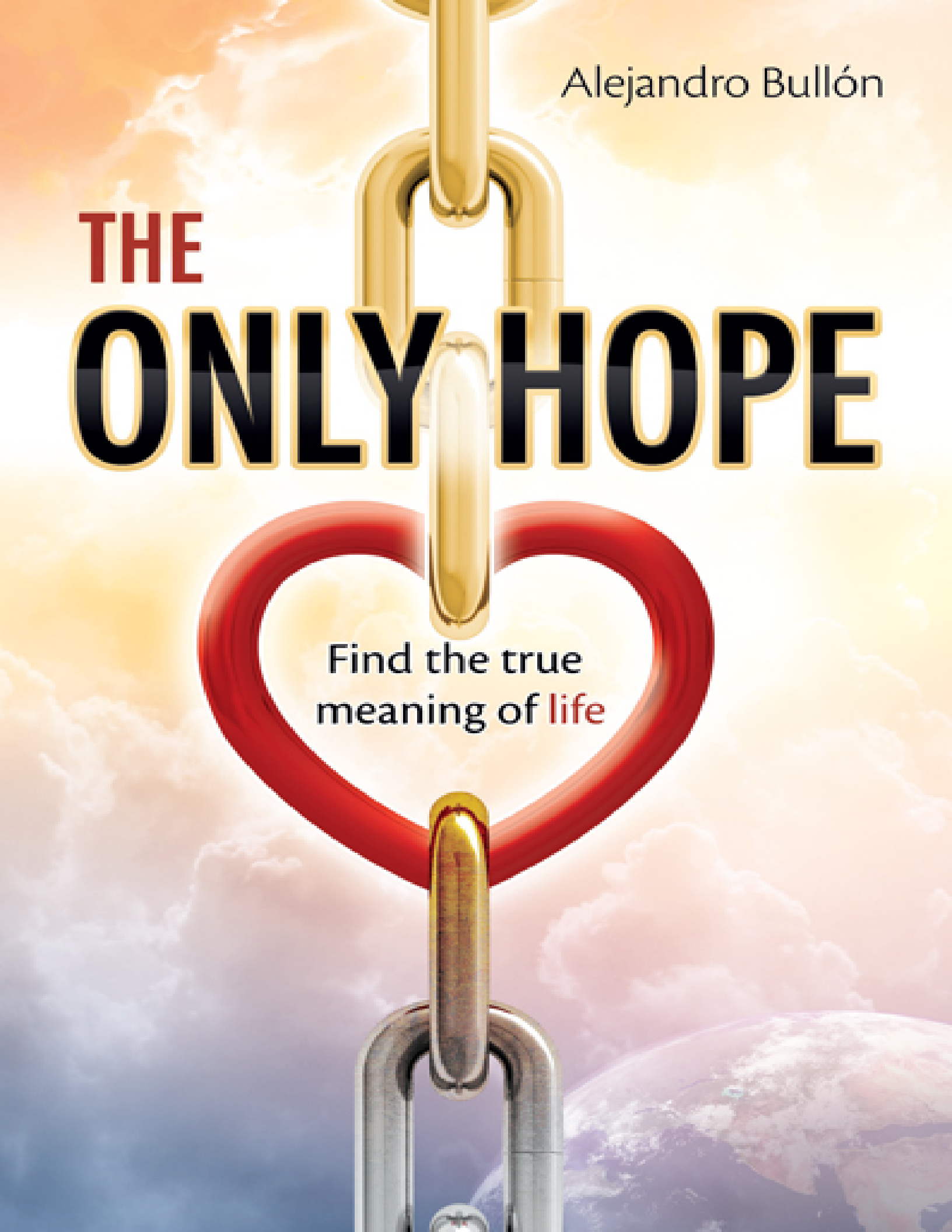


Alejandro Bullón

# THE ONLY HOPE

Find the true  
meaning of **life**





**THE  
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meaning of life

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# Introduction



Life is like a stage. The curtains open and we see the tragedies, struggles, conflicts, and relentless pursuit of humans who dream, yearn, and work to find a place in the sun. Many are born, grow old and die without reaching the desired shore. Some do not even know where they come from or where they are going. Others, after walking among thorns, finally find the meaning of existence.

This book features stories of people who one day, in the midst of contradictory circumstances, found hope. A light helped them look toward the future with the certainty that there is a better tomorrow. Hope is the wellspring of life. It helps us see the sun despite the dense clouds. It teaches us to believe in another day even when, from a human perspective, all is over.

The Christian's hope is not just the human desire for things to get better in the future. It is the conviction that victory has come despite the apparent defeat. This certainty is born of absolute values of an absolute God, who revealed the truth in His Word. The Bible is the source of hope. It contains over 3,000 promises that are able to revolutionize the lives of those who believe in them.

In our troubled world, there is a hopeful people. They are men and women who, despite their pain and suffering, walk with firm steps towards a glorious future. This attitude is not just an escape from reality; it is not the folly of burying one's head in the sand like the ostrich or imagining a sugar coated life. The hope of these people has a firm foundation.

What are the beliefs of this people? What is the reason for their convictions? How is it possible to walk with a fearless attitude in the midst of so many adverse circumstances?

This book will introduce you to the fundamentals of the world's only hope, the foundations of this glorious future.

# Chapter 1

## The book of hope



It is said the heart has reasons that reason does not understand. This may or may not be true. However, the foolish impulses of passion often mislead human beings. Otherwise, it would be difficult to explain what happened on that sad morning in July.

The train had reached the end of the tracks, and the throng of passengers spilled out of the cars. In the crowd a small, muscular man was hiding his face behind thick sunglasses and a cap.

Despite the air of mystery, nobody could suspect that underneath the jacket that citizen hid a .38. He appeared to be about 50 years old and walked with light steps, looking forward, careful not to lose sight of the beautiful brunette in jeans and black blouse that walked hurriedly through the crowd.

The 35-year-old woman looked back apprehensively, sensing she was being followed. She repeated this ritual three or four times before entering the tunnel to cross the avenue. She bent down pretending to tie her shoe-laces, trying to figure out if someone was indeed following her.

The church clock indicated 8:15 a.m. At that time, the city was crowded with people too busy to notice the unfolding scene.

Though she did not want to, Lucia came out of the other side of the avenue and entered a park. She was no ordinary woman. Her beautiful appearance easily attracted the attention of men, but she was not a person without scruples. She valued honor, dignity, and honesty.

The situation began almost without her noticing, and

gradually, she got stuck to a web of circumstances from which she was determined to free herself that morning. She began to replay the last fights she had with her husband as though she was watching a film. There were terrible scenes of jealousy, aggressions in public, endless nights of discussions, and finally betrayal wrapped up the scene.

Among centennial trees and unattended vegetation was a young blond man sitting on an old bench and reading a newspaper while smoking carelessly. When he saw Lucia, he ran to meet her with open arms.

Evaldo, the jealous husband, hid himself behind an old cashew tree to watch the scene. He seemed indecisive and was sweating despite the cold July; he exuded pain and hatred, clenching the gun in his hand. The rest of the story is easy to imagine. The blond man was shot four times and fell dead on the spot. Lucia was killed with two shots to the chest. Evaldo tried to fire the last shot in his own head, but no longer had bullets. Then he knelt before the body of his beloved, and weeping, reached to hold her bloodied body.

“Why did it have to end this way?” he screamed.

Sentenced to several years in prison, Evaldo wasted away, consumed by pain. He loved Lucia. He met her at a train station, in the carnival of 1990. At the time, he was 35 years old and at the end of his career. She, a beautiful dancer in a samba school, was 15 years his junior. Their love was intense from the beginning, and together they built their dreams. They lived in a yellow townhouse and had two children who filled their life with joy. But all that was gone. Evaldo served his sentence, and Lucia, who survived the attack, wanted nothing to do with her husband.

“I couldn’t care less if he rots in jail,” she would say to her friends.

But at night, lying alone and watching the children sleep, she wept in silence, not knowing the reason why. One day during lunch at the clothing factory where she worked as a seamstress, a co-worker approached her.

"I don't think you're happy," the co-worker said.

"I don't know. Is anyone truly happy?" Lucia replied.

"Lots of people. But for you to be happy, you need to know God's plan for you."

"What plan? What are you talking about?" Lucia asked.

"No one came into this world to suffer. God has a wonderful plan for each person, and happiness is the process of discovering it."

"Are you a Christian?" Lucia asked. "Yes, I am," her co-worker responded.

"Let me tell you, I don't have even the slightest interest in religion. I'm sorry, but I think it's better if we stop right here."

"I'm not talking about religion. I'm talking about your life. Are you happy that way?" asked her co-worker.

This conversation was the first of many for Lucia and her co-worker. As time passed, the friendship between the two started to grow. However, Roberta, the friend, did not say a word to her again about spiritual matters.

One day in October Lucia sought Roberta at lunch.

"I don't know what to do. My life is in complete chaos," Lucia said. "What's the matter?" asked Roberta.

"My thirteen-year-old daughter is pregnant. What did I do to deserve this?" Lucia asked. "I work myself to death in order to support my two children, and their father is in jail. I'm alone. I don't know what else to do."

"You're not alone." "What do you mean?"

"Why don't you give Jesus a chance?" Roberta suggested. "There you go again with the issue of religion," said Lucia.

"You know, Lucia, every human being has problems," replied Roberta. "The difference is our attitude toward them. And this attitude depends on the certainty that we are never alone."

"But I am," Lucia insisted. "My relatives are far away, and I haven't heard of them for many years."

"No, my friend, you're not alone," Roberta responded. "I'm



here.” “Thank you!” Lucia exclaimed.

“I’m not just talking about our friendship, but about Someone who can really help you,” Roberta said. “I’m talking about Jesus. Don’t say anything, just listen to this Bible verse.”

Roberta went to her work table, pulled out her Bible.

“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!” (Isaiah 49:15).

Lucia’s eyes reflected emotion. “Is that in the Bible?” she asked.

“Look with your own eyes,” said Roberta.

“But why do you think this book is the Word of God?” Lucia asked. “There are several reasons,” Roberta responded.

“The first is that the Bible writers claim they wrote by divine mandate. Paul says: ‘All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness’ (2 Timothy 3:16). This text has two ideas. The first is that all Scripture is inspired by God, and the second is that God gave us His Word for instruction. It is useless to try to be happy without the knowledge of the Word of God.”

“I don’t know, my friend,” said Lucia sceptically. “I love to see the way you trust this book, but anyone could have written this and then claimed it was inspired by God.”

“True, but there are other reasons to believe that this book is inspired by God,” said Roberta. “For example, there is the unity of thought. The Bible was written over a period of 1,500 years. Moses was the first author and lived 15 centuries before John, the last of the writers. Most writers didn’t know each other. However, if you read the Bible, you will find that there is a unity of thought that’s incredible. It’s as if one day the 40 writers had met and agreed what each would write.”

Lucia seemed disconcerted. For the first time, she was showing some interest in spiritual matters. Until that day,

she seemed to have merely existed, never wondering about her purpose in life. She looked at the clock and realized she still had 15 minutes of break left.

“You know it’s hard for me to believe in these religious things,” Lucia confided. “The people I met over the years who believed in the Bible were the ones who most disappointed me.”

“Maybe because they only knew the theory, but never knew the author personally,” Roberta suggested.

“How is this possible?” asked Lucia

“Look what it says here: ‘You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me’” (John 5:39), Roberta quoted. “The One who said that was Jesus Christ himself. He wants you to know Him and discover that you can trust Him and His promises.”

“Hmm.”

“There’s more; listen: ‘And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free’” (John 8:32).

“What will it free me from?” asked Lucia.

“From all that you’re feeling,” replied Roberta. “Fear, anguish, despair, loneliness. Jesus said: ‘The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly’ (John 10:10). Do you understand? He wants you to have abundant life. But for that to happen, you need to trust the Bible.”

The factory siren was indicating it was time to restart their activities, and the two headed back to their job posts.

Lucia said, “We need to talk more about this.” Roberta smiled.

The hours of the afternoon passed quickly. At the end of the work day, Lucia was waiting for Roberta by the exit.

“I want to know more about what we were talking about,” said Lucia, “but now I need to go home. I promised my kids that I would come home early today.”

“I can go with you,” Roberta offered. “We can talk on your way home.” “It won’t be too late for you?” Lucia asked.

“A little, but it’s ok,” Roberta replied.

On the bus, Roberta spoke of the prophecies as further proof of the inspiration of the Bible.

“Listen to what the prophet Isaiah wrote over 2,000 years ago,” said Roberta. “‘It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in’ (Isaiah 40:22). You know, for centuries, science claimed that the Earth was flat, but the Bible has said it was round. Christopher Columbus proved the truth of the Bible when he got to America on October 12, 1492.”

“This is awesome,” said Lucia. “I didn’t know that.”

“There are many things that people overlook,” said Roberta. “For example, there is the extraordinary way Bible describes human history in prophecy, from the days of the Babylonian empire to the present day.”

“Where is that?” asked Lucia.

“Here in Daniel chapter 2,” replied Roberta. “We can read when we get to your house. In this prophecy, Bible presents the parade of empires that dominated the world since the days of Nebuchadnezzar, passing through the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek Empire under the command of Alexander the Great and later by the Roman Empire. It is also mentioned the fall of Rome, and the failed attempts of other nations in dominating the world. The Bible says that, after the division of the Roman Empire into ten barbarian nations close to its borders, another empire would never rise again with such scope and power. In our day, the Lord Jesus will return to earth and to put an end to sin’s history.”

“In our day?” Lucia asked. “Are you kidding me?”

“I am not kidding,” Roberta said. “See what it says here: ‘And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom

shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Daniel 2:44).

“Who are these kings?”

“It refers to the present day when there is no longer a kingdom which dominates the world,” Roberta explained. “In these days, God will establish His kingdom forever, and it will happen with the return of Jesus to earth.”

Back home, while Lucia prepared dinner, the two friends kept talking. “You know, Roberta, when you talk, everything seems easy, but I always thought the Bible was a difficult book to understand,” Lucia admitted.

“In the beginning, my friend, you need the help of someone who knows more,” Roberta said. “However, with time, you will see that the same Spirit that inspired the Bible writers will enlighten your mind to understand the message. There is a Bible story that shows how important is to have help in the beginning.”

“What story is that?” asked Lucia.

“I’ll read it to you,” Roberta offered. “‘Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means ‘queen of the Ethiopians’). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it.’ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him’” (Acts 8:26-31).

“Does that mean I’m like the eunuch, and you’re like Philip?” Lucia asked. “More or less,” said Roberta.

They both laughed. Lucia was surprised that she was

laughing; ever since she learned about her daughter's pregnancy she could only cry.

"I thank you with all my heart for what you are doing for me," said Lucia. "You've spent your valuable time and patience dealing with my stubborn, hard-headed attitude. But tell me, how can I keep studying the Bible by myself?"

"Every time you want to study a particular subject, you need to find the Bible verses or chapters that talk about that subject," Roberta explained. "You should never quote the Bible on a topic by reading a single verse. You need to have a complete idea of the subject."

"That's very interesting," said Lucia.

"Oh, and there is a very serious warning," added Roberta. "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll" (Revelation 22:18, 19).

"You mean you cannot change anything that is written?" Lucia asked. "No, dear. God's Word is eternal," said Roberta. "Isaiah declares: 'The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever' (Isaiah 40:8). God is eternal. His love for human beings is also eternal. And, consequently, His Word is eternal. Therefore, He is sad when a person ignores the teachings of the Bible."

"Really?" asked Lucia.

"In the days of Israel, the leaders of the people had forgotten the Word of God and taught doctrines and traditions of men," Roberta explained. "That's why the Lord Jesus said, 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules'" (Matthew 15:8, 9).

