

# The Book of Revelation

Suffering for Jesus

Chapter 2:8-11

# Suffering for Jesus

## Revelation 2:8-11

There is a famous statement, well known from the early history of the church: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” It was made by the church father Tertullian in AD 197 in a defense of Christianity to the Roman Empire. The actual quote found in his *Apolegeticus* (Apology) reads, “We multiply whenever we are mowed down by you; the blood of Christians is seed” (Tertullian, Apology, 227). There is much truth in this statement.

# Suffering for Jesus

## Revelation 2:8-11

Suffering, persecution, and martyrdom have indeed been the calling of the church of the Lord Jesus somewhere among the nations throughout her entire history. At one time the book Foxe's Book of Martyrs was a perennial best seller, cataloging the stories of men and women who gave their lives for Christ.

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Today Voice of the Martyrs updates us on the persecution and sufferings of our brothers and sisters around the world. Open Doors does the same. Time Magazine (Alter, “Deaths”) reported the number of Christian martyrs doubled between 2012 and 2013. Nigeria led the way in 2012, Syria in 2013, with Iraq, Rwanda, and Sudan not far behind. An estimated 100–150 million Christians have been martyred every year in recent decades. Some estimate that 65 percent of all those martyred took place since the dawn of the twentieth century (EWTN News, May 10, 2002).

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We see this in the life of a first-century church located in a city called Smyrna, a church with whom Christ was well pleased (2:8-11). From the outside it did not look like much. It had neither the prestige of Ephesus nor the wealth and prosperity of Laodicea. However, it did have a love and passion for Christ that caught the eye of the One whose “eyes are like a fiery flame” (1:14). As with Philadelphia, our Lord has no word of criticism or correction. This is a church we can learn from. This is a church from whose example many will need to draw strength in the days ahead as they take up their own cross and follow Jesus.

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There is a basic and common literary pattern of 5 parts:

- 1) The addressee and a **characterization** of Christ from the vision of chapter 1
- 2) Christ's knowledge of the church's condition and a word of **commendation**;
- 3) A word of reproof or **correction**;
- 4) A word of exhortation or **council**;
- 5) A word of promise which presents a hopeful **challenge**.

# Suffering for Jesus

## Revelation 2:8-11

Revelation 2:8-9 (CSB)

“Write to the angel of the church in Smyrna: Thus says the First and the Last, the one who was dead and came to life: 9 I know your affliction and poverty, but you are rich. I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

# Suffering for Jesus

## Revelation 2:8-11

Revelation 2:10-11 (CSB)

10 Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will experience affliction for ten days. Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

11 "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will never be harmed by the second death.



**The Path  
Through the 7  
Churches  
will take  
place  
Clockwise  
from Ephesus**



modern day  
**TURKEY**

Pergamos

Smyrna

Ephesus

Laodicea

Thyatira

Sardis

Philadelphia



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## Revelation 2:8-11

Revelation 2:8 (CSB) “Write to the **angel** of the church in **Smyrna**

**Angel** (messenger) – 1) literal angel (cf. 1 Cor. 11:10); 2) pastor of the church; 3) messenger to the church

- **Smyrna** – modern Izmir and the only one of the 7 cities still in existence, 35 miles north of Ephesus. A proud and beautiful city, its coins were inscribed with the words “First of Asia in beauty and size.” (Ephesus and Pergamum challenged this!) Temples of Apollos, Asclepius, Aphrodite, Cybele and Zeus dotted the landscape of this beautiful pagan city.



**An artists depiction of ancient Smyrna.**

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- **Smyrna** – Politically the city was tight with Rome and the imperial cult (emperor worship). The Roman orator Cicero paid Smyrna a great compliment calling her “the city of our most faithful and most ancient allies.” As a reward for her loyalty in A.D. 23, Smyrna beat out 10 other cities and received permission to build a temple to Tiberius Caesar (A.D. 14-37), the Caesar who reigned when Christ was crucified.

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- **Smyrna** – In contrast to Ephesus, which today is nothing but ruins, Smyrna is the modern city of Izmir (iz'-meer) in Turkey. It is a modern, beautiful seaport city with a metropolitan population of over three million. It was known as Smyrna until the Turkish Postal Service Law of 1930 made “Izmir” the internationally recognized name.

