

Study Notes: Smyrna (Revelation 2:8–11)

1. Introduction: Setting the Scene

- Revelation is **three genres at once**:
 - **Letter** – written to real churches with pastoral concern.
 - **Prophecy** – like OT prophets, calling out sin, encouraging faithfulness.
 - **Apocalypse** – unveiling Christ through visions and symbols.
- The book is full of **Old Testament hyperlinks** (600+). Even in four verses, Smyrna's letter echoes Daniel and Zechariah.
- **Theme**: Faithfulness in suffering. The persecuted are not forgotten—Christ sees, knows, and rewards.

 *“Christ commends the church of Smyrna for enduring tribulation and encourages it to continue to be faithful in anticipation of imminent, more severe persecution, in order to inherit eternal life.” (Beale, Revelation)*

2. Historical Background of Smyrna

- **Wealthy seaport city** on the Aegean; thriving trade and culture.
- Known for its **loyalty to Rome**. In AD 26 it won the right to build a temple to Emperor Tiberius—cementing emperor worship.
- **Religious pluralism**: temples to Zeus, Apollo, Aphrodite, Cybele (mother goddess), and Rome herself.
- **Imperial cult**: citizens expected to burn incense to Caesar, declaring *“Caesar is Lord.”*
 - Jews were exempt (they could “pray for Caesar”), but Christians were not.

- Jewish leaders in Smyrna denounced Christians as dangerous outsiders (Rev 2:9).

“The Jewish community was a major force in opposing Christians, frequently acting as informants to the authorities.” (Campbell, Mystery Explained)

Result for Christians:

- Loss of jobs, exclusion from trade guilds.
- Confiscation of property.
- Public slander and imprisonment.
- Torture and martyrdom.

3. Who Speaks? (Rev 2:8)

- *“The First and the Last, who was dead and came to life.”*
- OT echo: Isaiah 44:6 — Yahweh calls Himself the First and Last.
- Jesus claims **divine identity**, presenting Himself as the one who conquered death.
- This directly answers Smyrna’s situation:
 - They face death → but He has already overcome death.
 - Encouragement: their suffering is real, but not final.

4. “I Know Your Tribulation” (Rev 2:9)

- To be “seen” by Christ is ultimate affirmation.
- Smyrna: **material poverty but spiritual riches.**
- “Synagogue of Satan” = not an ethnic slur, but a description of people aligning with the **accuser** (Rev 12:10).

- They claimed religious authority but sided against Christ's people.
- For us today: cultural slander labels biblical conviction as “hate speech.”
 - Standing for life, marriage, or biblical truth → called intolerant, bigoted, dangerous.
 - Same spirit, new clothes.

5. “Ten Days” of Testing (Rev 2:10)

Interpretations:

1. **Dispensationalist view:** 10 waves of Roman persecution (Nero → Diocletian), or 10-year Diocletian persecution (AD 303–313).
2. **Symbolic/ideal view:** echoes Daniel 1:12–15 (10 days of testing). Limited, God-ordained period.
 - Not endless suffering—God sets the boundary.
 - Testing refines, proves, strengthens.

“The ‘ten days’ should be taken as a figurative number designating a short and limited time of trial.” (Beale, Revelation)

Application: Your trial has an **expiry date**.

6. The Crown of Life (Rev 2:10)

- Crown imagery: Smyrna was famous for athletic games; winners received laurel crowns.
- Jesus promises a **better crown**—life itself, eternal and incorruptible.
- Polycarp (Bishop of Smyrna, disciple of John):
“86 years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” (Martyrdom of Polycarp)

9–10)

- Fire did not consume him; he was stabbed. His life embodies the Smyrna promise.

7. Second Death Overcome (Rev 2:11)

- First death = physical.
- Second death = eternal separation from God (Rev 20:14–15).
- Christ's promise: those faithful to Him **will not be touched by the second death.**
- Suffering may bring physical death, but never ultimate defeat.