"You mean if I love God, but do not value His Word, He will

not accept my worship?" asked Lucia.

"Exactly!" exclaimed Roberta. "But do not be afraid, for God loves unconditionally. The sole purpose of His Word is to help you to be happy. The Bible says, 'Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near' (Revelation 1:3). The word 'blessed' means 'happy'. Although this verse refers primarily to the prophecy in the book of Revelation, it can be applied to the entire Bible. Happy is the person who not only reads, but keeps the Word of God in his heart."

It was late at night when Roberta took the bus home. Her heart was overflowing with joy because there is nothing better than sharing the life-changing message of the gospel.

At home, Lucia entered the room of her pregnant daughter. Thirteen is the age a girl begins the journey to womanhood. How would a girl so young bear the consequences of such a dangerous choice? Lucia wished she knew how to help her daughter. She sat on the bed while the girl slept, covered her with a blanket, and wept as she looked at the face of her child. She would be forced to become an adult long before she was ready. Lucia kissed the little girl's face and left.

Lying in bed unable to sleep, Lucia imagined what life could have been like if she had known the Word of God while she was still young. Maybe her story would have been different; maybe she would have been a better wife and mother.

She remembered the last verse Roberta read: "I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11).

It was not the end of the story yet. She was still alive and had the opportunity to change the course of her life.

The following day she received a Bible as a gift. Roberta had signed it, writing, "I am certain that this holy book will help you find the way to happiness." Lucia was touched by those words.

From that day on, she would not begin or end her day without spending time in the Word of God. In her life, the brightness of a sunny day began to emerge. The clouds that once seemed to choke her were still there, but she was no longer sunk in pessimism. Bible promises lit her way, and she liked to constantly repeat, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path” (Psalm 119:105).

Several weeks later, on a Sunday, Lucia woke up early and asked her children, “Would you like to visit your father?”

The three went together to the prison for the first time in three years. The meeting was tense and the depressing environment did not help. They had to wait for a long time, and the guard explained that he was in a group studying the Bible.

Finally, Evaldo arrived.

Sandro, their 11-year-old son, took the initiative and ran to hug his father. They both wept. Their daughter followed. Lucia looked tenderly at the scene. She still loved him. Her heart was pounding, and tears were falling.

“If I had known the Word of God before,” she thought, “everything would have been different.

“Forgive me, forgive me!” he pleaded.

“I’m the one who should apologize,” Lucia said. The four came together in one embrace.

“Do you think there’s still hope for us?” he asked shyly.

In time, there would be. Two years later, Evaldo came home on parole. The whole family found the only hope.

## The book of hope

*You can find hope and purpose for your existence.*

Learn more about what God has prepared for your happiness.

1 - In the Bible, God's Word is written in human language.

1 *Thessalonians* 2:13

2 - God's love is expressed in His Word. *Isaiah* 49:15

3 - The Word of God brings hope and encouragement in times of difficulty. *Romans* 15:4

4 - Knowing God through His Word frees humans from emotional, intellectual, and spiritual prison. *John* 8:32

5 - The Holy Spirit helps us to understand the Bible. *John* 16:13

6 - There is danger in not following the whole Word of God. *Revelation* 22:18, 19

7 - The Bible is relevant for today. *2 Timothy* 3:16, 17

8 - God uses people to assist us in understanding His Word. *Acts* 8:26-31

9 - The Word of God is more important than human traditions. *Mark* 7:13

10 - When examining the Word of God, we find Jesus and salvation. *John* 5:39

To learn more about this subject and other messages God has for you, visit **[www.biblia.com.br/livro](http://www.biblia.com.br/livro)**



## Chapter 2

### Hope of life



An elegant gentleman in a dark suit left the JFK airport in New York with only carry-on luggage. His pace was so hurried that he left his suitcase behind.

At the door, he hailed a taxi and headed toward Queens. Once there, he made his way to a neighborhood of mostly Hispanic people and hailed another cab that took him to his true destiny of Newark, New Jersey.

Peter Paul, a young computer science entrepreneur, felt anxious and agitated. His business was bankrupt, but nothing could justify what he had been doing lately. This was his third trip carrying narcotics. In the first two, everything worked out well. But on this trip, panic suddenly took hold. He sensed that he would be discovered. He took off the name tag and abandoned the suitcase.

Two hours later, on the other side of the bridge in Newark, Peter arrived at Jair's house. Jair always turned a blind eye to the illegal activities of his childhood friend. They grew up together, played ball, fished, and double-dated, until life took them on different paths.

Years later, they accidentally met again at the front of Hotel Pennsylvania, across from Madison Square Garden in New York City. Jair had changed greatly. He seemed more serious and was married to a woman named Laura. Together, they had two precious children. Jair had also become a devout Christian.

Peter Paul was still single, nearing 40 years old, and living "the crazy life," as he liked to call it.

As Jair opened the door on that hot July day, he realized something strange had happened to his childhood friend.

After hugging him, he asked, "What is going on with you? You're deathly pale."

"Nothing's wrong. I'm just tired because of the journey," replied Peter. "Surely it's not just tiredness," insisted Jair. "I think you're sick. Make yourself at home. You'll stay in the same room you stayed last time."

Peter Paul came in. He felt dirty and unloyal to the friend who kindly had opened his home to him. Peter was conflicted. He did not know if he should stay and confess everything to his friend, or if he should turn around now and run away. Jair and his family did not deserve the danger he was putting them in.

Minutes later in the shower, feeling the water running through his body, he wept. How he longed for that fresh water to also cleanse his soul from his conflict and confusion. There was nothing that could rid him of the unending succession of hollow days and nights which had become his daily routine. Fear and despair took hold of him when he thought the police might find out who owned the abandoned suit- case at the airport.

For some unknown reason, he remembered Marta, the girl he abandoned when he learned she was pregnant. Peter realized he had a son or daughter he had never met. He wondered where Marta and their child were now.

The computer science company Peter opened five years ago thrived in the beginning, but gradually collapsed. He was the only one to blame. Peter lived extravagantly, spending more than he earned. His lifestyle had risked the company's funds.

As he saw his business sinking, Peter did all he could to save his patrimony, but failed. He thought he could quickly come up with the money to bail him out of this disastrous situation he was in. But what seemed like the easy solution was even riskier than the other choices he had made.

On that day at the airport, Peter felt this was not what he should be doing. He experienced fear and felt weak. He fled

from the scene like a frightened child.

As the evening arrived, he sat at Jair's family table for dinner. Peter Paul was quiet and introverted, unlike his typical behavior.

"What is it, Peter?" Laura asked. "Are you sick?"

"Jair said the same thing when I arrived," Peter responded. "You look different, uncle," said Jair's youngest son.

"No, it's nothing," replied Peter.

Peter was touched by the sweet scene in front of him. He knew many families, but none like this one.

Peter could sense happiness in that environment. However, a flurry of disturbing thoughts troubled him that day. How would he tackle the debt? The abandoned suitcase meant big money. He had to flee. Something was telling him he was being watched. Or was that feeling just a figment of his imagination? What if they could identify him? What if the police knocked at his friend's door? Would he ruin that beautiful family? His heart was in a swirl of feelings he could not control. He excused himself in the middle of dinner and went back to his room.

In the silence of the bedroom, Peter wept. What was happening to him? Peter barely recognized himself. Why so much worry, fear, and remorse?

An hour later, Jair knocked at the door. "May I talk to you?" "Come in," Peter said.

"What's up, man?" Jair asked. "Do you have a problem you want to talk about?"

"No, it's nothing," said Peter. "I think it moved me to see your beautiful and happy family. Man, you guys are different."

"We are Christians," replied Jair. "Jesus is a permanent guest in our home."

"Do you know that I envy you?" asked Peter. "I wanted so much to be happy, to have this peace that I feel every time I come here. My life is upside down." "You know what? We were not always like this," Jair said. "Three years ago, Laura

and I almost divorced. We were separated for two months, and I thought my life was over. I loved my wife, but I had caused the separation.”

“You?” asked Peter.

“Yes, I was unfaithful,” Jair responded.

“No way!” exclaimed Peter. “You are the most honest guy I know.”

“You may think I am, but I’m not,” Jair admitted. “No one is good on his own.”

“How so?” Peter asked.

“It’s what the Bible says,” Jair replied.

Jair picked up a Bible that was on the nightstand and read, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Looking into his friend’s eyes, he said, “All. Do you understand? All, without exception. You, me, we are all sinners.”

“Aren’t you exaggerating?” asked Peter. “There are many good people in this world!”

“From a human point of view, perhaps,” said Jair. “But the Bible says that ‘there is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one’” (Romans 3:10-12).

“Not even one?” Peter asked.

“Not even one!” exclaimed Jair. “And it doesn’t matter what humans do to get rid of sin. The stain of rebellion and evil is always there. ‘Al- though you wash yourself with soap and use an abundance of cleansing powder, the stain of your guilt is still before me, declares the Sovereign Lord’” (Jeremiah 2:22).

“So, are we lost?” questioned Peter.

“We are!” replied Jair. “It means we are short of the glory of God. And, far from Him, we wander on the territory of death. That’s why Paul says, ‘for the wages of sin is death,

but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

“I do not understand, Jair,” Peter said. “If we are all sinners, and the wages of sin is death, how come we are alive?”

“It depends on what you mean by life,” replied Jair. “From the biological standpoint, life is a period of time in which the heart beats and the lungs breathe. But we’re more than just a body. We are human beings with emotions, dreams, and projects. To enjoy the real life, we need more than just walking, eating or sleeping.”

“I also think so,” Peter said reflectively.

Both remained silent. Peter Paul looked at the open Bible. Jair knew that his friend was absorbing the conversation.

“But all is not lost,” Jair finally continued. “See what it says here: Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:6).

“Jesus is life?” Peter asked.

“Exactly!” Jair replied. Only Jesus can give meaning to existence. So he declared, ‘The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly’” (John 10:10).

“An abundant life is a meaningful life,” said Peter.

“That’s right,” replied Jair. “And the apostle John says, ‘And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life: he that hath not the Son of God hath not life’” (1 John 5:11, 12).

Peter Paul kept thinking, and Jair continued, “Away from Jesus our life simply becomes survival. Getting up in the morning, working and sleeping is not life; it’s only existence.”

Jair’s words stirred Peter Paul’s heart, and he asked, “And how can you get this kind of life?”

“I will read to you what Jesus said,” responded jair. ““For

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life'” (John 3:16).

“I’ve heard it before,” said Peter.

“A lot of people hear it, Peter,” said Jair. “However, few people think about the true meaning of that statement. There are some key words in this verse.”

“What are they?” Peter asked.

“The first is that God loves you,” Jair explained. “He doesn’t love you because of what you do or don’t do. The love of God is not by merit. God loves you because He is love (1 John 4:8). That is His nature. No matter who you are or what you do. Despite whether you believe it or not, to God you are the most precious being in this world.”

Peter Paul could not hold back the emotion. Tears shone in his eyes. If Jair knew what Peter had done, he certainly would not be saying this.

“You mean I do not have to worry about my conduct?” asked Peter. “Yes, you do,” replied Jair.

“But you just said...”

“God’s love is unconditional, and for all, but it only has value for those who accept it,” Jair explained. “That’s why the verse we just read says, ‘For everyone who believes in Him.’”

“How do I believe?” asked Peter.

“First, accept the dramatic fact that you are in the territory of death, far from God,” Jair said. “You’re lost and cannot get out of this situation on your own. Jeremiah asks, ‘Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to do evil’” (Jeremiah 13:23).

“That’s me,” Peter admitted.

“That is all of us, Peter,” responded Jair. “Listen to this: ‘The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their

conduct, according to what their deeds deserve” (Jeremiah 17:9, 10).

“God knows everything,” Peter reflected.

“That is so,” Jair agreed. “The sinful human being likes to pretend he is good. But deep down, he knows his heart is false. This has been the case since Adam and Eve sinned. Because of that tragic day, we are all born with a sinful nature and are incapable of doing good. It’s what David means when he says, ‘I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me’ (Psalm 51:5).

“The apostle Paul adds to the idea saying: ‘Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned’” (Romans 5:12).

“Are we all doomed?” asked Peter. “Yes and no,” replied Jair.

“I don’t understand.”

“We would all be doomed by the way we are born,” Jair explained. “However, if you accept the fact that you are unable to remedy your situation, and you go to Jesus as you are, you will hear His voice saying, ‘Come now, let us settle the matter,’ says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool’” (Isaiah 1:18).

“Go to Jesus taking my sins?” asked Peter.

“It is the only way to go to Him,” Jair said. “Many wait until they change their lives to go to Jesus. They hope to correct their behavior and stop doing this or that. They will never go to Jesus. By themselves, they will never change their nature.”

“It’s amazing,” said Peter.

“It is Jesus who transforms human beings,” Jair explained. “He promises, ‘I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and

give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

“Is it simple as that?” asked Peter.

“Yes, and you don’t pay anything for it,” Jair replied. ““For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from your- selves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast”” (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

“But isn’t a Christian someone who does everything right?” Peter asked. “Don’t you need to have good works?”

“An apple tree is not an apple tree because it produces apples,” said Jair. “It is the opposite. It produces apples because it is an apple tree.”

“What does that mean?” asked Peter.

“Jesus told us that,” said Jair. “Here, we read, ‘likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit’” (Matthew 7:17, 18).

“Fruits?”

“Yes,” said Jair. “In order to produce good fruit, the tree needs to be a good tree. The fruits are the result. The same thing happens with the Christian. Be- fore worrying about producing good works, you must be a good Christian.” “And a good Christian is one who comes to Jesus the way he is, right?” asked Peter.

“That’s right!” Jair said. “And he is one who stays with Him. You did understand!”

The friends continued to talk as the hours slipped by. Jair took the ini- tiative and asked, “Can we continue tomorrow? I think it’s late, and you need to rest after your long journey.”

“Did you know that even my tiredness disappeared because our con- versation was so interesting?” asked Peter. “I had never thought about the things you share with me.”

“Just one more question,” Jair said. “Sure.”

“Do you accept Jesus as your Savior?” asked Jair. “Do you



want to go to Him as you are?"

"I... I mean... I..." Peter responded.

"Get some rest," Jair said, understanding this was not the right time. "Tomorrow is another day. May I pray for you?"

"Please do," said Peter.

Jair prayed, "Thank you, dear Father, for bringing the gospel into my life, and for showing me Your healing, forgiveness, and peace. I can never thank You enough because You saved my family and me. Right now I want to pray for Peter Paul. He needs You, Lord. Enter in his heart and put it in order. Take away the sorrow and anguish, and give meaning to his existence. Amen."

At the end of the prayer, Peter Paul could not hold back his tears. Jair hugged him and prepared to leave quietly. Before he left, Jair opened the Bible to a certain verse and said, "Read this before going to bed."

By himself, Peter Paul read, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28, 29).

Big tears rolled down his face, which was prematurely lined by his life-style. He shook his head, not knowing what to think. His heart longed for peace. Until that day, he had lived at a breakneck pace, searching for something he could not define. Now he heard Jesus' gentle voice saying, "Come to Me."

What a day Peter had experienced! He had ridden a rollercoaster of emotion, including panic, despair, fear, anguish, and longing. And now, at the end of the day, there was hope and the prospect of a glorious tomorrow.

That night, Peter Paul hardly slept. He rolled over, just as he had so many other nights. But this time it was different. He was remembering what Jair told him.

Peter stood up, turned on the light, and opened the Bible. He knew he needed to make decision that very moment. He

could not continue living as he had.

However, Peter could only utter five words: “Forgive me, God. Forgive me!” The light of the new day came streaming through the window and woke

Peter. It was a new day. It would also be a new journey.