[Tommy C. Higle (2016). Journey Series - Book Studies. Tommy C. Higle.]

# **Suffering for Jesus**

## **Revelation 2:8-11**

**When you are suffering....**

**1. Remember Jesus is Eternal (vs. 8)**

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## Revelation 2:8-11

Revelation 2:8 (CSB) “Write to the angel of the church in Smyrna: Thus says the **First and the Last**, the one who was dead and came to life:

**First** (protos) **and the last** (eschatos): used of Yahweh in Isaiah 44:6; 48:12. This emphasizes both His eternality and His sovereignty. He is eternal God. This persecuted people needed to know He knows what is happening and that He is allowing it to happen. He is the eternal one, a title related to time.



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If “the First and the Last” draws attention to His deity, “the One who was dead and came to life” speaks to His humanity. The former emphasized His authority over time. The latter emphasizes His authority over death and life. Jesus experienced death for us, a far more horrible death than any human will ever know. He bore the full judgment and wrath of God for the sins of the world (John 1:29).

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Revelation 2:8 (CSB) “Write to the angel of the church in Smyrna: Thus says the First and the Last, **the one who was dead and came to life:**

He suffered, He died, and He lived again! Their Lord, the sovereign, eternal God was subject to rejection, persecution and death. But He won, He conquered. Like their Savior, they may be rejected, persecuted and even die, and like their Master they too will be victorious. He lives! He is with them. He knows all that they are experiencing.

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Our Lord transcends time, life, and death. Jesus is addressing Christians who are suffering so horribly they may have to die for their faith. He wants them to remember He is the resurrection, and the life ( Jn 11:25b).

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Revelation 2:8 (CSB) “Write to the angel of the church in Smyrna: Thus says the First and the Last, **the one who was dead and came to life:**

Like their Savior, this church too may walk the road of persecution and suffering. Like Him, they may even walk the road of an unjust death. But they should not lose heart. To live is Christ and to die is gain (Phil 1:21). In Christ believers are in a win-win scenario. He lives and they will live with Him. Because of this guarantee, they have no fear of the death all should fear, “the second death” (Rev 2:11).

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## **Revelation 2:8-11**

**When you are suffering....**

- 1. Remember Jesus is Eternal (vs. 8)**
- 2. Realize Jesus knows and cares (vs. 9)**

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## Revelation 2:8-11

Revelation 2:9 (CSB) 9 I know your affliction and poverty, but you are rich. I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Jesus tells His people at Smyrna, “I know your affliction and poverty.” Swindoll puts this statement in a wonderfully descriptive context:

Imagine yourself sitting among the gathering of God’s people in Smyrna on a cold morning before sunrise. A small, lamp-lit room houses the remnant of beaten and beleaguered church members. The once-lively crowd of Christians now displays obvious gaps where men and women once sat. Some have fallen away under the persecution. Others are simply gone—arrested, exiled, or executed. Some of you risked your lives just to meet this morning to pray, to sing hymns to God, and to read from Holy Scripture.

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All of you are outcasts, desperate for a word of encouragement from the messenger sitting in your midst. In the dim light the pastor unrolls a scroll and begins to read with a calm, quiet confidence. Whispering and shuffling in the room ceases when you hear from whom the message comes—the risen Lord Himself. The entire group seems to hold its breath when Christ begins His commendation: “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)” (2:9). (Insights, 45)

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The Church is Commended for its dedication: The word Smyrna means myrrh, which was a sweet perfume used to embalm dead bodies. As a gift from the Magi, (Matt. 2:11), he was prophetic of the suffering and death Jesus would experience. This city had a history of suffering. Now that lot was cast upon the church. By all outward signs she was weak and poor. **BUT REMEMBER:** looks can be deceiving. Upon careful inspection by the Lord, we find a strong and wealthy people, at least as Jesus sees things.



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**Affliction**— the pressures you are experiencing and the opposition you are facing. I know. I know the burden that crushes.

**Poverty** – extreme, abject poverty. Linking tribulation and poverty suggests the two are related. Economic destitution was the result of the opposition they experienced. It cost them to take a stand for Jesus, yet they stood. And because they stood Jesus makes an amazing statement: “you are rich.” Materially they had nothing, but spiritually they had everything.

