

# REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

## STUDY FIVE

### The Suffering Church under Attack

*Revelation 2:8–11*

*No one suddenly wakes up one morning and says, “I don’t love Jesus anymore.” It doesn’t happen like that. It happens over the years, little by little, after hardship that doesn’t seem to have reason—loss of health, loss of hope, loss of a loved one. The love sometimes cools off, and that breaks Jesus’ heart.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**H**UMAN innovation has made mundane what once seemed unthinkable. In a few hours, airplanes can take us to regions of the world our ancestors hardly knew existed. Smart phones allow us to carry around a universe of knowledge everywhere we go. Modern medicine has lowered the infant mortality rate and increased life expectancy. *What a time to be alive!*

Though these inventions might make us believe we are superhumans who can accomplish the impossible, no technology has ever—nor *will* ever—eradicate the ever-present problem of *pain*. Anesthetics may numb physical pain. Entertainment may distract from emotional pain. But those nagging aches in the body and soul will always return. When they do, we realize just how fragile and needy we truly are.

So when it comes to pain, we need a *divine* solution.

Thankfully, Scripture offers a heavenly answer to the earthly problem of suffering. Jesus never promised to take away the pain of this life, but He does offer hope that, one day, He will return to give us a new life and to eliminate the problem of pain for good. That promise strengthens us to endure even when we frail humans feel like breaking.



#### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Say this prayer to prepare your heart to search the Scriptures today:

*Father, the suffering I endure in this life often feels unbearable. Before I study Your Word today, I acknowledge I cannot solve this problem of pain by my own human strength. Sustain me with your divine strength and lead me to trust You more and more—even when life hurts most. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.*



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## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In Jesus' letters to the seven churches in *Revelation 2–3*, He moves quickly from congregation to congregation, city to city, addressing specific issues. According to *Revelation 2:8*, which church did Jesus address *second*? How did He describe Himself, and with what description from *1:12–18* does His self-description match?

The New Testament says little about the city of Smyrna. The key point of note, however, is that this metropolis was loyal to the Roman Empire. In fact, early in the first century AD, Smyrna won a bid to build the temple for Caesar Tiberius. If you want explore these details further, you can read about *Smyrna* in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* available for free at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).

Why might Christians who were committed to worshiping Jesus as Lord struggle in a culture like Smyrna's?

In a city full of people saying, "Caesar is lord," committed followers of Jesus had a target of treason painted on their backs. Yet it wasn't the *Romans* who turned against them . . . it was the local *Jews*. We discover why in *Revelation 2:9–11*.



## Observation: The Church in Smyrna

In most of these letters, Jesus offered a commendation, a concern, and a correction. When the text differs from this pattern, it is *intentional* and *important*! In the letter to the church in Smyrna, Jesus exchanged His words of concern and correction for a refrain of *comfort*. Keep this in mind as you observe Jesus' words in *Revelation 2:9–11* to this impressive church.<sup>1</sup>

According to *Revelation 2:9*, what two things did Jesus "know" about the church in Smyrna?

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What paradoxical observation did Jesus make in *Revelation 2:9a* about the state of the believers in Smyrna?

According to *2:9b*, who was the *immediate* cause of this state of the church in Smyrna? Who was the *ultimate* cause? What is ironic about this reality?

What exhortation in *2:10a* did Jesus offer the believers in Smyrna?

According to *2:10b*, what reward awaits those who “remain faithful even when facing death”?

According to *2:11*, what did Jesus say would happen to those who “listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying”? What kind of victory would they obtain?

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*It must have given these struggling believers a sense of relief to remember that the Lord Jesus Christ had tasted death for them. No one could be more understanding or comforting to a suffering church. There's something about having gone through the depths that gives you an understanding of someone else when they go through it too. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## Interpretation: Making Sense of Suffering

Jesus framed His message to this suffering church in Smyrna with two similar statements about death—which may be the truest expression of pain. What did Jesus say about death in [Revelation 2:8](#) and [2:11](#). How do these words offer comfort to suffering Christians—both then and now?