Peter’s heart sang. He opened the bedroom window looking toward the garden and took a deep breath. He knew this was the first day of his brand- new life. For some reason, he felt he should seek the child he did not know. He understood that one cannot build a new building without establishing solid foundations.

Peter wondered if he would have the strength to get through the day. Then he realized that would not be a problem because, “He who began a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

Now Peter’s heart was full of life. He was determined to have the only real hope there is.

## Hope of life

*You can find hope of eternal life. Discover a loving God who provides a full life to His children.*

- 1 - After sin appeared, God offered hope of salvation. *Genesis 3:8-10, 15, 21*
- 2 - Sin involved all human beings. *Romans 3:10-12, 23*
- 3 - People cannot do anything to change their sinful nature. *Jeremiah 2:22*
- 4 - Salvation is a free gift of God. *Romans 6:23*
- 5 - Salvation is received through faith. *Ephesians 2:8-10*
- 6 - Good works reveal the authenticity of faith. *James 2:17, 24, 26*
- 7 - The Word of God, implanted in us, is able to save us. *James 1:21*

- 8 - Jesus is our only hope of salvation. 1 *John* 5:11, 12  
9 - He who believes in Jesus has eternal life. *John* 3:16  
10 - The joy of salvation should be shared with others. *John*  
4:29, 39-42

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# Chapter 3

## The Day of Hope



João Carlos woke up one morning as the birds sang outside his window. Though the new day had dawned, the sky was covered in dense clouds. It was raining heavily. However, none of this matter to João Carlos. He got out of bed early, unable to sleep as usual. Once again, he started the day in a surly mood.

It was a dark October day, and the leaves fell lazily down, contrasting with the busy city. Brasilia could seem quiet – and perhaps once had been – but it had become a restless place, like a swarming beehive.

The throngs of people came from “satellite cities” to the actual city of Brasilia, called “Plano Piloto.” These people are the lifeblood of Brasilia. Years ago, João Carlos was one of them. He and his family were experiencing a difficult time. He had left the Northeast in search of better job prospects, and was able to find land in Ceilândia. To get to work, he rode three different modes of transportation.

Those difficult times were now in the past. João Carlos was a wealthy, thriving entrepreneur. He could travel to anywhere he wanted, and his family wanted for nothing. They shopped in the best malls in the city, spending money recklessly. When they tired of Brasilia, they would travel by plane to São Paulo, Rio, Europe, or the United States.

On that dark October day, João Carlos was stuck in traffic with time to think. He asked himself if he truly wanted to be wealthy. He no longer needed to worry about money. He lived in the South Lake and drove a spectacular car, but he felt lonely and sad. He had few friends and his family was growing apart from him as his wealth increased. Then he

wondered if he was the one who was walking away from his family. He was not sure.

There were many things João Carlos did not know. For example, he was ignorant of the fact that his 16-year-old daughter was pregnant, and his 18-year-old son was doing drugs. He was also oblivious to the fact that his wife thought about divorcing him because she believed he did not love her anymore.

However, he usually pretended that everything was going well. His family was taken care of and lacked nothing that money could buy. Despite this, João Carlos felt sadness at the core of his being. He tried to comprehend the sense of failure that caused his insomnia at night.

That morning when his business office opened, Ivair, the janitor, walked down the aisle singing like a canary. João Carlos admired him in silence. He knew in the heart of that simple man there was music. He had the impression that poor men were happier and wondered why. When he was poor, he sang as well. He did not have a melodious voice, but he felt a drum in his heart that kept producing rhythm. Melody and rhythm had left the halls of his soul for a long time now.

“Why don’t you stop singing, man of God?” João Carlos asked. “Exactly because of that, my boss,” Ivair answered.

“What’s that?” asked João Carlos.

“Because I am a child of God!” exclaimed Ivair. “But I am too, right?”

“Yes, you are, my boss, but when was the last time you spoke with Him?” Ivair asked.

“I don’t actually know if I’ve ever talked to Him,” responded João Carlos. “Do you talk to God?”

“Every day,” said Ivair. “And I know He is always with me.”

The simple faith of the simple man moved him. This humble janitor did not live a complicated life. He had the certainty of hope. João Carlos, on the other hand, had money, but was not certain of anything.

“Is your God the same as mine?” João Carlos asked. “Yes, He is,” replied Ivair.

“So what’s the problem? It works out for you and it doesn’t work for me.” “That does not depend on God,” Ivair responded.

“I don’t understand,” said João Carlos.

“It’s not enough only to believe in God,” Ivair explained. “We need to spend time alone with Him. Only then God is no longer just a name and He becomes a reality.”

“As a reality? Is He not real?” asked João Carlos.

“If you don’t spend time with him, He is just a name,” said Ivair. “And that does not help much, especially in difficult times like you are experiencing.”

“How do you know I’m living hard times?” João Carlos asked.

“It’s reflected in your face, on the way you look and how you treat your employees,” Ivair said.

João Carlos felt offended, but realized it was true. Ivair was not guilty of anything; he was just answering what the boss had asked him.

“How do you spend time with God?” João Carlos asked.

“Every day, before leaving home, I’m alone with Him, and on Saturdays, I dedicate the entire day to be with Him,” Ivair explained.

“Why on Saturdays?” asked João Carlos. “It’s in the Ten Commandments,” said Ivair. “Where?”

Ivair excused himself and a moment later returned with his Bible. “Listen to what Exodus 20:8-11 says,” Ivair invited: “Remember the

Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and on the seventh day he rested, so the

Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”

“Is that in the commandments?” João Carlos asked. “Yes, sir,” responded Ivair.

“But was not the Sabbath only given to the Jews?” asked João Carlos.

“When God sanctified the Sabbath, the Jewish people did not exist yet,” explained Ivair. “Listen to what it says in the creation account: ‘Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done’” (Genesis 2:1-3).

“It says the ‘seventh day’, not ‘Saturday,’” João Carlos argued.

“You can look in the dictionary or calendar to see which is the seventh day,” Ivair said.

“You mean that the Saturday that you call Sabbath existed since the creation of the world?” asked João Carlos.

“Yes,” said Ivair. “In the same week of creation, God rested on the Sabbath, although He was not tired. He is never tired. He rested to give us the example. But, beyond that, He blessed and sanctified the Sabbath.”

“You mean the Sabbath is a holy day?” João Carlos asked.

“That’s what the Bible says,” responded Ivair. “‘If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord’s holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken’” (Isaiah 58:13, 14).

“I’ve heard that keeping the Sabbath on the seventh day is no longer necessary, because Jesus was risen on Sunday,” said João Carlos.

“It is true that Jesus was risen on Sunday,” Ivair responded. “But in what part of the Bible does it say that Sunday became a holy day and the Sabbath is no longer valid? On the contrary, take a look at what Jesus used to do on the Sabbath. ‘He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read’” (Luke 4:16).

“But did not Jesus perform miracles on the Sabbath?” asked João Carlos. “Yes, He did,” Ivair replied.

“So He worked...”

“He did His works of salvation,” explained Ivair. “The Sabbath is not simply a day when you don’t work. We do not work because we are focused on praising and serving God. The Sabbath is not a day full of rules that enslave human beings. Jesus himself said ‘the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath, so the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath’” (Mark 2:27, 28).

“Now, if Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath,” Ivair continued, “He can use it to accomplish His work of salvation. He performed many miracles to show that, on that day, it’s important to heal and restore sinners. We can also use the Sabbath to perform the works of the Lord.”

The boss looked at Ivair’s eyes. That man was not as simple as he had imagined. His words were filled with wisdom.

João Carlos asked, “You mean you are happy because you keep the Sabbath?” “Human beings need to rest from their work and think about God,” Ivair explained. “One day Jesus said, ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls’ (Matthew 11:28, 29). Without Jesus, human beings will never rest. They will live extremely busy lives and accumulate money, but won’t

have peace. Jesus is the only source of peace and rest for



the soul.”

“If Jesus gives me rest, why do I have to keep the Sabbath?” João Carlos asked.

“Many Christians do not understand that,” Ivair said. “The rest does not come from the Sabbath; it comes from Jesus. The Sabbath, in essence, is a day like any other. What makes it different is the fact that God separated it at creation as a holy day for fellowship with His children.”

“And it can’t be any other day, like Sunday or Wednesday?” asked João Carlos. “Of course, it could be, if God had chosen so,” Ivair replied. “But He chose the Sabbath.”

“That’s what I don’t understand. Why must it necessarily be the Sabbath?” asked João Carlos.

“I do not know,” Ivair responded. “We can ask Jesus when He returns. In the meantime, I love Jesus and I desire to obey Him.”

“That is interesting,” João Carlos said.

“Of course it is!” exclaimed Ivair. “And Jesus’ disciples continued keeping the Sabbath even after the resurrection of Christ. The Bible says, ‘Then he took Him down, wrapped Him in linen cloth and placed Him in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid. It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment’” (Luke 23:53-56).

“What does that mean?” asked João Carlos.

“Jesus was already dead and buried,” Ivair explained. “It was Friday after- noon, and the women who went to the tomb rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment. Luke wrote about it twenty years after the resurrection of Christ and people were saying that it was ‘according to the commandment.’ Don’t you think it seems

odd? If the Sabbath commandment had ended with the resurrection of Christ, how does Luke say this twenty years later?"

"You are right," João Carlos admitted. "What about the apostles?"

"We can read about what Paul used to do on the Sabbath," Ivair offered. "'There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks' (Acts 18:2-4). Can you tell me what did Paul do on the Sabbath?"

"He went to the synagogue," said João Carlos.

"Nevertheless," Ivair said, "many believe the apostle went to the synagogue on that day because he wanted to evangelize the Jews who were only found in the synagogue on the Sabbath. However, the book of Acts reveals us that even where there was no synagogue Paul sought a place of prayer during the Sabbath (Acts 16:13). Could someone say that Paul was stuck in the Old Testament?"

"I don't think so," said João Carlos. "But then why do most Christians keep the Sunday and not the Sabbath?"

"That's a historical issue," Ivair explained. "In the early years of the Christian era, the Jews rebelled against the Romans and were persecuted.

However, as Christians kept the Sabbath, they were mistaken as Jews and, therefore, were persecuted. Then someone had the idea that, in order to avoid this misunderstanding, perhaps it would be better to keep Sunday in honor of Christ's resurrection."

"I did not know that," João Carlos said.

"Years later," Ivair continued, "in the 4th century, the emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity and, as he belonged to a pagan religion that worshiped the sun,

whose day of worship was the first day of the week, the church accepted Sunday as the day of the Lord. But we don't find a single Bible verse which says Sunday is a holy day, or that it replaces the Sabbath." João Carlos and Ivair had been talking for a while now. The other employees wondered why the boss was talking to a simple janitor for so long. The conversation seemed interesting to João Carlos. The rich man was moved. His eyes were opened to the fact that his world was collapsing. He recognized that his life lacked room for God.

"God loves you very much, boss," said Ivair. "He can do wonders in your life, if you allow Him to."

"Can we talk more at lunch time?" asked João Carlos. "Of course, I'll be in the cleaning department," said Ivair.

The hours passed quickly. In the morning, João Carlos had so many appointments that he lost track of time. He looked at the clock and it was almost 1:00 p.m. João Carlos asked Ivair to come to his office.

The employee entered with his Bible in hand.

"How long did you go to school, Ivair?" asked João Carlos. "I only went to elementary school," said Ivair.

"And how do you know so much about the Bible?" his boss asked. "I didn't have to go to school to study God's book," Ivair responded.

"This morning you spoke about spending time with God," said João Carlos. "What exactly did you mean by that?"

"You see, human beings are like a car," Ivair said. "They need fuel to function. A vehicle doesn't move if the driver does not fill the tank. God is the one who motivates humans, gives us life, wisdom, and balance. He is the only person who is able to make us happy and victorious. When we spend time with Him, it's like we are filling the fuel tank of our lives."

"And what does the Sabbath have to do with it?" asked João Carlos. "During each week, we struggle for survival," explained Ivair. "Our communion with God is relatively short."

But God knows we need to charge the batteries to live life with meaning, so He gave us the Sabbath. We completely dedicate this day to God. The Sabbath is not holy because we don't work on that day, but because we spend the day with God. The Christian experience is not focused on the Sabbath, but on Christ. We keep the Sabbath simply because we love Jesus and we want to please Him."

"How did you come to that conclusion?" asked João Carlos.

"The Bible says the Sabbath is a sign of faithfulness between God and His people," replied Ivair. "'Keep my Sabbaths holy, that they may be a sign between us. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God' (Ezekiel 20:20). To keep the Sabbath is a matter of faith in God. People need to know the blessing of Sabbath rest. Keeping the Sabbath is a sign of faith in God and dependence on Him as Creator, Redeemer, and Savior."

"It is a sign of love," said João Carlos. "Yes, of love and salvation," Ivair agreed. "Of salvation?" João Carlos asked.

"That's right," said Ivair. "The fourth commandment appears twice in the Bible: in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Each one of these passages gives us a different reason for keeping the Sabbath.

"In Exodus, the reason is the creation, for it says, 'For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and on the seventh day he rested, so the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it' (Exodus 20:11).

"But in Deuteronomy, the reason is not only the creation, but redemption. 'Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day' (Deuteronomy 5:15).

"It is clear that God is the Creator and also the Redeemer," Ivair concluded. "Only God can create and He alone can redeem. The Sabbath is a memorial of both creation and redemption. No one can say he believes in

God as Creator if he has not accepted the Sabbath. Also he cannot say he accepts Jesus as his Redeemer if he does not accept the Sabbath.”

“This is fantastic, Ivair!” João Carlos exclaimed.

“And there’s more to it!” Ivair responded. “I also want to tell you about the miracles Jesus performed on the Sabbath.”

“Please do,” João Carlos said.

“These miracles were intended to show how Sabbath is related to the salvation and restoration of human beings,” Ivair said. “The Sabbath is a day of victory over sin. Sin brought pain and disease, but Christ brought life and health. He finished His work of restoration at Calvary on a Friday afternoon and cried out victoriously, ‘It is finished!’ The devil had no chance anymore; he was defeated!”

“Tremendous!” exclaimed João Carlos.

“Then, when the work of redemption was completed,” Ivair continued, “Jesus rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.”

The dialogue with Ivair was very helpful to João Carlos. From that day on, the boss and employee began to arrive at work early to study the Bible together. As the months passed, João Carlos faced dark storms in his life. But instead of reaching the point of despair, he learned to trust in God.

One day, he gathered up his family and asked for their forgiveness. “I’ve ruined your lives,” he said, looking into the eyes of his loved ones.

No one seemed to understand what he was saying.

“A man without God did not have much to give to his family,” he added. His wife and children looked at each other. They still did not know what had happened in João Carlos’ life.

“Could you give me an opportunity to do things differently?” he asked, as tears rolled down his cheeks.

He then shared with them what he had learned about the love of God. He added, “Why don’t we make the Sabbath a

day for our family and dedicate that day to God? Let's allow Him to take control of our home."

Though no one said a word, they were all moved.

Miracles happen, and conversion stories are recorded in the books of life in heaven. João Carlos, his wife, and daughter found the only hope.

## The day of hope

*You can find rest and refreshment on the day of hope.*

Find out now how not to be a victim of modern stress.