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**Poverty** – People on earth mocked them as paupers, but God praised them as wealthy. James 2:5 is helpful here:

“Listen, my dear brothers: Didn’t God choose the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that He has promised to those who love Him?”

There are sacrifices in following Jesus, but He is worth it all!

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**Synagogue of Satan** - Apparently, the Jewish synagogue in Smyrna was vicious in its blasphemy, or slander, of the Smyrnan believers. Because the Jews in Smyrna were trying to destroy the church, they were a synagogue, or instrument, of Satan.

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**Jews** - These were descendants of Abraham by physical birth but not spiritual birth. In John 8:44 we find words quite similar as Jesus said of those unbelieving Jews, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.” Physical heritage is no indication of spiritual standing! Hostile and bent on persecuting the followers of Christ, these Jews were tools of the evil one.

**Satan** - means adversary. Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 provide some insight, by way of typology of his fall. (He is mentioned in Rev. 2:9-10, 13; 3:9; 9:11; 12:9-10, 12; 13:4; 20:2, 7, 10.)

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**Jews** - Neither this text nor any other text in the Bible gives warrant for any thought or act of anti-Semitism. In commenting on the reality of anti-Semitism and a Christian perspective, John Piper is extremely helpful:

[Anti-Semitism] has seemed amazing to me because Jesus was a Jew, and all the 12 apostles were Jews, and the whole of our Bible was written by Jews (except for [possibly] Luke), and Jesus said, “Salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22), and to be Christian is to be grafted into the covenant made with Abraham the first Jew (Romans 11:17-24), and to become a Christian is to become “Jewish” —a child of Abraham by faith (Galatians 3:7).

# Is there a Devil?

The DEVIL, or Satan, has been around a long, long time. Life magazine once rightly called the devil “the longest-lived villain in history.” Christians did not invent the devil. Long before Christianity, the devil was being portrayed as a fallen angel in Greek, Egyptian and Hindu mythologies. Christians, however, trace their belief in the devil to the Bible, not ancient myth.

# Is there a Devil?

The New Testament especially depicts him as the unseen instigator of evil, the archenemy of God and man. But something unexpected happened to the devil in the centuries after the New Testament Church was established. Over the years he underwent a strange metamorphosis.

# Is there a Devil?

By the Middle Ages, superstitious and demon-dreading Europeans had transformed the biblical devil into a grotesque physical caricature. Connecting evil with physical ugliness, religious people increasingly pictured the devil as a repulsive mixture of monstrous body parts.



# Is there a Devil?

Eventually, he acquired a forked tail, a cloven hoof, pitchfork and horns.

# Is there a Devil?

By modern times, the devil had become a laughable cartoon figure in the popular imagination. Meanwhile, some more educated people changed the devil into a convenient literary metaphor for evil.

# Is there a Devil?

According to the Bible, the devil was the angel Lucifer – the Shining One or Light-bearer (Isaiah 14:12). His pride led him to rebel against God and become Satan, the Prince of Darkness. The Bible says the devil and his demons exercise power over the nations. The apostle John, when writing about the devil, said the “whole world is under the control of the evil one” (I John 5:19). Revelation says he “leads the whole world astray: (Revelation 12:9).

# Is there a Devil?

Paul told the Christians at Ephesus that they had once followed “the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (Ephesians 2:2). The apostle Paul said, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers” (II Corinthians 4:4). The devil has been at this deception game from earliest times. He is experienced in seducing people into doing his bidding without them being aware of it. Temptation continues to be the devil’s most powerful weapon (I Corinthians 7:5). That’s why the Bible identifies him as the tempter (I Thessalonians 3:5).

# Is there a Devil?

Satan roams among God's people, Scripture warns. He tries to ravish the spiritually unprepared. "Be selfcontrolled and alert," wrote Peter (I Peter 5:8). Why? Because, he continued, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith" (verses 8-9). God in Jesus Christ came in human flesh "to destroy the devil's work" (I John 3:8). Jesus promised that Satan the devil would one day be permanently condemned (John 12:31).

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**When you are suffering....**

- 1. Remember Jesus is Eternal (vs. 8)**
- 2. Realize Jesus knows and cares (vs. 9)**
- 3. Refocus on the Eternal Reward (vs. 10-11)**

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Revelation 2:10 (CSB) **Don't be afraid** of what you are **about to suffer**. Look, the devil is about to throw **some of you into prison to test you**, and you will experience affliction for ten days. Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

**Do not be afraid** – stop fearing (me with the imperative); it may indicate an already present atmosphere of fear (cf. Matthew 10:28).