 *“Overcomers will not be hurt by the second death; they may die once, but they will never die twice.” (Campbell, Mystery Explained)*

8. Smyrna Then and Now

- Ancient Smyrna: Christians slandered, boycotted, persecuted, killed.
- Modern parallels:
 - Fired for Christian convictions.
 - Social ostracism on campuses.
 - Labeled hateful for biblical marriage or pro-life convictions.
 - Increasing violence toward believers (e.g., attacks on churches, Christian speakers).

“The events on earth and in heaven are interconnected. Persecution in history reflects a cosmic war between Christ and Satan.” (Beale, Revelation)

9. The Theology of Persecution

- Not meaningless suffering but **refining fire** (James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 1:6–7).
- Persecution = Satan’s attempt to destroy, but God’s tool to strengthen.
- Tertullian (AD 197): “*We multiply whenever we are mowed down by you; the blood of Christians is seed.*”(Apology 50)
- Smyrna = picture of **faithful witness** that overcomes fear of death.

10. Call to Response

1. **Are you bold or compromising?**
 - Living openly for Christ or silently blending in?
2. **Are you prepared to suffer for Him?**
 - Smyrna’s Christians embraced prison, poverty, death.
3. **Have you given your life fully?**
 - Cultural Christianity won’t stand in persecution.
 - Christ calls: “*Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.*”

References

- G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*.
- David Campbell, *Mystery Explained: A Simple Guide to Revelation*.
- Douglas Stuart & Gordon D. Fee, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*.
- *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (2nd century).
- Tertullian, *Apology* 50.

REVELATION 2:8-11
LETTER TO SMYRNA

DEFEAT IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE,
SEED-SOWN FOR A COMING
HARVEST.



“All death can do to
the believer is deliver
him to Jesus”

CHARLIE KIRK

LETTERS

PARABLES

PARABLES

GOSPELS

APCALYPTIC

PROPHECY

WISDOM

POETRY

LAW

NARRATIVE

Apocalypse: Symbol-laden vision, pulling back the curtain on reality.

Prophecy: A Spirit-given word calling the church to faithfulness.

Letter: Addressed to real communities, with ongoing relevance to the universal church.

The first and last are in poor spiritual health.

Three in the middle are in a mixed situation.

Only the 2nd and 6th have proven themselves faithful.



Events in heaven and earth
are interconnected.

The picture of the lampstand doesn't come out of nowhere. Zechariah 4:2 — the prophet sees a lampstand with seven lamps blazing before God. In Israel's tabernacle and later in the temple, the lampstand stood in God's presence, always burning. It was a living symbol: the seven flames meant the Spirit's power (Zech. 4:6), and the lampstand itself was Israel — God's chosen people meant to shine in a dark world.

That word “mystery” is deliberate. It reaches back to Daniel 2, when God gave Daniel insight into the king’s dream. The king saw kingdoms rise and fall, and Daniel called it “the mystery” revealed by God. Now Christ says to John: the mystery is no longer hidden. It’s fulfilled in Me.

**BEAST
666**

***BREAKING
NEWS***



**WHAT ARE THE
DIFFERENT VIEWS
ON THIS LETTER**

BIBLE





The “ten days” gets mapped to either ten distinct waves of persecution under ten emperors, or the ten-year terror of Diocletian (AD 303–313).

Dispensationalist: Smyrna = a prophetic church age. They read it as the era of persecution under Rome — from Nero (AD 64) to Diocletian (AD 313). The “ten days” gets mapped to either ten distinct waves of persecution under ten emperors, or the ten-year terror of Diocletian (AD 303–313). For them, Smyrna is one box on the prophecy chart, with the martyrs crowned for their faithfulness.

Smyrna **belongs to every age of the church.** The testing is short, but it's fierce. The victory isn't escaping death but enduring it. Just like the cross: apparent defeat, actual triumph. The takeaway: Smyrna is more than a prophecy chart. It's a **mirror for the persecuted church in every generation.**