1 - The seventh day is different from the other days of the week. *Genesis 2:1-3*

2 - The Sabbath was made for the good of mankind. *Mark 2:28, 29*

3 - We worship the Creator while resting on the Sabbath. *Exodus 20:8-11*

4 - The Sabbath was observed by God's people in the Old Testament. *Exodus 16:23; Isaiah 58:13, 14; Jeremiah 17:24, 27; Ezekiel 20:12, 20; Nehemiah 13:15-21*

5 - Jesus regarded the Sabbath as a day of worship to God and service to fellowmen. *Luke 4:16, 31*

6 - The death of Christ does not replace the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship to God. *Luke 23:53, 56*

7 - The disciples were faithful in the observance of the Sabbath. *Acts 13:14, 27, 42, 44; 17:2; 18:4*

8 - The Christian should not disregard any of the Ten Commandments. *James 2:10-12*

9 - Commandments and human traditions cannot be above the Word of God. *Mark 7:6-8, 13*

10 - The Sabbath will continue to exist in the New Earth as a special day of worship. *Isaiah 66:22, 23*

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# Chapter 4

## Principles of hope



Christian wanted to shine. He was ambitious, and wanted to show the world all he had to offer. He longed to be applauded, honored, and acclaimed.

He often dreamed of being pursued by crowds asking for his autograph, and he imagined himself surrounded by beautiful girls. He pictured himself smiling for the cameras and waving to his admirers.

Christian's dream eventually came true. However, the wonder was short lived. He was a shooting star swallowed by darkness.

There are many stars that shine in this life as Christian did, applauded, acclaimed, and idolized. Time takes away their luster and sometimes even their memories.

One of Christian's mistakes was to think he could be famous without respecting borders and boundaries. He thought his abilities made him almost super-human.

"I'm the man," he used to say.

Christian ignored conventional wisdom, opting instead to do whatever felt good to him. This free and easy lifestyle came to a halt when he woke up one dark morning in a hospital bed, infected by the deadly HIV virus.

One day, I met Christian's father. Adolfo was a faithful Christian, and turned to Jesus in the hour of pain. Adolfo opened his heart to God, seeking the cure for his beloved son. He prayed constantly, crying out to the Lord for a miracle. Christian himself opened his heart and repented, asking God to forgive him for the disastrous way he had lived. Still, death came to Christian unrelentingly.

Two years after his son's death, Adolfo was still wondering



why God had not restored Christian's health. Wasn't God love? Where were His promises of forgiveness and redemption?"

Adolfo needed to understand the extent of God's protective character. Nobody loves as He does. Human parents care for their young children and protect them when they run into a street full of traffic or near the rail-way line. For the children, there is no danger. They are unaware of the risk. Because of this, parents often establish rules, such as where they can and cannot play, what they can and cannot eat, and how they should cross the street. Rules do not exist to restrain freedom. They are, in fact, an expression of love and are meant for protection. Parents love their children and, therefore, wish to see them grow up safely.

The same principle applies to God and His creation. Led by his sinful nature, man creates problems for himself, and God establishes rules out of love to show him the best way, with the purpose of avoiding pain and suffering. The law is a protective fence of God's love.

I constantly meet wonderful Christians who believe God's commandments were given to the people of the Old Testament. They imagine that the divine ordinances no longer apply to those who live under grace. On the other hand, there are Christians who believe they can obtain salvation by keeping the commandments. Where is the balance found?

The subject of law and grace seems contradictory. However, it is not logical to put God's law against His grace. God is the author of the law and also of grace. There is no contradiction in Him.

"Why Adventists speak so much about the law?" Adolfo asked one day as we talked about the results of salvation in the Christian life.

"It's not Adventists, it's the Bible," I answered. "The law is mentioned 223 times in the New Testament, while grace is mentioned only 184 times. There would be no grace if there

were no law. Both were born in the divine mind.”

“How so?” asked Adolfo

“The apostle Paul declares: ‘The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace overflowed, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord’ (Romans 5:20, 21). This means that grace is the solution to sin.”

“Why would sin make grace overflow?” Adolfo asked.

“Jesus died on the cross to save the repentant sinner,” I explained. “Sin manifested grace. Jesus would never have died if it were not for sinners in need of salvation. That’s what Paul says: ‘You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us’ (Romans 5:6-8). The existence of sin demanded grace.”

“You’re confusing me,” Adolfo interrupted me.

“Because I said that law and grace are part of the same gospel?” I asked. “The explanation is simple. The law has its proper place, and so does grace. We should not confuse things. The law has the defined function of showing what is sin, not of saving humanity. ‘Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin’ (Romans 3:20). This verse explains that through the law we become conscious of our sin. No one will ever be justified by works. The law does not have a saving function. Anyone who keeps the commandments thinking that he is getting some merit to gain salvation is completely wrong. The law does not save.”

“So what does it do?” Adolfo asked.

“It only shows sin,” I responded. “Paul repeats this concept over and over again. ‘What shall we say, then? Is the law

sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet' (Romans 7:7).

"So you agree with me that the law does not save..."

"I totally agree," I replied. "The Bible clearly teaches that we are saved only by the grace of Jesus. 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast' (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

At this point in the conversation, I could see a gleam of relief in Adolfo's eyes. He rejoiced when he understood his belief regarding salvation was biblical. So he was convinced, and concluded: "If we are saved by grace, we do not have to keep the law."

"Let Paul answer that question," I suggested. "'What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?'" (Romans 6:1, 2).

"It says that we should not remain in sin, but it's not talking about the law," said Adolfo.

"And what is sin?" I asked. "'Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness' (1 John 3:4). If there were no law, there would be no sin. So what would Jesus have saved us from? Therefore, grace frees us from sin; however, it does not nullify the law."

Adolfo looked confused but interested. He had an open Bible in his hands, and as I read the last verse, he looked for another. Before reading, he said, "Paul teaches that the commandment, that is, the law only brings death. Look what he says here: 'But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died' (Romans 7:8, 9). Do you see? 'But when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.'"

“Dear Adolfo, the Bible must be understood as a whole,” I responded. “You just read the verses 8 and 9, but verse 7 says, ‘What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, You shall not covet.’ Paul is speaking of the law’s role and, in the verses you have read, he amplifies the idea that he would not have knowledge of what sin is without the law.”

“The verse says, ‘But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire’” (verse 8), Adolfo argued.

“Exactly,” I replied. “It does not say that the law wrought in him a lust; it says that sin, through the commandment, wrought lust. That means it was the commandment that raised awareness of his sinful situation by showing him what sin was like.”

“And why did he say, ‘with no law, sin is dead’?” Adolfo asked.

“Because if there were no law, there would be no knowledge of sin, and the sinner would be considered innocent,” I explained.

Adolfo had to read the text again. He wanted to understand. He wanted to assimilate every word.

“You’ve read verses 8 and 9,” I continued. “Why don’t we read the following verses? They further clarify what Paul says. ‘And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful’ (Romans 7:10-13).”

“Let me read it again,” he asked.

Adolfo had an inquiring mind. He was sincere and could not deny what his eyes were reading. I wondered how he could argue against the apostle's statement: "the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." "But here is not speaking of the law in Exodus 20," Adolfo argued, "but about the will of God. The commandments of Moses had been nailed to the cross of Calvary."

"So let's see what Jesus says," I suggested. "'Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or tittle shall pass from the Law until everything is accomplished'" (Matthew 5:17, 18).

Adolfo immediately reacted. "Read the last sentence: 'until everything is accomplished.' And everything was accomplished on the cross. Paul says, 'Having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ'" (Colossians 2:14-17).

After reading, Adolfo looked at me. A part of Paul's statement - "having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross" - definitely seemed to show the law came to an end on the cross.

I looked at him with love, and continued, "Let's consider what Paul says. The apostle speaks here of 'the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us.' What is that charge? He explains, 'these are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.' What is this 'shadow of things that were to come?' It is the ceremonial ordinances of sacrifices that symbolized Jesus."

"What ordinances?" asked Adolfo.

"Every time the Israelites sacrificed a lamb or any other

animal, that became a symbol of Christ, 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'" (John 1:29), I explained. "The author of Hebrews makes it clear, 'It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself '" (Hebrews 9:23-26).

"But it all ended on the cross," Adolfo insisted.

"Of course," I agreed. "The writings of ordinances that Jesus nailed on the cross were the ordinances regarding these sacrifices and other ceremonies specific to the people of Israel. After Christ's death, these sacrifices are no longer required because the true Lamb of God was already sacrificed. But this has nothing to do with the Ten Commandments recorded in Exodus 20." "Why not?" asked Adolfo. "It says, 'Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New

Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ' (Colossians 2:16, 17). Isn't the Sabbath one of the commandments in Exodus 20?"

"Yes, the Sabbath is," I said. "However, here is speaking of Sabbaths in the plural. Also are mentioned the feast days and new moon, which are 'a shadow of things that were to come.' Everything here is part of the ceremonies of Israel, but the Ten Commandments are not mentioned."

"I had not thought about it," Adolfo admitted.

“James gives us more light in this regard,” I went on. “‘For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, You shall not commit adultery, also said: You shall not murder. If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker’ (James 2:10, 11). What is the law to which James refers to in this passage?”

“Exodus 20,” Adolfo replied.

“The gospel saves, Adolfo,” I said. “It saves from sin. Paul says, ‘For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means!’” (Romans 6:14, 15).

“And now? It says here that we are not under law but under grace?” Adolfo asked.

“We are not under the condemnation of the law because of the grace of Jesus,” I explained. “His blood covers our sins so the law cannot condemn us. But Paul’s question is: ‘Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?’ He replies: ‘By no means!’”

“That’s true from that point of view...”

“And what other point of view can it be?” I asked. “‘Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law’” (Romans 3:31).

“It cannot be!” exclaimed Adolfo. “I had never read this before.” “Christians obey the law of God,” I said. “The only people who are under the condemnation of the law are those who transgress it. For example, a person is not affected by the speed limit while he is respecting the law. If he exceeds the limit, he is under the condemnation of the traffic law.”

“So, the fact that we are under grace does not give us liberty to break the law,” Adolfo said.

“That’s right,” I agreed.

Adolfo seemed surprised. The Spirit of God was working in his heart, and he accepted that influence. The point was not

who was right or wrong; it was a matter of life. The Christian life is a constant growth experience, and growing up involves learning. However, for one person to learn, he needs to leave what is familiar and cross unknown waters. This naturally causes fear. Perhaps that is why many people prefer not to grow.

Adolfo truly desired to learn and grow. That was why he asked me one last question.

“The things that you said are logical, but what could you say to me about the Epistle to the Galatians? In this letter, doesn’t Paul give the impression of being against the law?”

“I know this letter is controversial,” I replied. “There are Christians who believe that it provides arguments to ‘prove’ the law is no longer valid.”

“I know,” said Adolfo.

“The apostle wrote this letter to resolve a doctrinal problem the church had in the region of Galatia,” I explained. “This problem came from a mis-taken interpretation of the law’s function. Many Christian converts among the Jews taught that it was necessary to keep the law in order to be saved. Paul vehemently fought this idea.”

“But this problem is not particular of the Galatians,” Adolfo added.

“Of course not,” I agreed. “Legalism was a problem to many people throughout the centuries. We see it today as well.”

“What happened in Paul’s day?” asked Adolfo.

“He had established the church in the region of Galatia around the year 50 AD – that means approximately 20 years after Jesus Christ’s death,” I replied. “Some years later, around the year 55 AD, while Paul was in Ephesus, news reached him that the Galatian church stood immersed in a crisis of Christian identity.”

“What was this crisis about?”

“Some preachers from Jerusalem were accusing Paul of preaching an incomplete gospel,” I responded. “They taught



that a belief in Jesus is not enough to be saved. According to them, it was necessary for the Gentiles to become Jews by circumcision. Many began to accept these new teachings.”

“Really?” asked Adolfo.

“The Bible teaches that, in order to be saved, a man only needs to believe in Jesus, regardless of his nationality,” I went on. “Some Jews believed that, because the law was given to Israel at Sinai, only they could be saved. Therefore, those who desired to be saved should go through circumcision, which is the introductory rite to Judaism. Then, according to this thinking, faith was not the only means of salvation, as Paul and the apostles taught. To be saved, one had to obey the law, which required circumcision. The conclusion was that, to be saved, one must become a Jew. Paul was fighting this heresy.”

“I see,” he replied.

“The problem was that the Galatians believed they had to obey the law as a condition to save themselves,” I explained. “That is not biblical. Therefore, because he knew what was going on, Paul wrote the epistle.”

“That’s why Paul is tough on the legalists,” Adolfo concluded.

“Yes,” I agreed. “Legalists teach that salvation is achieved not only by grace, but by the law. But Paul says it is not possible to place beside Christ any other complementary element. The law, as the apostle says, does not save. The final and deciding factor on salvation is the grace of Christ.”

I talked to Adolfo on three other occasions. On the third occasion, he was accompanied by his wife and his 17-year-old daughter, who had vivacious eyes like her father. She attentively listened to everything I said and wrote down every word in a book.

“It’s just so I can check it out at home,” she said, smiling.

Some months later, the whole family was baptized and sealed their covenant of love with Christ. A choir sang as they were submerged in the water. The words of the hymn

said:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind but now I see!

Adolfo and his family found the only hope.

## Principles of hope

*Avoid pain and suffering by living the principles of hope.*

Live with fullness and security.

1 - The law of God was established to protect us and avoid suffering. *Exodus 20:1-17*

2 - God himself wrote the moral law on tablets of stone. *Exodus 31:18*

3 - Jesus confirmed the validity of the moral law. *Matthew 5:17*

4 - The apostle Paul recognized the validity of the Ten Commandments. *Romans 7:12*

5 - The function of the law is not to save but to reveal sin. *Romans 7:7*

6 - Faith in Christ does not nullify God's law. *Romans 3:31*

7 - We are invited to keep God's commandments. *1 John 2:4, 5; 5:2, 3*

8 - The people of God keep His commandments by faith. *Revelation 14:12*

9 - The Ten Commandments must be followed without exception. *James 2:10-12; 1 John 3:4*

10 - Obedience to divine law is the natural manifestation when we love God. *John 15:10; 14:15*

To learn more about this subject and other messages God has for you, visit **[www.biblia.com.br/livro](http://www.biblia.com.br/livro)**

# Chapter 5

## Hope of counsel



The path through which Sandra, a young medical doctor in the community, had to go as part of her daily route was long and narrow. In those evenings, sometimes rainy and sad, sometimes dry and cold, Sandra was restless. She made her way with her backpack over her shoulder, humming the songs she was learning in the study group she was participating in.

In recent weeks, the beautiful doctor seemed to be another person. A year earlier, she had come to that group fleeing from people after being abandoned by her fiancé at the altar. She wanted to forget that chapter of her life. However, at night the memories circled around her, causing her to dread a new day. She was trying to move on and heal from the pain, but was finding it very difficult.

Sandra eventually met a group of people who studied the Bible and her eyes were suddenly opened to truths she had ignored. As she learned the beauty of the gospel, she felt her troubles fly away.

“How could I have lived so long without knowing these things?” she asked shyly at one of those evenings.

“Do not blame yourself for it”, someone replied. “There are many people in the world who don’t even know the Bible.”

“These truths are wonderful! They shouldn’t remain hidden from so many people,” Sandra lamented.

“They are not hidden,” said the group leader. “The problem is people do not value them or pay attention to them. But the message is available to everyone who is interested in learning about it.”

On that evening, while she walked the long way back

home, Sandra thought about the meeting that evening. The theme was: "Are there prophets today?" She did not believe God could raise a modern prophet.

"Today we'll talk about the gift of prophecy," said Gerson, the Bible study leader.

12 people with open Bibles sat in the study circle. Most of them, like Sandra, were beginning to study.

"Let's look at the words of Paul," Gerson continued. "'Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. [...] There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues' (1 Corinthians 12:1, 6-10). The apostle says God gave gifts to His church to build her up."

"Is the gift of prophecy one of those gifts?" a teacher at the community's elementary school asked.

"Yes, and the Bible teaches the spirit of prophecy is one of the characteristics of the last days church," Gerson answered.

"Where does it say that?" the teacher asked.