This refrain of comfort contains a puzzling statement: “I know about your suffering and your poverty—but you are rich!” ([Revelation 2:9](#)). In what sense can suffering believers (who often lack material wealth) be considered rich? What do they have in abundance that others lack?

What does [2:9–10](#) reveal about Satan’s role in human suffering. Some parts of these verses may feel confusing, so be sure to consult your Bible-study tools, like Pastor Chuck’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*, or the free online resource [Constable’s Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#).<sup>2</sup>

*Satan isn’t a little ugly red character with a pitchfork. He is the most attractive and winsome and alluring and appealing of all the creations. He is brilliant and deceptive. He motivates people in ways they don’t realize. Very few are Satan worshipers, but he is the ultimate cause of a great deal of suffering in this world. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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## Correlation: A Divine Perspective

Long ago, a man named Joseph endured a great deal of suffering, and his story offers a divine perspective on the reality of human pain.

Jacob, Joseph's father, loved Joseph more than his other brothers, which caused the brothers to feel jealousy and anger toward Joseph. They *hated* their brother. So, one day, they decided to dispose of him . . . for good. They trapped him, beat him, and sold him to a band of traveling merchants who brought him to Egypt as a slave. *Talk about suffering!*

Yet God was with Joseph, and shortly after his arrival in Egypt, Joseph succeeded in whatever he did. Several years later, he found himself working closely with Pharaoh as a personal advisor and vice-regent. During this time, God gave Joseph wisdom that allowed him to anticipate and prepare for a great famine. If Joseph had held this position that allowed him to help Pharaoh, people across the known world would have died from starvation.

As Joseph reflected on these events in [Genesis 50:20](#), what theological principle did he discover? How could these words be comforting to the believers in Smyrna thousands of years later?

Read the following New Testament verses and describe how they offer a uniquely divine viewpoint on human suffering: [Romans 8:26–30](#); [James 1:2–4, 12](#); and [1 Peter 1:3–7](#).

Until Satan, sin, and death are eradicated, human beings will suffer, but God—in His sovereignty—can take even the most horrible circumstances and use them for our good and for His glory.

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## Application: Enduring Suffering with Christ

As Pastor Chuck Swindoll reflected on Jesus' message of comfort to the suffering church in Smyrna, he developed three personal points of application:

- *My Lord knows every detail of my circumstances*—no matter how bad they are.
- *If my situation remains the same, I don't need to fear*—no matter how scary it's been.
- *If things get worse for me, He will see me through*—no matter how long it takes.

The language of pain is one of the few dialects every person can understand with absolute fluency. What experiences with pain have you had in the past? How did God bring you through these times of suffering? In what ways have you seen Him use something evil for your good and His glory?

Are you enduring a painful trial right now? How do Jesus' words, "I know about your suffering . . ." offer you comfort (*Revelation 2:9*)? What practical steps can you take to trust Him amid this difficult time and to allow Him to use the fiery trial to refine you?

You may not experience the same kind of persecution that the believers in Smyrna did, but Jesus said that His followers should expect to be hated by the world (see *John 15:18–20*). How has learning about the ancient church in Smyrna equipped you to stand strong for your beliefs when you endure mistreatment or even full-blown persecution because of your faith in Jesus?

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Pain is a companion that will follow and assault you until it lands its final, fatal blow. Yet we follow the one “who was dead but is now alive” (*Revelation 2:8*). When we finally meet Him at heaven’s gates, He will give us new bodies that are forever freed of the shackles of sin, death, sorrow, and *pain*. *What a day that will be!* Until then, we wait and, if needed, endure.



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, I find comfort in the truth that Your Son has conquered Satan, sin, and death. Though I feel the effects of these evil powers each day, I rejoice in the hope that You will one day defeat them for good. I eagerly await that day when I can fully share in Christ’s victory. As I wait, remind me that You are always with me—even in the pain. In Jesus’ victorious name, amen.*

## ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer and content strategist, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 2003, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