TEMPLE TO
CAESAR

CAESAR IS LORD

CAESAR
IS LORD

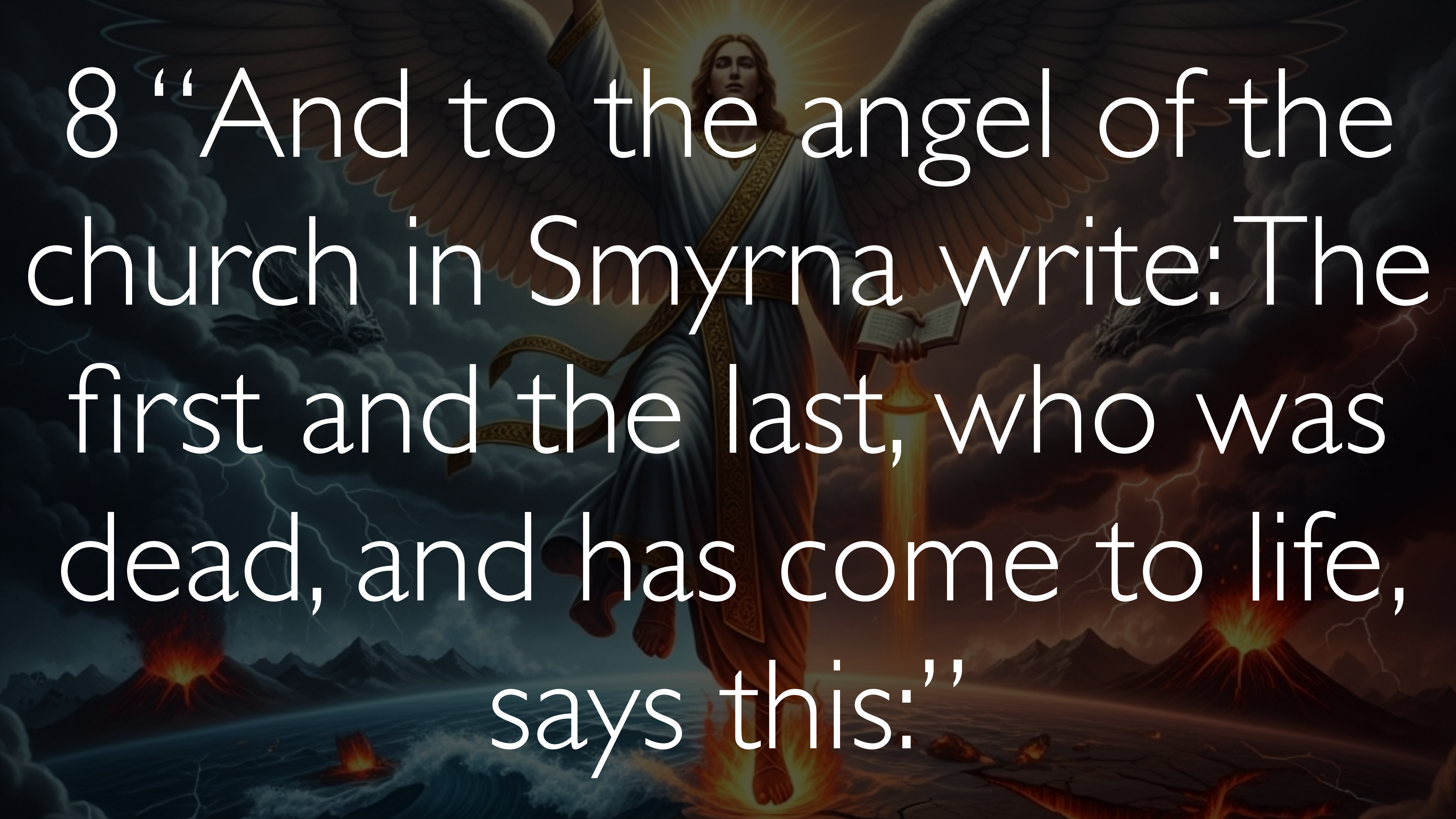




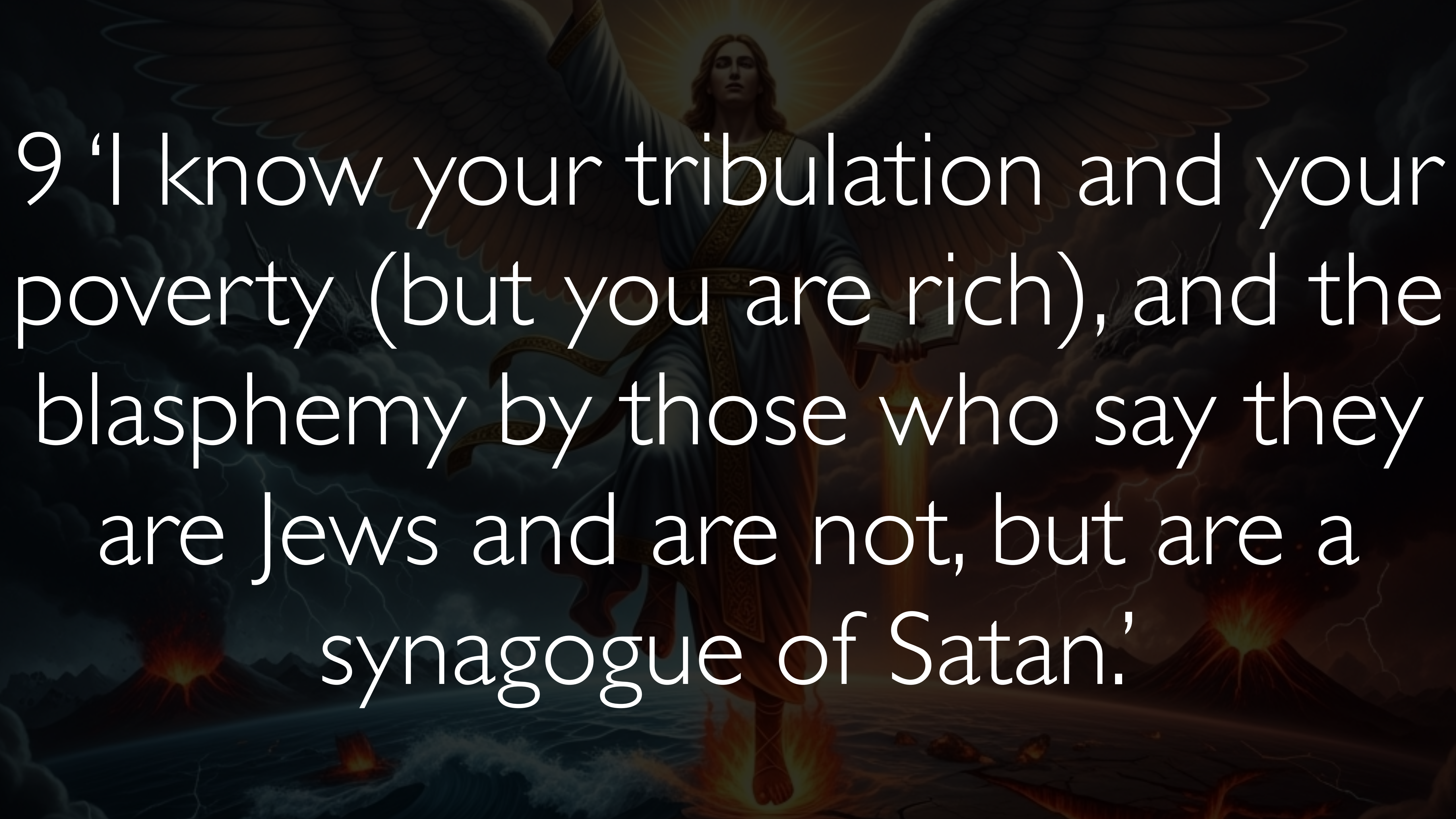
Revelation 2:8–11 (NASB)

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: 9 ‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