"Here in Revelation," Gerson said. "'Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring - those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus' (Revelation 12:17). The dragon is the devil (Revelation 12:9), and the woman is a symbol of the church of God (Genesis 3:15). The enemy tries to destroy the church, but the church retains the testimony of Jesus."

"But there is no mention of the spirit of prophecy."

“You’re right,” Gerson agreed. “It is talking here about the testimony of Jesus. However, look at what John says, ‘At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus’” (Revelation 19:10).

“But what is the spirit of prophecy?” someone asked.

“The spirit of prophecy is the gift of prophecy manifested in the church of God,” explained Gerson. “According to this statement, there may be people who receive the gift of prophecy in our day.”

“Really?”

“Yes, they could,” Gerson replied. “But the person who receives this gift is not a prophet who is necessarily announcing things to come. To understand this, we need to think of John the Baptist. The Bible states the following about him, ‘And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him’” (Luke 1:76).

“Was John the Baptist a prophet?” asked another group member.

“Yes, he had received the gift of prophecy,” said Gerson. “Besides, Jesus said that, among those born of women, there had not risen anyone greater than John. That means Jesus compared John to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other prophets and said none of them was as big as John.”

“But John did not write any book or chapter of the Bible”, said a young man who was always attentive to the explanations. Then he looked at the others and asked timidly, “You mean that, in order for someone to be a prophet, he is not required to predict things to come?”

“Not necessarily,” answered Gerson. “But there’s more. The Hebrew word that’s translated as ‘prophet’ in the Old Testament is nabi, which literally means one whom is called by God for a special mission.”

“What mission?” asked the young man.

“The mission of speaking on behalf of God,” Gerson replied. “The work of the prophet is to teach, warn, admonish, and announce events to come. Therefore, it has to do with the past, present, and future. These three things do not always appear together in the same prophetic ministry. It may be just one of them, or all can be combined. There is no difference.”

“How fascinating!” Sandra commented.

“This concept becomes clearer when we analyze the Greek word that is used in the New Testament to refer to a prophet,” Gerson continued. “The word is prophetes, which has two roots: the preposition pro, which means ‘for’, and phemi verb, meaning ‘to speak’. The literal translation of this word is ‘to speak for someone’ or ‘to speak in behalf of someone’. The prophet speaks for God.”

“Can you give us an example of what you’re saying?” Sandra asked. “Yes, I can,” Gerson replied. “Let’s consider Moses’ call to take the people of Israel out of Egypt. The story is in the book of Exodus, chapter 4. Moses said he was a man slow of speech and that he was afraid to speak. Then God told him He would send Aaron with him to be his voice, ‘You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him’ (Exodus 4:15, 16). In other words, while Moses was God’s prophet, Aaron would be Moses’ prophet. This is the biblical meaning of a prophet. The prophet’s main job is not to predict the future, but to guide, teach, and advise the people of God.”

“That means there are still prophets today?” Sandra asked.

Gerson looked at her. He took off his reading glasses and said, “Yes, and their function is not necessarily to announce future events. Look at what this verse says. ‘Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the

world' (1 John 4:1). It says that today there are many false prophets. Now, if there are false prophets, it is because there is at least one true prophet."

"And how can we identify the true prophet?" the young man asked. "Scripture itself presents the characteristics of an authentic prophet,"

Gerson answered. "What are they?"

Gerson responded, "The first is, 'This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God' (1 John 4:2).

"What does that mean?" asked the young man.

"John says that one of the characteristics of a true prophet is its message," said Gerson. "If he declares Jesus is God, one with the Father and with the Spirit, he is a true prophet."

"Is there anyone who thinks Christ is not God?" Sandra asked. "Strangely enough, yes, there is," answered Gerson. "But in our studies we have seen that 'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. [...] The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth'" (John 1:1-3, 14).

"So, if someone claims to be a prophet, but he does not teach that Jesus is the incarnate God, is it evidence that he is not true?" Sandra asked.

"That's right," Gerson agreed. "But it is not the only proof. There is another. 'Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit'" (Matthew 7:15-17).



“Fruits?” someone asked.

“Yes, fruits,” Gerson said. “For example, what are the results of the work of this so-called prophet? Wherever he goes, does he leave a message of unity and commitment to Christ, the church and the mission? Or, after he leaves, is the church disunited, in revolt, and full of the spirit of criticism? If the prophet is true, his fruits will be good, otherwise he has not been sent by God.”

The group remained attentive to Gerson’s explanations. The leader read the Bible to support his statements. He liked to say that the Bible explained itself.

“Let’s check one more characteristic of a true prophet,” Gerson said. “Read with me, ‘Consult God’s instruction and the testimony of warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn’” (Isaiah 8:20).

“Of what law is Isaiah speaking here?” asked Sandra.

“In those days the law meant the Torah, or the first five books of the

Bible,” Gerson explained. “Applying the same idea today, this verse says that one of the characteristics of a true prophet is to present his teachings according to the statements of God’s Word. No true prophet can contradict Bible teachings.”

Sandra seemed satisfied, but she asked, “And what about a prophet being the announcer of things to come?”

“Let’s allow Moses to answer that,” Gerson replied. “He says, ‘I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him. I myself will call to account anyone who does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death. You may say to yourselves, How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the

Lord? If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed'” (Deuteronomy 18:18-22).

“If the fulfillment of prophecies is a characteristic of a true prophet, could Nostradamus be one of them?” the elementary teacher asked.

“If this would be the only characteristic of a true prophet, that could be true,” Gerson responded. “But what about the others? I will give you an example. One of the characteristics of human beings is to have feet. Can a table be considered a human being because it has feet?”

Everyone laughed at the funny example. Gerson had the ability to break down concepts even when they seemed complicated at first. However, Sandra wanted to learn more about it.

“A prophet must be a perfect person, right?” she asked.

“Let’s consider the lives of some prophets,” replied Gerson. “The first prophet mentioned in the Bible is Abraham. He was a patriarch, the spiritual leader of his family and his people. One day, Abraham arrived in the land of Gerar, and Abimelech, the king of that land, seeing that Sarah, Abraham’s wife, was beautiful, wanted to have her as his wife. The patriarch, fearful of being kicked out of the land, said Sarah was his sister.”

“What a lie!” Sandra exclaimed, covering her mouth with her hand.

“Indeed, Abraham was lying,” Gerson agreed. “That lied almost led Abimelech and Sarah to sin. However, that night God talked to the king and said: ‘Now return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die’” (Genesis 20:7).

“That means Abraham was a prophet?” asked Sandra.

“Yes, this is the first time a prophet is mentioned in the

Bible,” answered Gerson. “And he appears here in a sad situation, lying and nearly causing his wife to sin with the king. However, God calls him a prophet. The lesson we can learn from this incident is that, despite the human mistakes and errors, a person called by God can be a prophet.”

“So Abraham was not perfect,” Sandra concluded.

“No, he wasn’t,” agreed Gerson. “A biblical prophet is not someone who is immune to erring. He only believes in God and depends on Him to walk in the spiritual life.”

“I’ve heard that Moses was the first prophet of the Bible”, said a lady who was very focused on everything that was being taught.

“Moses was the first prophet in Israel,” Gerson said. “The Bible says, ‘since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face’ (Deuteronomy 34:10). This verse defines the spiritual experience of this man. Moses always sought God. In the darkest hours, he sought the Lord’s wisdom. And God never failed him. But that does not mean he didn’t have difficult moments. He was human, and despite the extraordinary relationship he had with God, his sinful nature surprised him sometimes.”

“But there were many other prophets,” Sandra said.

“Of course there were,” Gerson replied. “After Moses’ death, God led His people through the ministry of several prophets. These men came from the most amazing places, and they had quite different backgrounds. Among them were priests such as Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Isaiah and Zephaniah had royal blood. Samuel was a judge. Daniel was the prime minister of Babylon. Hosea was a peasant.”

“Extraordinary!”

“Some of them wrote books,” Gerson continued. “Others announced future events, preached, counseled kings and condemned sinners. They all fulfilled the mission of being messengers and guides of God’s people. They were holy men, in the sense that they sought an experience of communion with God, but at the same time they were as

human as any of us.”

“I always thought that a prophet was immune to errors and faults,” admitted Sandra.

“Many believe so, but the Bible does not teach that,” Gerson replied. “Take Elijah, for example. James says of him, ‘Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops’ (James 5:17, 18). That means the prophets were men consecrated to God; however, they were still human beings.”

“And they never had prophetesses?” Sandra asked.

“Yes, they did,” answered Gerson. “I will only mention three of them. The first is Miriam. The Bible presents her as follows, ‘then Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing. Miriam sang to them: Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea’ (Exodus 15:20, 21). By her historical context, we understand she was a leader among the women of her time and she directed the choir of women, but unfortunately there was a sad chapter in her life. She was jealous of her brother Moses. Miriam criticized him unfairly and as a consequence she became a leper. She repented, was forgiven and cured, becoming a valuable woman to Israel.”

“Who is the second woman?” asked Sandra.

“Deborah,” Gerson replied. “The Bible says, ‘Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided’ (Judges 4:4, 5). Deborah was a judge with political and spiritual authority at a time when it was not very common. The time of the judges was a time of spiritual decay. It’s very good to know that, in the midst of a crisis of leader-

ship, God raised up a woman to lead the people of Israel!”

“And what about the third one?” Sandra wanted to know.

“The third was Hulda, the counselor of King Josiah,” Gerson said. “An interesting fact is that, while Hulda developed her ministry, the prophets Jeremiah and Zephaniah were still alive, and Josiah preferred to consult Huldah. Undoubtedly, the king respected very much her prophetic ministry.” “It is true that the Adventist Church also has a prophetess?”

Sandra asked. “Thank you for that question,” responded Gerson. “There are many people who get confused about the position of Ellen White within the Adventist Church. She was born in Gorham, Maine, in the United States on November 26, 1827. She and her twin sister were the youngest in a family of eight children. Her formal education was interrupted when she was only nine years old because of an accident that almost cost her life.” “But was she a prophetess or not?” someone asked.

“We believe she was an inspired woman,” answered Gerson. “All the biblical evidences of a true prophet were applied to her. So we can say that she was a woman chosen by God to advise His church.”

“But I’ve heard that Adventists are her followers.”

“The Adventist Church follows the principle of Sola Scriptura, that is, we follow the Bible and the Bible alone,” explained Gerson. “Not a single Adventist doctrine was taken from the writings of Ellen White. If she had not existed, the church would have the same 28 fundamental beliefs that it has today.”

“But then, what can you tell us about her?” Sandra asked.

“For 70 years, she presented messages that God had entrusted her,” Gerson replied. “She was never elected to any administrative function, but the leaders always heed her advice. As a result, her messages had a broad impact on the educational and medical systems of the church.

Although she never took any courses in the health field, the results of her ministry are remarkable in the worldwide

network of Adventist hospitals.”

“And how about her books?” someone else questioned.

“She was a great writer,” Gerson responded. “Since 1851, when she published her first book, she produced a huge amount of articles, pamphlets and books. Some books are devotional in nature while others are compilations from personal letters she wrote over the years. Some books have a historical perspective and deal with the conflict between Christ and Satan for the control of the nations and individuals. She also wrote books on education, health, and other issues of importance to the church and society. After her death, over 70 books were compiled and published.

Her book *Steps to Christ* has been translated into 150 languages, which makes her the most translated American writer.”

“But was she or was she not a prophetess?”

“Yes, she was, in the biblical sense of a prophet,” Gerson answered. “She was a divine messenger. All her teachings are in accordance with the Word of God. She did not remove nor add anything to Scripture.”

It was getting late when the group prayed and dispersed for the night. Sandra walked silently, thinking about everything she had heard.

She entered her room and headed for the table where she kept a book called *The Ministry of Healing*. She smiled and looked at the cover because the author was Ellen White. She opened the book carefully and read the following paragraph:

Not because we first loved Him did Christ love us; but “while we were yet sinners” (Romans 5:8) He died for us. He does not treat us according to our desert. Although our sins have merited condemnation, He does not condemn us. Year after year He has borne with our weakness and ignorance, with our ingratitude and waywardness. Notwithstanding our wanderings, our hardness of heart, our neglect of His Holy Word, His hand is stretched out still. Grace is an attribute of

God exercised toward undeserving human beings. We did not seek for it, but it was sent in search of us. God rejoices to bestow His grace upon us, not because we are worthy, but because we are so utterly unworthy. Our only claim to His mercy is our great need. The Lord God through Jesus Christ holds out His hand all the day long in invitation to the sinful and fallen. He will receive all. He welcomes all. It is His glory to pardon the chief of sinners. He will take the prey from the mighty, He will deliver the captive, He will pluck the brand from the burning. He will lower the golden chain of His mercy to the lowest depths of human wretchedness, and lift up the debased soul contaminated with sin (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 161).

Sandra was moved. That paragraph she had just read was inspired by God and made her feel safe. She had come to that small town fleeing from a painful incident, but in that community she met the soothing love of God.

Sandra discovered the only hope.

### Hope of counsel

*Today we can still know God's guidelines for our lives.*

Learn how to identify the true prophet chosen by God.

1 - God revealed His "secrets" to His servants the prophets. *Amos 3:7*

2 - Jesus warned us about false prophets. *Matthew 7:15; 24:11*

3 - The true gift of prophecy would accompany the people of God in the end time. *Revelation 12:17; 19:10*

4 - The content of the prophecies must be evaluated by the Word of God. 1 *John 4:1*

5 - A true prophet's message does not contradict Scripture. *Jeremiah 28:1-9, 15-17*

6 - The true prophet accepts and teaches about Jesus' incarnation. 1 *John* 4:2

7 - The prophet of God produces good fruit. *Matthew* 7:15-23

8 - The true prophet lives according to the Bible and God's law. *Isaiah* 8:19, 20

9 - The prophecies of a true prophet must be fulfilled. *Deuteronomy* 18:21, 22

10 - God invites us to follow the guidance of the prophets. *Proverbs* 29:18; 2 *Chronicles* 20:20

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# Chapter 6

## The great hope



On a warm and bright April day, Ramiro was happily walking in the hotel garden, thinking he was in the prime of his health, far from imagining that he was a few days away from death.

Without his knowledge, a terrible cancer had been devouring his life for a long time. The next morning, after learning the results of the medical tests, he felt like a bomb was exploding inside his head.

Life is short and often comes with hardships, but even in the most difficult circumstances everyone still clings to life. That is how Ramiro was feeling. He was only 50 years old, too young to die. In two months, his first grandchild would be born. That is why, when he found out he had a few weeks left to live, he sank into an abyss of despair and disillusionment. The small faith he had since childhood disappeared and he wondered where God was, and why He had allowed this to happen.

In his last week of life, still in the hospital, he was visited by a chaplain. The white-haired man with a calm voice said a prayer, which meant nothing to Ramiro. His trust in God was completely shaken at this point. Nevertheless, he was impressed by a Bible verse the chaplain had read.

“Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:13, 16).

After listening to this promise, as if seeking a ray of hope, Ramiro asked: "You mean Jesus will return and, on that day, I will be raised from the dead?" "That's what the Bible says," replied the chaplain. "'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am'" (John 14:1-3).

Ramiro was not an unbeliever, nor was he religious. His parents were Christians and took him to Mass every Sunday. Time had passed and, in college, although he had not lost his faith altogether, for him, God was just some amulet he remembered about each time he struggled with difficulties. But now, sentenced to death by cancer, he felt forgotten by God.

"Is it possible to believe in these things the Bible says?" he asked, feeling hurt.

"You see, Ramiro," replied the chaplain. "In the Bible there are over 3,000 promises. Each has the power to revolutionize the life of any person who has faith."

"That many?" asked Ramiro.

