
 - Revelation 21 shows heaven and earth passing away, leading to a restoration of Paradise in ch. 22
 - The outline in 1:19 spoke of “what is now” and “what will take place later”.
 - We will see that Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the 7 letters to 7 churches.
 - These were real churches, as shown by the excavations of Sir Wm. Ramsay (1851 – 1939)
 - After the time of the churches (“the now”), the scene shifts to heaven and the “after these things” (meta tauta) starts
 - Keep that on your mind as we consider the timeframe

Theological Principles

(From Wikipedia on Hermeneutics)

- **Theological Group of Principles:**
- The **Election Principle**
- The **Historical-grammatical** principle based on historical, socio-political, geographical, cultural and linguistic / grammatical context
- The **Dispensation Principle** or The **Chronometrical Principle**: "During different periods of time, God has chosen to deal in a particular way with man in respect to sin and man's responsibility."
- The **Covenantal Principle**: "We differentiate between the various contracts that God has made with his people; specifically their provisions, their parties and their purposes."
- The **Ethnic Division Principle**: "The word of truth is rightly divided in relation to the three classes which it treats, i.e. Jews, Gentiles and the Church."
- The **Breach Principle**: Interpretation of a certain verse or passage in Scripture is aided by a consideration of certain breaches, either breaches of promise or breaches of time.
- The **Christo-Centric Principle**: "The mind of deity is eternally centered in Christ. All angelic thought and ministry are centered in Christ. All Satanic hatred and subtlety are centered at Christ. All human hopes are, and human occupations should be, centered in Christ. The whole material universe in creation is centered in Christ. The entire written word is centered in Christ."
- The **Moral Principle**
- The **Discriminational Principle**: "We should divide the word of truth so as to make a distinction where God makes a difference."
- The **Predictive Principle**
- The **Application Principle**: "An application of truth may be made only after the correct interpretation has been made"
- The **Principle of Human Willingness in Illumination**
- The **Context Principle**: "God gives light upon a subject through either near or remote passages bearing upon the same subject."
- **Sub-divided Context/Mention Principles:**
- The **First Mention Principle**: "God indicates in the first mention of a subject the truth with which that subject stands connected in the mind of God."
- The **Progressive Mention Principle**: "God makes the revelation of any given truth increasingly clear as the word proceeds to its consummation."
- The **Comparative Mention Principle**
- The **Full Mention Principle** or The **Complete Mention Principle**: "God declares his full mind upon any subject vital to our spiritual life."
- The **Agreement Principle**: "The truthfulness and faithfulness of God become the guarantee that he will not set forth any passage in his word that contradicts any other passage."
- The **Direct Statement Principle**: "God says what he means and means what he says."
- The **Gap Principle**: "God, in the Jewish Scriptures, ignores certain periods of time, leaping over them without comment."
- The **Threefold Principle**: "The word of God sets forth the truths of salvation in a three-fold way: past - justification; present - sanctification/transformation; future - glorification/consummation."
- The **Repetition Principle**: "God repeats some truth or subject already given, generally with the addition of details not before given."
- The **Synthetic Principle**
- The **Principle of Illustrative Mention**
- The **Double Reference Principle**
- **Figures of Speech Group of Principles:**
- The **Numerical Principle**
- The **Symbolic Principle**
- The **Typical Principle**: "Certain people, events, objects and rituals found in the Old Testament may serve as object lessons and pictures by which God teaches us of his grace and saving power."
- The **Parabolic Principle**
- The **Allegorical Principle**

Sub-divided Context/Mention Principles

(From Wikipedia on Hermeneutics)

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- **The Parabolic Principle**
- **The Allegorical Principle**

Past, Present and Future

(v. 19)

“Alpha — Omega”

“Things...seen”

“Beginning — End”

PAST

PRESENT

FUTURE

Son of Man in Heaven

“I am he that liveth”

“the things which thou
hast seen”

The 7 Churches

“I was dead”

“Behold, I am alive”
“the things which are”

The Cosmic Crisis

(After removal of true
church and before the coming
of Christ to creation)

“I have the keys of hell and
of death”
“the things about to be after
these things [*meta tauta*]”

Revelation 1
Christ in Glory

Revelation 2, 3
Church in the World

Revelation 4 — 22
Crisis in the Future

From J. Vernon McGee

The 70 Weeks of Daniel