**About to suffer** – he warns them: it is coming •

**Some to prison to test you** – to show where their loyalty is to show how strong their faith is to show how great their love for Jesus is

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Revelation 2:10 (CSB) Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will experience **affliction for ten days**. Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

**Affliction for ten days** – 1) ten literal days 2) symbolic for a limited period of time 3) representative of 10 specific periods of Roman persecution from Nero A.D. 54 to Diocletian in A.D. 284.

View #2 is best. • God allowed it • God limited it. He is in control.



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**Affliction for ten days** –

No matter how long you are to suffer afflictions - remember the following promise:

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.” (Rom 8:18)

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Affliction - Smyrna built a temple to the Emperor Tiberius in 23 b.c. Later, under the cruel emperor Domitian, emperor worship was required of all Roman subjects. Part of the required worship was once a year to say "Caesar is lord" while placing incense on an altar. Many Christians refused to say those words and would instead say, "Jesus is Lord," which often resulted in torture and execution. "Jesus is Lord" is the first Christian confession. Therefore, the Christians in Smyrna were suffering horribly for their faith.

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In the letters to the seven churches, after the commendation there is usually a word of condemnation. However, there is no word of criticism for the suffering church in Smyrna. She's not perfect, but there is no outstanding sin in this church. The only other church that has no word of criticism from our Lord is the church at Philadelphia. It is no accident these two churches have no rebuke from the Lord. It is because they are enduring severe persecution.

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There is truth in the old saying, "Persecution purifies the church!" Suffering can also be good for Christians. George Müller (1805-1898) was a famous English Christian who cared for over 10,000 orphans during his lifetime. He said, "Difficulties are food for faith to feed on."

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Revelation 2:10 (CSB) Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will experience affliction for ten days. Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the **crown of life**.

**Crown of life** - No earthly persecution or death can rob the child of God of their priceless eternal reward. Note the crowns: Crown of life (Rev. 2:10; also James 1:12) Crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8) Crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4) Crown of gold (Rev. 4:4) Crown of rejoicing (1 Thess. 2:19) Crown of corruption (1 Cor. 9:25) Men may thrust a spear through our heart but God will put a crown on our head!

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## Revelation 2:8-11

Revelation 2:11 (CSB) 11 “Let anyone who has ears to **hear** listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who **conquers** will never be harmed by the **second death**.”

**Hear** – (imperative) Churches – (plural)

**Conquers**– (I John 5:4-5)

**Second Death** – (cf. Rev. 20:6, 14; 21:8). This is spiritual death, eternal death. It is not annihilation but permanent, conscience separation from the living God in Hell, the Lake of Fire. It is an eternal punishing which the overcomer will not experience. John uses a double negative ... “The overcomer no not will be hurt by the second death.”

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**Second Death** – All true believers are conquerors, or overcomers ( 1 Jn 5:5). However, in this passage Jesus is promising the second death will in no way affect true believers. The first death—physical death—is the separation of body and spirit. The second death is hell according to Revelation 20:14: “Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.”

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**Second Death** – At this second death, a person’s spirit is separated from God for all eternity. If you are only born once, you will die twice—both physically and spiritually. On the other hand, if you are born twice, you will only die once—physically.



# Old Testament Connections

Interestingly, the message to Smyrna contains fewer Old Testament allusions than any of the other messages.

# Old Testament Connections

Revelation 2:8 “Write to the angel of the church in Smyrna: Thus says **the First and the Last**, the one who was dead and came to life:

Isaiah 44:6 This is what the Lord, the King of Israel and its Redeemer, the Lord of Armies, says: **I am the first and I am the last**. There is no God but me.

Isaiah 48:12 “Listen to me, Jacob, and Israel, the one called by me: I am he; **I am the first, I am also the last**.

# Old Testament Connections

Revelation 2:10 Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison **to test you, and you will experience affliction for ten days.** Be faithful to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Daniel 1:12 "Please **test your servants for ten days.** Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink.

Daniel 1:14 He agreed with them about this and **tested them for ten days.**

# The Book of Revelation

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Chapter 2:8-11