"Yes. There are conditional and unconditional promises. The promise of the second coming of Christ is an example of an unconditional promise. He will come on time regardless of anything."

"Does that mean Jesus will really come again?" Ramiro wanted to know. "Yes," answered the chaplain. "Whether human beings believe it or not, when it is time for Christ's coming, He will come. Genuine Christians have always waited eagerly for that promise. Christ's return is mentioned 300 times in the New Testament. Jesus will return; He will end with the story of sin and He will create a world without pain, disease, and injustice."

The chaplain's last sentence touched Ramiro's heart. He

immediately asked, "And when will He come?"

"Take a look at what Jesus said about this," the chaplain replied. "'But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father'" (Matthew 24:36).

"So, no one knows?" asked Ramiro.

"No one. However, we have signs that indicate the proximity of the event. Jesus, while on earth, said: 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. [...] and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold [...]. Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened' (Matthew 24:7, 11, 12, 32-34). Isn't that the situation in today's world?"

Ramiro was weak because of the treatment he was receiving. His body was rotting from within, but the dialogue with the chaplain seemed to cheer him up.

"And how will this return be?" he asked anxiously.

"It will be a visible and very real return," the chaplain responded. "The whole world will see it. When Jesus ascended to Heaven, His disciples were sad, watching the clouds while their Master disappeared. Then two angels appeared to them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven' (Acts 1:11).

"The disciples saw Him rise in a literal form. He will return that way. Christ Himself said, 'So if anyone tells you, There he is, out in the wilderness, do not go out; or, Here he is, in the inner rooms, do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be

the coming of the Son of Man. [...] Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:26, 27, 30).

“But I heard that Jesus has already returned and only the righteous could see Him with the eyes of faith,” said Ramiro.

“There are people who say that,” replied the chaplain, “but the Scriptures say, ‘Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all peoples on earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen!’” (Revelation 1:7).

“Who are those who pierced Him?” Ramiro asked.

“The ones who hurt Jesus on the cross,” the chaplain answered, “as well as all the enemies of Christianity throughout History. They will rise before Jesus returns and see Him in the splendor of His glory. Therefore, His return will not be a secret act.”

“So no one will be left behind?” Ramiro’s son Roberto asked, breaking his silence for the first time.

“The idea of a secret rapture comes from a misunderstanding of a speech Jesus gave in His prophetic sermon,” the chaplain explained. “‘For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come’” (Matthew 24:38-42).

“Could you explain better this text?” Roberto asked.

“Of course,” replied the chaplain. “The Bible is a unit, and it must be understood in the light of its context. For example, what is the theme of Matthew 24?”

“The second coming of Christ,” Roberto said, who by this time seemed more interested than his own father.

Ramiro looked at his son with admiration.

“That’s right!” affirmed the chaplain. “Matthew 24 focuses on the return of Christ and the signs that would happen before His coming. Verse 38 says that the days preceding Jesus’ return will be like the days before the flood, in which people were completely oblivious to what was about to happen. They continued on with their life, eating, drinking, marrying, going to school, working, buying, and selling. They had no idea what was going to happen until the flood suddenly came. Eight were saved while the others were left behind.”

“But verse 40 says that two will be in the field, one will be taken and the other left,” Roberto pointed out.

“Exactly,” the chaplain replied. “But the goal in this verse is to emphasize the element of surprise in Jesus’ coming. No one knows the day or the hour. We should be permanently prepared, because those who are ready will be taken, and those who are not will be left behind. But it will only happen when Jesus returns. Therefore, verses 30 and 31 state, ‘Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory’ (Matthew 24:30, 31). The rapture will not be a secret, but a public act, visible to everyone.”

“The angels themselves are going to gather the chosen ones when Jesus returns?” asked Roberto.

“That’s right,” replied the chaplain. “After using the illustration of women in the mill and men in the field, Jesus said, ‘So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him’ (Matthew 24:44). He once again emphasizes the need to prepare for His second coming. Those who won’t be ready, unfortunately, will be left behind.”

“This is kind of scary,” Ramiro argued, shifting position in

bed. "Scary?" asked the chaplain. "Why do you think so? It will be the most glorious day for God's children. Since the entrance of sin in this world, mankind has been wandering in the desert of life, wishing for a better world. Many died on the way and did not see the fulfillment of their hope. Look what is said here: 'And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection.

Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated - the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised'" (Hebrews 11:32-39).

"All these people suffered hoping for the promise but they did not receive it," said Ramiro. "Don't you think that's unfair?"

"They will not fail to see the promise fulfilled because at the sound of the trumpet at the time of Christ's return, all the dead in Christ will rise to receive Jesus with open arms. 'In that day they will say, Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation'" (Isaiah 25:9).

A silent tear rolled down Ramiro's face, but it wasn't because he was sad. There was a gleam of hope in his eyes

when he asked, "You mean I'll be there?"

"Absolutely," answered the chaplain. "God's promises are also for you." Roberto sat beside his father and patted the head of the man who had been his best friend.

Watching the scene, the chaplain continued, "Read with me what the apostle Paul says when he wrote to the Thessalonians. 'Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: Death has been swallowed up in victory'" (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

"This is wonderful. Thank you!" Ramiro exclaimed emotionally. "And, why can't Jesus come back soon?" Roberto asked.

"You see, my dear ones," the chaplain said, "God is love and He is working in the hearts of many people to accept that love. The apostle Peter states regarding this, 'The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare'" (2 Peter 3:9, 10).

"Will it be like in the movies?" asked Roberto.

"I think human imagination is not able to reproduce what will truly happen," the chaplain replied. "I do not want to scare you but, as those who accept Jesus as their Savior will raise their arms to receive Him, those who reject God's love will fully understand the mistake they've made, and will see the terrible punishment they'll suffer. 'I watched as he

opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?" (Revelation 6:12-17).

Roberto was shocked to read that last text. He took the Bible and read that part again and said, "This does not seem like a God of love!"

"Oh, Roberto, this is a subject everyone needs to understand," said the chaplain. "When human beings turn away from God, they actually turn away from life and enter the territory of death. But the Bible is clear when it says, 'Say to them, as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?' (Ezekiel 33:11). Today God calls us incessantly. Many people accept His calling but, unfortunately, others reject it."

"That's true," admitted Roberto.

"There are still those who, besides not accepting, laugh of the believers," the chaplain added. "Because of this, Peter says, 'Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, where is this coming he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation' (2 Peter 3:3, 4). Isn't that the reality of a large part of humanity?" Father and son were both moved. They were sincere people, living in a difficult



moment. One could not say they were religious people; they had never been committed to any church. That day, they accepted the chaplain's visit out of courtesy, but as the conversation progressed, they both showed interest in spiritual matters and were surprised with the truths they ignored.

"How could we not know this for so long?" Ramiro asked.

"That's not a problem," the chaplain assured them. "What matters now is that you do understand there is no reason for you to live hopelessly. Christ's return is the end of the history of sin and the plan of salvation. If Christ did not return to earth, salvation wouldn't have much logic. For what purpose would He save us? For us to continue living forever in this world of suffering and pain, saved from sin, but also prisoners of our consequences? The visible return of Jesus is the end of sin. This is a divine promise, and He said: 'trouble will not come a second time'" (Nahum 1:9).

The constant question in the conversation seemed to be why the Lord was taking so long to return. It is part of the human nature to have expectations. When God promised Adam and Eve that a son would come from a woman to redeem the world, they thought their firstborn, Cain, would be the Savior. From then on, every child who was born was a frustrated hope. Therefore, in Israel, women who could not have children felt cursed. They all hoped the Messiah would come from their womb. Generations passed, until, finally, Jesus arrived.

Something similar is happening today. Since Jesus said, "I will come back" (John 14:3), humanity anxiously waits. Paul and Peter waited faithfully for Him, and they died without seeing the fulfillment of the promise.

Suddenly, Roberto broke the silence among them.

"I cannot harmonize the urgency of this event with the delay," he said. "It's true", the chaplain replied. "It is apparently incompatible. For example, John says, 'Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the

prophecy written in this scroll' (Revelation 22:7). And, at the beginning of verse 6, he records, 'He said to me, these sayings are faithful and true.' How can they be faithful and true if Jesus said he would return soon and has not return yet? The answer may be the concept humans have of time. For mankind, the life expectancy of 100 years is a lot of time, but not for God. On the other hand, there is the fact that God wants everyone to repent. But when the day and time arrives, the Lord will come to take His children. So today is a day of good news. Today is a day of decision."

Five days after the chaplain's visit, Ramiro died with peace and hope in his heart. However, before the chaplain left the room that day, Ramiro shared his story with him.

"Life has surprises we cannot imagine," Ramiro began. "I heard so much about the Bible throughout my life, but I never had the curiosity to know anything. I just lived to work, I struggled to educate my children and see them happy and never had time to think about God. Today, even against my will, I stand here before the Bible and realize how much I've lost.

"The most important thing is that, right now, you are sensitive to Jesus' voice," the chaplain replied.

Ramiro looked at Roberto and said, "Son, study God's Word. You still have time. Take these truths to your family."

Roberto said nothing. He only gently gripped his father's hand. Ramiro's funeral service was inspiring. A choir from the chaplain's church came to sing at the cemetery. That gloomy afternoon was illuminated with the chords of the song they sang:

On that bright and golden morning, when the Son of Man shall come,  
And the radiance of His glory we shall see;

When from ev'ry clime and nation He shall call His people home,  
What a gath'ring of the ransomed that will be!

What a gath'ring, what a gath'ring,

What a gath'ring of the ransomed in the summer land of love!  
What a gath'ring, what a gath'ring,

Of the ransomed in that happy home above!  
Ramiro's wife, two sons, and daughters-in-law continued studying the Bible. They found the only hope.

## The great hope

### *You can rejoice with great hope.*

Find details of this event long awaited by God's people.

1 - Christ promised to come back for those who believe in Him. *John 14:1-3*

2 - Many signs show the nearness of Jesus' coming. *Matthew 24:4-7, 10-12, 24, 29*

3 - The exact time of Christ's coming was not disclosed. *Matthew 24:36*

4 - When Jesus returns, all will see Him. *Revelation 1:7*

5 - Many will be caught up by surprise. *Matthew 24:38-46*

6 - At the coming of Christ, all who believe in Him will be transformed. *1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17*

7 - Whoever believes in Jesus will rejoice in His coming. *Isaiah 25:9*

8 - Those who do not believe will be terrified. *Revelation 6:12-17*

9 - God wants to save everyone. Therefore, He expects everyone to accept His forgiveness. *2 Peter 3:9, 10*

10 - The final invitation of Jesus is that we prepare ourselves for His soon coming. *Revelation 22:12*

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# Chapter 7

## The hope of resurrection



Mr. Machado had rented that mysterious house because he thought it was a place that would give him quiet time he needed to write. He was a retired journalist and had decided to put his biography on paper before the end of his life.

For a long time, the house had been abandoned. People commented it was haunted, but he did not believe in spirits. Besides, the landscape he could see through his office window was truly inspiring.

During the first days at his new home, he heard some strange noises, especially in the evening hours. He thought the noises were in his imagination, caused by the old stories he had listened to, and he did not worry about it.

During his second week, while he was sitting on an antique sofa, drinking lemonade, he noticed a large, old picture on the wall of a woman who strongly resembled his deceased wife. Machado approached the picture and was moved by the similarity. But his emotions turned into fear when the woman's face in the picture smiled and winked at him. He jumped back with the intention of running away from that place, but he regained his composure and, moved by curiosity, approached the picture again.

It was around 6 p.m. and the house lights were still not lit, giving an even more frightening look to the room. Machado's heart was beating rapidly. Was the smile of the woman in the picture real or just the product of his imagination?

In the following days, he was still disturbed by the incident and could not concentrate on his work. He opened the computer and began reviewing familiar pictures. He stopped

in a picture of himself with his wife, Elisa. They smiled together, satisfied with life. At that moment, he heard the voice of his beloved wife and panicked.

“Do not be alarmed, dear, I came here to work with you on your auto- biography,” it said.

Machado did not know what to think. At first, he tried not to listen to the voice, but he gradually overcame fear. He became convinced that he enjoyed Elisa’s company for six months, and that she helped him finish his autobiography.

“No one can convince me the dead are not alive,” he said, certain of his experience.

The theme of life after death has always been present. However, it has never been as much in evidence as today. On one occasion, I was talking about the Bible with a group of college students and the subject came up.

“What does the Bible teach about that?” one of them asked, after report- ing a similar experience to the one Mr. Machado had.

I opened the Bible and read the following text, “For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further re- ward, and even their name is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun. [...] Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom” (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10).

“According to this biblical statement,” I said, “the dead know nothing, be- cause when they die, every feeling, thought, and action vanishes with them.” “But how can this be?” a young lady with brown eyes asked, very interested in the subject. “I’ve always heard that when a person dies her spirit lives on.” “To understand this issue, we need to know what happened at the time of Man’s creation,” I explained. “The Bible teaches that ‘the Lord God formed man of the

dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul' (Genesis 2:7).

According to the biblical account, God formed man out of the dust of the earth. Adam had brains, but not thought; he had a heart, but he was not breathing. However, when God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, he became a living soul in the biblical sense, or what the world calls a living human being."

"You mean a human being is the result of the addition of dust with the breath of God?" the brown-eyed young lady asked again.

"Exactly," I replied. "And when a man dies, the opposite of that creation process occurs. The divine breath, which many call the spirit, goes back to God, and the dust goes back to the ground. Solomon tells us to remember the Creator before death comes and 'the dust returns to the ground as it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it' (Ecclesiastes 12:7). There is no conscious spirit separated from the body. We can compare the human life to a lighted lamp connected to electricity. The light is the result of the junction of energy and light. Together, the two produce light. When the connection is not there, there isn't light anymore."

What I had just said came as a bomb for some of the young people. Most believed the disembodied spirit of a human being was somehow still alive. "Let's forget about the Bible for a second," one of them said. "Can you prove scientifically that, when a human being dies, his spirit ceases to exist?" "No, I cannot," I replied. "But those who teach that there is life after death also have no scientific evidence. What I'm saying is based on the Bible, which is considered to be the Word of God by billions of human beings."

"So where did the idea that the spirit does not die come from?" asked a tall young lady, who was taking notes of what we were talking about.

“The Bible can answer your question,” I responded. “Look at what it says here, ‘Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, Did God really say, You must not eat from any tree in the garden? The woman said to the serpent, We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die. You will not certainly die, the serpent said to the woman’” (Genesis 3:1-4).

“You mean the idea that the spirit is immortal was born with God’s enemy?” the young lady asked.

“Yes,” I said. “The apostle Paul says the following on immortality: ‘which God will bring about in his own time – God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen’ (1 Timothy 6:15, 16).

“According to what I just read, only God has immortality. No human being has it. Therefore, when a man dies, he no longer has conscience of anything. That’s what David says about the person who dies, ‘When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing’ (Psalm 146:4). What purpose has the existence of a spirit that does not think when is separated from the body?”

“You’ve just said only God is immortal,” replied a cheerful young man with bright eyes. “Is that supposed to mean that Adam and Eve, in their original state, would also die? If so, they did not die as a result of their dis- obedience, but because they were mortal by nature.”

“Your question is interesting,” I said. “Human beings do not have im- mortality; only God possesses it. Therefore, if a person wants to live forever, he needs to be in communion with the source of life. That source is God.”

“How come?” the young man asked.

“Adam and Eve would never have died if they had not walked away from the Lord,” I explained. “Disobedience is simply turning away from God. By moving away from Him, a human being turns away from life and enters the territory of death. Death is not a divine punishment, but the natural consequence of the removal of life. The Bible says, ‘Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned’” (Romans 5:12).

“So we’re all doomed!” he exclaimed.