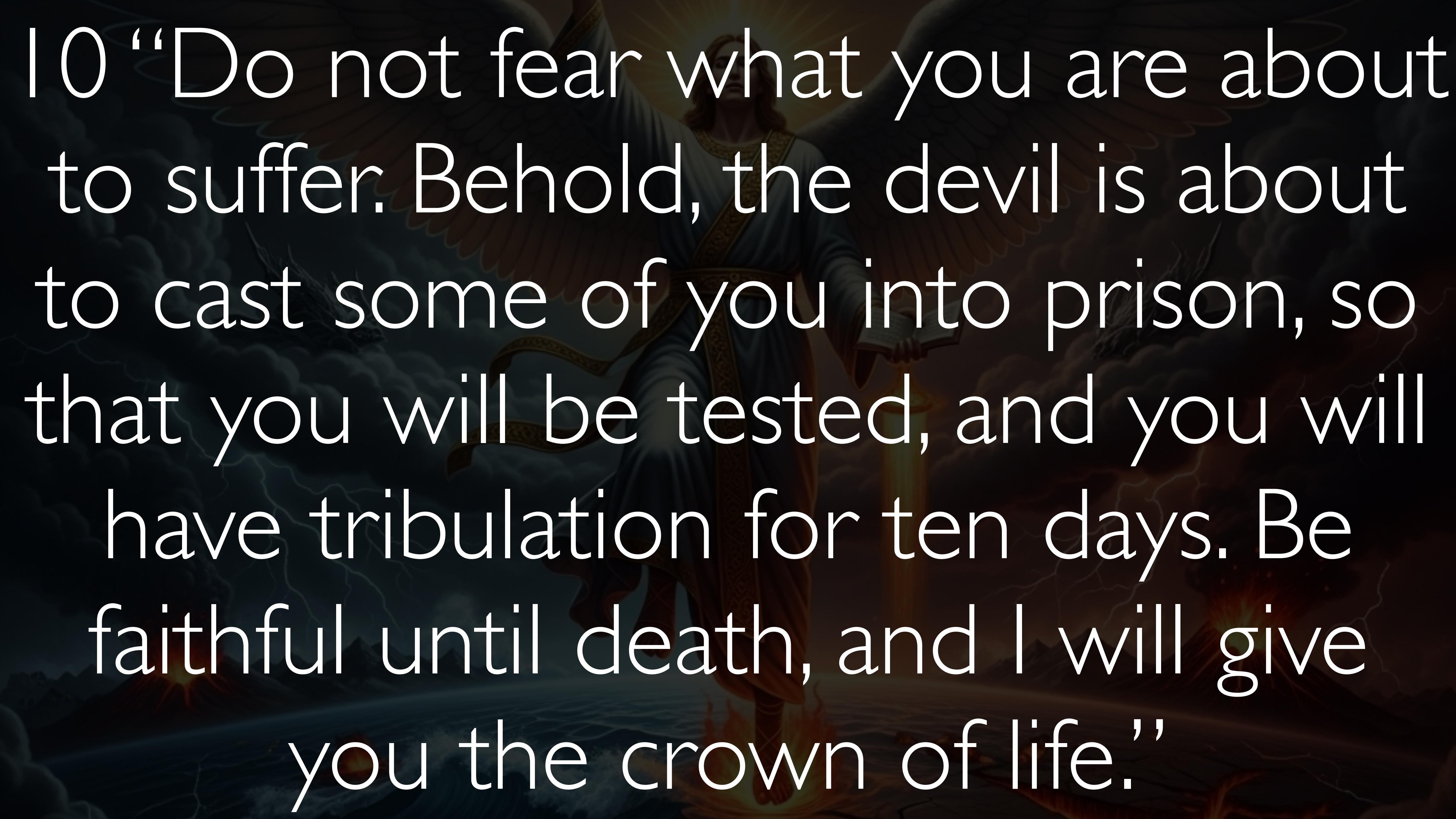
10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. 11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'