“We would be, were it not for Jesus,” I replied. “Look at this passage. ‘Our Savior Jesus Christ [...] destroyed death, [...] brought life and immortality to light through the gospel’ (2 Timothy 1:10). Here, Paul clearly states that the gospel brings immortality to human beings.”

“I don’t understand,” the young man said.

“It’s simple,” I responded. “Listen to this. ‘Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’ (John 14:6). Jesus, as we have seen, is the only one who has immortality. He himself is life. And John says, ‘Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life’ (1 John 5:12, 13). Do you understand?”

“Yes, the only way to have immortality is to go to Jesus and stay with Him. Whoever has the Son has life,” said the tall young lady.

“That’s how it works,” I agreed.

“And what can you tell us about those who die in Christ? Do their spirits go to heaven?” the young man with bright eyes asked.

“They will go for sure,” I answered, “but only when Jesus returns and not at the time they die. At death, a human being remains in a state of unconsciousness until the day of resurrection, which will occur at Christ’s return.” “Where do



you get that idea from?” a young woman with long hair asked. “From the Bible,” I replied. “John relates that one day Lazarus, a friend of Jesus, was ill, and his sisters asked Jesus to come and help him. The Master took a few days to arrive, and Lazarus died.

“Here is the record of what happened: ‘After he had said this, he went on to tell them, our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up. His disciples replied, Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better. Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, Lazarus is dead’ (John 11:11-14). Do you realize that death, for Jesus, is a state of unconsciousness compared to sleep?” Each verse we read seemed to divide the group. Some believed; others were reluctant, almost incredulous. Then a young man wearing a black coat, who looked indifferent until that moment, raised a question.

“I know the Bible a little,” he said, “and it seems what you are saying does not agree with Jesus’ promise to the thief on the cross. He said that, on that same day, after his death, the thief would be with Jesus in heaven, and not only on the day of resurrection. What explanation can you give me for that?” “Let us read the Biblical account,” I replied. “‘Then he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. Jesus answered him, truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise’ (Luke 23:42, 43). Many Bible scholars believe the translation of this verse is wrong and that the text, instead of saying ‘I say to you today you will be with me in paradise’, should say ‘I tell you now: you’ll be [one day] with me in paradise.’ The truth is that I’m not too worried about it.”

“Why not?” he asked.

“It is a simple matter of logic,” I explained. “Consider the account of what happened when Jesus was resurrected. ‘Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white,

seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, Woman, why are you crying? They have taken my Lord away, she said, and I don't know where they have put him. At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for? Thinking he was the gardener, she said, Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him. Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, Rabboni! (which means Teacher). Jesus said, Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20:11-17).

"And what does this incident has to do with Jesus' promise to the thief?" the young man asked.

"When Jesus met Mary," I replied, "He had been dead for already three days, and He had not ascended to His Father yet. Where was Jesus during those days if He had not gone to heaven? Evidently He was sleeping the unconscious sleep of the dead. There is no paradise immediately after death, but the paradise is the ultimate reward the righteous will be given at the second coming of Jesus."

"How strange!" the young lady with the brown eyes said.

"I understand this sounds strange to many, because our culture is filled with another way of thinking," I responded. "Today most people believed that, in one way or another, there is life after death, but the Bible is emphatic to teach the opposite. There is no conscious disembodied spirit."

"Interesting", the girl with long hair said.

"I'll give one more example to support what I've said," I continued, "and that is David's experience. Look what is said here. 'Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. [...] For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right

hand' (Acts 2:29, 34). I think nobody doubts that David, repented and forgiven, will be in the kingdom of heaven. However, in this text it is said that his grave is still on earth. It is obvious that centuries after his death he had not ascended to heaven yet."

I could feel the tension in the air. The young people looked at one another. What they were hearing, undoubtedly, was contrary to everything they saw in the movies and on television. The media has an impressive didactic power because its subliminal messages are effective, and many people unwittingly form convictions influenced by the media.

The young man who had some knowledge of the Bible seemed annoyed. He asked, "And what can you say about the parable of the rich man and Lazarus? Isn't it an evidence that there is hell and heaven?"

"Of course," I said. "The Bible mentions hell and paradise, but as a reward or punishment on the day of Jesus' return. The parable you mentioned says the following: 'There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire. But Abraham replied, Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us'"

(Luke 16:19-26).

“Apparently this parable is a proof that, when people die, the good go to heaven and the wicked to hell,” I continued. “But one must understand that this text is a parable, an illustration. Illustrations do not define concepts. If this parable were a reflection of reality, there would be many incoherencies. For example, what size would Abraham’s bosom be so that all good people could fit there? How can we imagine that heaven is so close to hell that the spirits can talk? And how could bad people get burned if they do not have a body anymore?”

I had not finished this explanation when another young man who had listened quietly raised his hand and said, “I know many people who attended meetings where the spirits of the dead appeared and spoke with the living. Who were these spirits?”

“I do not doubt that these people have talked with spirits,” I replied. “But, according to the Bible, these were not spirits of dead people.”

“So what spirits were they?” he asked.

“I will read a biblical text that may answer your question,” I offered. “‘And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light’” (2 Corinthians 11:14).

“You mean that these spirits were evil angels?” asked the young man. “Well, if the devil can disguise himself as an angel of light,” I said, “could

the other angels that were cast out of heaven with him also do it? Remember that the enemy has always used seduction and deception against humans. The book of Revelation says, ‘Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him’ (Revelation 12:7-9). Satan’s

original lie to Eve said, 'You will not certainly die'" (Genesis 3:4).

"But with what purpose would he do that?" the young man wondered. "Simply because it's his nature to lie," I replied. "One day Jesus said 'he was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies'" (John 8:44).

"This is scary!" he exclaimed.

"Of course it is," I agreed. "That's why God warns those who consult the false spirits of the dead, 'When someone tells you to consult mediums and spirits, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?'" (Isaiah 8:19).

We had spent over two hours talking together. It was late, and we needed to rest, but I did not want to finish that meeting without mentioning to the young people the great hope of those who sleep in Jesus.

"'Brothers and sisters,'" I quoted, "we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first' (1 Thessalonians 4:13-16). This is an extraordinary promise. Jesus will return, and on that day, the dead in Christ will awaken from the sleep of death and live with Him for eternity."

That day's study was fruitful. Years later, while I was attending a meeting, a couple approached me accompanied by two children. "Do you remember us?" the woman

asked.

I did not remember.

“We attended a meeting with college students in which you mentioned the issue of the state of the dead. Do you remember the meeting?”

I did, and emotion took over me. The couple went on to tell me that after that day they continued studying the Bible. Now they were married, and God had given them two precious children. Their eyes reflected assurance. That lovely couple discovered the only hope.

## The hope of resurrection

*You can find hope of resurrection and eternal life.*

Meet the divine solution to the problem of sin and death.

1 - God created mankind to reflect His image. *Genesis 1:27*

2 - Through the divine breath, the human being became a living soul. *Genesis 2:7*

3 - The disobedience to the Word of God led to death. *Genesis 3:19*

4 - Death is a state of unconsciousness. *Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6; Psalm 6:5; 146:4*

5 - Jesus compared death to sleep. *John 11:11, 14, 21*

6 - Immortality is a unique attribute of God. *1 Timothy 6:15, 16*

7 - There will be two resurrections: one to everlasting life and the other to everlasting death. *John 5:28, 29*

8 - The saved will receive immortality only when Christ returns. *1 Corinthians 15:51-54*

9 - Only through Christ we have the certainty of the resurrection and eternal life. *John 11:25*

10 - Our hope is in the promises concerning the coming of Christ. *1 Thessalonians 4:18*

To learn more about this subject and other messages God has for you, visit **[www.biblia.com.br/livro](http://www.biblia.com.br/livro)**

# Chapter 8

## Hope of prosperity



Gabriela rose from the table and looked at the smartphone a customer had forgotten. She had hidden the forgotten item in her purse. She cautiously looked around and hurried out through the back door.

The hot night did not match the cloud-covered sky. Gabriela appeared to be nervous. All day long she had worried about her terrible financial problems and felt a weight in her conscience. She felt suffocated. When the customer forgot her phone, the secretary's first intention was to return it, but after realizing it was an expensive device she decided to keep it. Her conscience, however, was disturbing her.

On the street, she got in the first bus she saw without knowing where she was going, sinking into her world of problems and difficulties. Over an hour later, the driver's voice brought her back to reality.

"Last stop! This is the end of the line!" he called.

The young widow got out of the bus and walked down the road that was parallel to the railway line. She felt like her world was about to collapse. Three years ago she had lost her husband and then, months later, the house. Now she was literally sunk in debt and did not know what to do. Her five-year-old son lived in another city, with his grandparents, so she could work. She felt alone and lost in a huge city.

The fight on her conscience did not start because she stole the cell phone. Actually, her inner conflict with God's voice began on a morning when, unable to sleep, she turned the television on. On the screen, a man was talking about "doing business with God." In his opinion, the solution to all



problems seemed very easy. It was just handing money to God, and He, in turn, would solve all problems. This way of looking at life seemed somewhat mercantilist. Still it was the starting point for her interest in knowing God's will.

That night, after walking through the city, Gabriela returned home and called the neighbor who always invited her to go to church.

"Hello, Laura," she said. "Are you still awake?"

"Yes, Gaby," Laura responded. "What's up? Your voice sounds kind of strange."

"It must be everything I'm dealing with right now," Gabriela replied. "You know my life is upside down."

"I know how it is," Laura said. "But remember, I'm praying for you." "Well, Laura, it seems that God does not listen," Gabriela said bitterly.

"Everything in my life still seems the same."

"Patience, Gaby," Laura reassured her. "I've told you many times that we need to talk about your relationship with God. You are far from Him."

"I know," Gabriela admitted. "That's why I'm calling you. I would like to study the Bible. I'm very serious about it."

Laura was quite surprised. Until that moment, Gabriela had never shown interest in spiritual matters, despite the difficulties she faced.

"Are you ok, Gaby?" Laura asked.

"No, I'm not," Gabriela responded, her voice shakey. "We need to talk." The next evening, the two friends met again, with an open Bible. Gabriela had big expectations of seeing her problems solved. She wanted God to intervene in her life in an extraordinary way.

"I'm willing to do whatever God wants me to," she said, "just as long as He solves my problems. I'm desperate."

"You want to make some kind of exchange of favors with God?" Laura asked.

"I don't know," Gabriela admitted. "I'm at rock bottom. Yesterday I even took a phone that is not mine, so I could

sell it. Can God do something for me?"

"Of course He can," Laura said. "God is God. He really loves you and cares about your situation. Check out this promise. 'Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? [...] And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you - you of little faith?'" (Matthew 6:26, 28-30).

"That's my problem, Laura," Gabriela responded. "I have no faith. Right now, I am a woman who only thinks about getting out of debt."

"You know, your problem is not the debts you have. They exist. They are real. But they are only the result of the true problem that you lack God in your life. For you, God is just a detail. You are alone."

"But, with so many problems, I don't have time for anything else," Gabriela said.

"The difficulties are suffocating you because, for you, God is not in control," Laura explained. "He is your Creator and loving Father, but you do not seem to care. If you would recognize Him as your God, He would do wonders in your life. Read with me what David says, 'Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness. [...] Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. [...] You who fear him, trust in the Lord - he is their help and shield. [...] He will bless those who fear the Lord - small and great alike. May the Lord cause you to flourish, both you and your children. May you be blessed by the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth'" (Psalm 115:1, 3, 11, 13-15).

"What does this mean?" asked Gabriela.

“The main idea in this text is that God is sovereign, all-powerful, and eternal,” Laura replied. “‘Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.’ Human beings cannot make themselves the center of their life, even when they are going through difficult times. ‘Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory,’ says the psalmist.”

“And what do I do with my problems?” Gabriela wondered.

“The verse I just read can answer that,” Laura said. “‘You who fear him, trust in the Lord – he is their help and shield. He will bless those who fear the Lord – small and great alike.’ A shield is a weapon of protection. If the Lord is your shield, who can touch you?”

“Is this promise for me as well?” Gabriela asked.

“Yes!” exclaimed Laura. “Only the right motive to seek Him should not be the solution to your problems. Instead that you would worship Him because He is your God.”

“It’s very easy for you to say that. Right now, my conditions are not favorable,” Gabriela complained, feeling discouraged.

“No, honey, I’m not in your shoes,” Laura admitted. “But I’ve learned that blessings are a natural result of seeking the Lord with all your heart. That’s what the Bible says, ‘I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me. With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity. My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, bestowing a rich inheritance on those who love me and making their treasuries full’” (Proverbs 8:17-21).

As Gabriela moved on the couch, her eyes showed a different brightness. It was as if a ray of light had illuminated her darkened world. She had sought solutions to her problems, but she wasn’t searching for God. When she realized her attitude, she looked down, feeling ashamed, and said, “I’m completely wrong, I know...”

“No, Gabriela,” Laura responded. “You, like many people,

just don't understand the order of things. God is the beginning of everything. Look at what Jesus says, 'but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well'" (Matthew 6:33).

"What should I do then?" asked Gabriela.

"Go back to God," Laura said. "You do not belong to yourself. Recognize God as Creator and Sustainer. If you don't do it, you will be taking hold of what belongs to God. See what the Lord said in the days of Malachi: 'Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty. But you ask, how are we to return?' (Malachi 3:7). What

God wants the most is His children to recognize they walked away from Him and return to the loving arms of the Father."

"Why do you say that I've walked away from Him?" Gabriela asked. "I'll explain it to you, but we need to go back to the Garden of Eden,"

Laura replied. "Back to where?"

"Yes, I do," said Gabriela.

"God also gave them everything that was in the field so they could eat and live," Laura went on. "But He set something aside. 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die'" (Genesis 2:15-17).

"Was something wrong with that tree?" asked Gabriela.

"Nothing was wrong," Laura answered. "It was just a test of loyalty to Adam and Eve. To recognize the Creator's sovereignty was to respect the tree of knowledge of good and evil. To touch it, however, meant they were seizing the things that belonged to God. They were making themselves owners of it all and they were departing from the Creator.

The consequence of this rebellion act was death. Slowly, mankind would begin to deteriorate.”

“I had never thought about it that way,” Gabriela admitted.

“God owns everything, Gaby,” said Laura. “‘He says, ‘For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the insects in the fields are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it’ (Psalm 50:10-12). The problem is that humans have the tendency to take possession of what belongs to God, and still think all they have belongs to them, especially when life circumstances are favorable to them.”

“Perhaps that was my case,” Gabriela mused.

“That is the case of all human beings,” Laura responded. “It always has been.”

“Why do you say that?” asked Gabriela.

“In the days of the people of Israel,” Laura replied, “God had already said, ‘Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. [...] Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. [...]. You may say to yourself, My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me’ (Deuteronomy 8:11-14, 17). Do you understand that human beings have always had a tendency to take over everything that belongs to God? Adam did it and today we continue doing the same thing.”

“But today the tree of knowledge of good and evil does not exist,” Gabriela argued. “I’m not touching anything that God said not to touch.”

“Well, after leaving Eden because of sin,” Laura said,

“Adam and Eve no longer had access to the tree. Tithing became one of the proofs that we recognize God as sovereign. Moses made this clear: ‘A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord’” (Leviticus 27:30).

“I don’t think this is a proof of loyalty,” Gabriela said doubtfully.

“You don’t?” asked Laura. “Then look at what God said in the days of Malachi: ‘Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, How are we robbing you? In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse – your whole nation – because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it’ (Malachi 3:8-10,). Do you realize that God told Adam: ‘you will certainly die’ (Genesis 2:17), and to us today He says, ‘You are under a curse’?”

“But isn’t God love?” Gabriela asked. “How can He kill or curse us only by touching a tree or if we do not tithe?”