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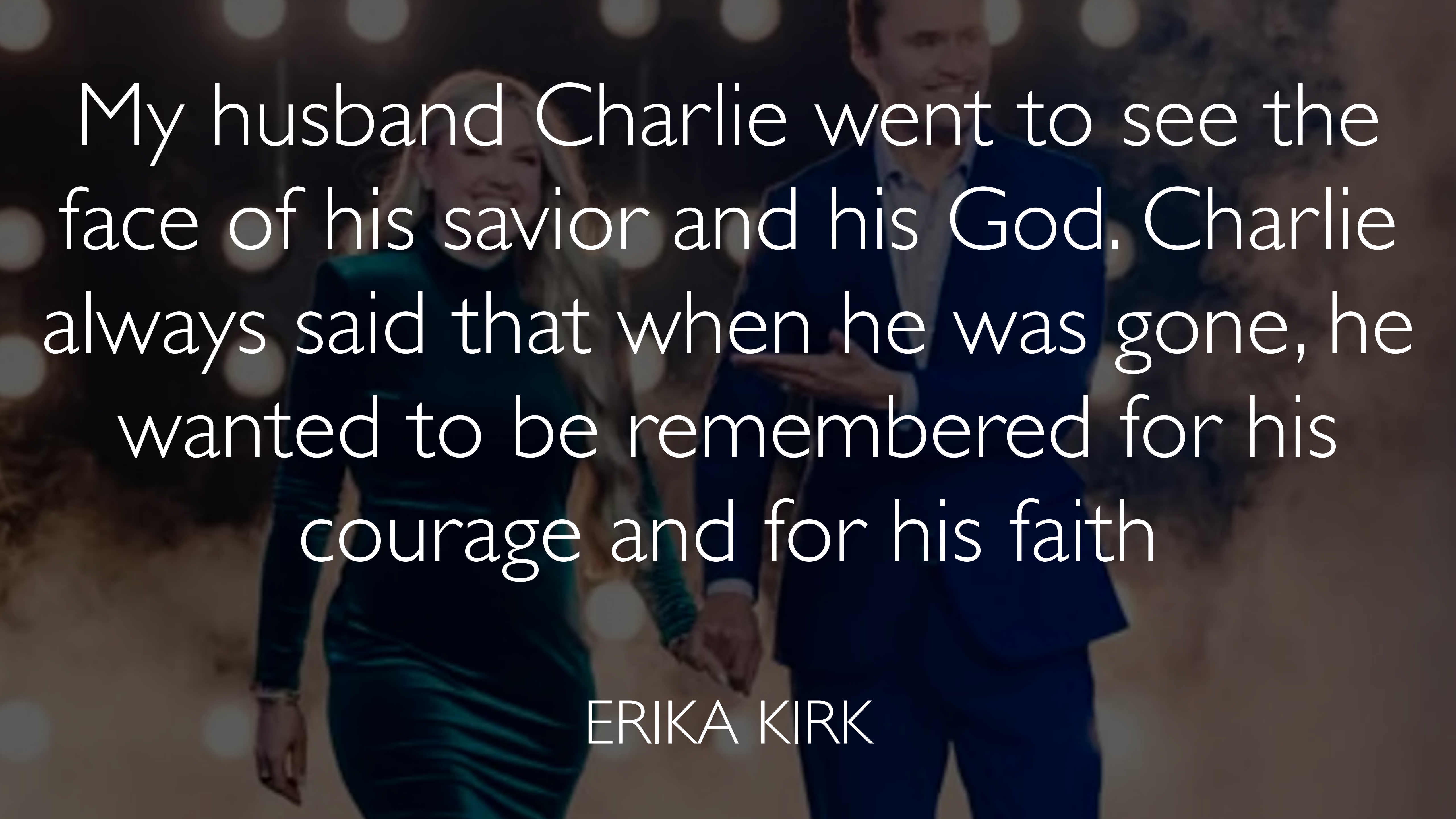
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“Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance”
(James 1:2–3)

I want to be
remembered for
courage, for my faith...
the most important
thing in my life is my
faith.

CHARLIE KIRK



A couple is walking together at night. The woman is on the left, wearing a teal dress, and the man is on the right, wearing a blue suit. They are both smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is dark with many out-of-focus lights, creating a bokeh effect. The text is overlaid on the image in a white, sans-serif font.

My husband Charlie went to see the
face of his savior and his God. Charlie
always said that when he was gone, he
wanted to be remembered for his
courage and for his faith

ERIKA KIRK

10 “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

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)

...you will have tribulation for ten days...

The “ten days” is figurative, echoing Daniel 1:12–15 where Daniel and his friends were tested for ten days. It means the trial is intense but brief and under God’s control. The number ten often signifies completeness in a limited scope. The church is assured that the suffering is not open-ended but confined within God’s sovereign limits.

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. I I He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'





When ordered to curse Christ and live, he simply replied: "Eighty-six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'



Questions