“It is not God who punishes,” Laura explained. “He is the source of life itself. But when man takes hold of what is His, he moves away from the Creator and voluntarily enters the territory of death and the curse.”

“I do not understand,” said Gabriela, confused.

Laura explained, “It is as if God said, ‘Son, everything is mine but I’ll lend it to you so you can live. However, as I am God and I know everything, I know that over time you will think that everything belongs to you. So I established tithing so you’d never forget that I am the owner and you are only the administrator. While doing so, I know that you’ll recognize Me as sovereign. If not, I will know you are taking over what I’ve entrusted to you.”

“So it is man who determines his situation?” Gabriela

asked.

“Exactly,” said Laura. “What God really wants is for us to live happily. ‘Say to them, As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?’” (Ezekiel 33:11).

“Let me be honest, Laura,” Gabriela said. “I think God doesn’t need money.” “Of course not,” Laura agreed. “He himself declared, ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine, declares the Lord Almighty’” (Haggai 2:8). “Then why does He asks us to tithe?” wondered Gabriela.

“I’ve told you,” said Laura. “The problem is not tithing, but the fact that you recognize Him or not as sovereign in your life.”

“And what does the church do with the tithe?” Gabriela asked. “How do they use it?”

“In the time of Moses,” Laura said, “the tithe was used for the maintenance of the priests, who belonged to the tribe of Levi. ‘Instead, I give to the Levites as their inheritance the tithes that the Israelites present as an offering to the Lord. That is why I said concerning them: They will have no inheritance among the Israelites’” (Numbers 18:24).

“But that was in the days of the people of Israel,” Gabriela pointed out. “What about now?”

“Today, the sacred tithe is used for the maintenance of the ministers and preaching the gospel,” Laura explained. “The apostle Paul says, ‘Don’t you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel’” (1 Corinthians 9:13, 14).

Hours had now passed without them noticing. Gabriela had never imagined the Bible had the answers to the human heart’s concerns.

“Oh, my friend,” Laura said, “you can find in Scriptures the answer to any question. This book is a love letter Jesus left us so we wouldn’t get lost in the intricacies of life, trying to be happy in our own way.”

“Could we continue studying spiritual subjects?” Gabriela asked anxiously. “Whenever you want, I’ll always be ready to study with you,” Laura reassured her.

When Gabriela left her friend’s house, it was already quite late. She took a shower and went to bed. Her heart was pounding. She felt music in her soul. The problems were still the same, but she had changed. The prayer Laura had prayed before they parted that night had touched her heart.

The next morning, Gabriela woke up with the birds singing. She thought, “If God cares about the little birds of the sky, why would not He care for me?” She opened her eyes, knelt down and said, “Lord, take control of my life. I am Your daughter. I know that You love me, and I want to apologize because I never recognized You as my loving Father and my Almighty God. Here is my life. I put it in Your hands. I don’t know what You will do for me, but there is one thing I do know: I do not want to live alone anymore.”

Then Gabriela left, not just to go to work, but to experience a life of victory. She realized that nothing can touch those who put themselves in the hands of God.

The first thing Gabriela did when she got to the office was to call the owner of the cell phone.

“We have your phone,” she told him.

“But yesterday they said they hadn’t found it,” the woman said, confused. “It’s here with me,” Gabriela replied. “Could you, please, come pick it up?” Four hours later the owner of the device arrived. She was an old lady with white hair, very elegant and of noble appearance.

Gabriela looked into her eyes and said, “I’m sorry, ma’am! I’m so ashamed. I took your phone. I was wrong. Nothing justifies what I did, I just want to apologize.”

The woman was changing color and attitude as she heard



the secretary's confession.

"And you think these things can be fixed like that?" she demanded. "That I'll just forgive you, and everything is resolved? I want to talk to your manager."

Before the day was over, Gabriela was fired.

She left the office feeling sad and embarrassed by her actions. However, she noticed something strange. She was not desperate. An indescribable peace filled her heart. The sun shone still stronger in the distance. She was unemployed, but not troubled. She was in God's hands, and if He could take care for the birds, He would take care of her too.

In the following days, Gabriela continued studying the Bible with Laura. On Saturday, she went to church for the first time, taking the tithe of the money she had.

"I know I need this money to pay my debts, but I also know that I will never touch what belongs to God," she said to herself.

That Saturday at the church potluck dinner, a short, stocky white-haired man approached her.

"Hello," he said. "I was told you are a secretary. Could I talk to you tomorrow?"

By Monday, Gabriela was employed again, earning almost double the money she made at her previous job.

The years passed by. Today, Gabriela is married again, her son is living with her, and her parents now rest in Christ. She lives joyfully and is convinced that God is sovereign and eternal in her life.

Gabriela and her family found the only hope.

Hope of prosperity

*You may find hope of prosperity.*

Find out why we should be generous and grateful for God's

blessings.

1 - God promised to take care of His children.

*Deuteronomy 8:17, 18*

2 - God is the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. *Psalms 24:1; 50:10, 11*

3 - From the hands of God, we receive all the provisions for our survival. *1 Chronicles 29:14*

4 - God declared that the tithe belongs to Him. *Leviticus 27:30*

5 - In addition to the tithe, we must offer according to the blessings God bestows us. *Deuteronomy 16:17*

6 - When we retain tithes and offerings, we also retain God's blessings. *Haggai 1:6, 9, 10*

7 - God has prepared immeasurable blessings for His faithful children. *Malachi 3:8-10; Psalm 37:25*

8 - Through the tithes and offerings, we participate in the preaching of the gospel. *1 Corinthians 9:13, 14*

9 - When we honor God with our goods, we receive abundant blessings. *Proverbs 3:9, 10*

10 - God invites us to seek Him first. *Matthew 6:33*

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# Chapter 9

## Hope of a new Beginning



The dark night of the desert was frightening, and the wail of coyotes made it more gruesome and scary. Three men rode silently in the darkness, taking advantage of the fact that the sun was on the other side of the earth. Crossing the desert during the day would be like suicide. No one could endure the severity of the sun.

In a few hours before dawn, they reached the dry bed of what appeared to have been a stream.

“Halt!” The guide’s voice was lost in the immensity of the dry sand. The three dismounted.

“Collect all the rocks you can,” ordered the guide.

At first, the order seemed not to make sense, but they had promised to obey without questioning, and despite their fatigue, they obeyed unwillingly. “What for?” they asked themselves. “We could make good use of the night hours to move forward.

Then they continued on their journey, feeling disgruntled with the apparently incoherent request of the odd Bedouin. The night was still dark, and a gentle wind blew when they heard the voice of the desert man again. “When the sun appears, you will be happy and sad at the same time,” he said.

And then he disappeared in the darkness. From that moment on, they continued the journey by themselves. Two of them threw away some of the stones. The hours passed. The sun of the new day came out bright and splendid. It was time to stop and rest. At that moment, as they searched in their bags for something to eat, they saw the rocks and could not believe it. They were valuable diamonds. They

were rich. However, they immediately felt sadness and regret. Why had they not collected more stones? Why had they not obeyed the orders of their guide without questioning?

This story is a lot like life. We walk in the desert of this world involved in darkness and often we do not see things around us. We start having short term interests and become short sighted and unable to look to the future, especially when it comes to spiritual matters. When some hear about the eternal life that God has promised, it is nothing but children's tales that compensate for the disappointments and sorrows of this life. Others regard it as an unreal, nebulous existence, where "the saints" are dressed in white, sitting on clouds near the rainbow, playing golden harps.

One day, Gilberto, a successful college professor, was talking with his 50-year-old colleague, Cristiano.

"You are a smart man, a science teacher," Gilberto said. "How can you believe that there is a heaven, a paradise or something like that?"

"You don't believe in those things?" asked Cristiano.

"Of course not," replied Gilberto, "It's all just a figment of human imagination. It is wishful thinking - religious beliefs that don't fit into a rational mind."

"So let's suppose something," Cristiano said. "What?"

"Let's pretend that nothing the Bible says is true; there is no heaven, nor Christ's return, nothing," said Cristiano.

"And..."

"Time goes by," Cristiano continued. "Finally we reach the end of the world, and we find out that you were right.

Nothing is true. What did I miss?"

"Nothing," Gilberto said.

"But let us pretend that, after all, we discover that I was right and you were wrong," Cristiano responded. "There is everything that the Bible mentions. What have you lost?"

Gilberto felt somewhat destabilized. He was a brilliant man, but he did not expect a seemingly silly question. It was

then they both began to study the Bible. Gilberto preferred subjects that were related to the future. After all, this was the issue that led them here.

“What does the Bible teach about the end of the world and the new world order?” Gilberto asked.

“The Bible says that when Jesus returns this planet will become chaos,” Cristiano replied. “The Bible says, ‘but the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare’” (2 Peter 3:10).

Gilberto settled back in his seat. He read the verse again and reflected. “This is scary.”

“It is,” Cristiano agreed. “John expresses the same idea in another way. ‘I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place’” (Revelation 6:12-14).

“You mean the world will be destroyed altogether?” asked Gilberto. “Not quite.”

“And what will happen to people?” he wondered.

“Several things will happen,” responded Cristiano. “The first one is the resurrection of the just and the transformation of those who will be waiting for Jesus’ return at that time. The Bible clearly says, ‘For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever’” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

“Do you mean that all the dead will be resurrected?” asked Gilberto. “Not all of them,” Cristiano answered. “Only those

who have died 'in Christ'."

"And what about the others?" Gilberto asked.

"The Bible says, 'The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended'" (Revelation 20:5), responded Cristiano.

"When will these one thousand years happen?" Gilberto asked, somewhat surprised. Curiosity had awakened his interest.

"I'll explain," said Cristiano, "but first we need to understand that there will be two resurrections. The Bible says, 'Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned' (John 5:28, 29). That means the righteous will be resurrected to the resurrection of life at the time of Jesus' return, and the unrighteous to the resurrection of death only after a thousand years."

"Yes, but tell me about the thousand years," Gilberto responded.

"It is a period of time in which the righteous will reign with Jesus in Heaven," explained Cristiano. "The Bible presents the subject like this. 'Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years'" (Revelation 20:6).

"You mean the righteous will go to heaven just for a thousand years and not forever?" asked Gilberto.

"Exactly," Cristiano replied. "The eternal home of the righteous will be on Earth, which will be renewed. The righteous will return here after the thousand years. John describes this scene like this: 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her

husband” (Revelation 21:1, 2).

Cristiano said things that seemed unbelievable to a rational man like Gilberto. He looked at the Bible and to check what was written.

“Wait a minute,” he said. “What will be the state of the earth during those thousand years?”

“It will be chaotic,” replied Cristiano. “First, look at what will happen to Satan. ‘And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time’” (Revelation 20:1-3).

“You mean that Satan will be bound?” Gilberto asked.

“Bound by the circumstances,” Cristiano answered. “This is not a literal prison. It’s just a symbol of the situation that Satan will find himself in. He will have no one else to tempt. The righteous will be with Jesus in heaven, and the unrighteous will be dead on the earth. It will be a situation of terrible loneliness to the enemy. Jeremiah describes the state of human beings at that time like this: ‘At that time those slain by the Lord will be everywhere – from one end of the earth to the other. They will not be mourned or gathered up or buried, but will be like dung lying on the ground’” (Jeremiah 25:33).

“Do these verses refer to the millennium?” Gilberto asked.

“We can say,” Cristiano replied, “that, like all prophecies do, these verses describe the devastation of the earth when God intervenes to destroy the enemies of His people, but it also has a future application that fits the situation of the earth during the millennium. The idea of the desolate earth during the millennium is repeated several times. ‘See, the Lord is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will

ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants,' says Isaiah" (24:1).

"So the earth will remain completely empty and destroyed during that period of time?" asked Gilberto.

"Yes," Cristiano agreed. "The prophet Jeremiah describes the situation of the planet during the millennium with dramatic words. 'I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and at the heavens, and their light was gone. I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying. I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away. I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger. This is what the Lord says: The whole land will be ruined, though I will not destroy it completely'" (Jeremiah 4:23-27).

"And the righteous will be in heaven doing what?"

"The book of Revelation answers that," replied Cristiano. "In addition to reigning with Christ, they will revise the books of life of human beings.

'I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years'" (Revelation 20:4).

"In what sense will they judge?" asked Gilberto.

"As a sort of review," Cristiano responded. "Not because God needs it but because of humans. On that day, many of those we thought would be saved will be lost, or vice versa. It is, therefore, necessary that all doubts are clarified in the human mind."

"In the verse you just read," said Gilberto, "it's telling about the 'souls' of those who were 'beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus.' Are those disembodied spirits?"

"No," responded Cristiano. "Remember that, at this point,



the righteous have already been resurrected. The Bible uses the word 'soul' to refer to a living human being. 'Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being'" (Genesis 2:7).

Gilberto was a restless man, very rational and incredulous. In the last few days, he had gone through many changes. His inquiring mind did not accept things easily. Therefore, he checked everything his friend had shown him to see if he agreed with what the Bible said. His interest in these subjects began to grow.

"What will happen after the thousand years?" he asked. "What will the end of everything be like?"

Cristiano drank some water, shifted on the couch and said, "John tells us what will happen. 'When the thousand years are over, Satan will be re-leased from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth - Gog and Magog - and to gather them for battle. In number, they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever'" (Revelation 20:7-10).

"What does it mean that 'Satan will be released from his prison?'" asked Gilberto.

"It's because the unrighteous will rise from death," Cristiano explained. "This is the second resurrection. 'The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended' (Revelation 20:5). Then, seeing the resurrected unrighteous, the devil will deceive them again, making them believe that it is possible to take over the city coming down from heaven. John describes the descent of the city like this: 'I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem,

coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband' (Revelation 21:2). At that moment, however, the resurrected unrighteous will advance against the city of the saints, but then fire will come down from heaven and they will be destroyed."

"All of them?" Gilberto wondered.

"Absolutely all of them," replied Cristiano. "Both Satan and his followers. Paul confirms this by saying, 'This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus' (2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8). This will be the end of the story of sin, and neither the root nor the branch of evil will remain. The sins and anguish will not rise a second time. The Bible is emphatic: 'Whatever they plot against the Lord he will bring to an end; trouble will not come a second time'" (Nahum 1:9).

"And that will be the end of everything?" Gilberto asked.

"No," said Cristiano. "This is just the beginning of the real new world order. This earth will be made new. Remember that during the descent of the holy city, fire will fall from heaven, and all will be consumed; 'they marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever' (Revelation 20:9, 10). This is the greatly feared hell."

"But hell will not last forever?" wondered Gilberto.

"The Bible speaks of 'eternal fire' in the sense of the eternal consequences of the fire," explained Cristiano. "Sin will be no more, neither will it rise for a second time. It will be over forever. Someone watching the disobedient burning in the flames for centuries and centuries could not believe in the God of love that the Bible presents. A living example of

what I say are the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The biblical account says, 'In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire'" (Jude 7).

"Did they also suffer the eternal fire?" asked Gilberto.

"That's what the Bible says," replied Cristiano. "However, they are not burning to this day. But the lessons of what happened to them are indeed eternal."

The biblical text seemed coherent. Gilberto felt that every conversation with his colleague made sense. After all, Cristiano did not base his answers in human conjectures, but he always had an open Bible and a text to respond to the concerns of his friend.

"And what will happen to the city that the rebels failed to take?" Gilberto asked.

"God will establish His kingdom on earth," Cristiano answered. "It will be a reign of peace and love, when 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away' (Revelation 21:4). 'However, as it is written: What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived - the things God has prepared for those who love him'" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

"It seems unreal, doesn't it?" asked Gilberto.

"It may seem, but it is the divine promise," replied Cristiano. "Look at what Isaiah says, 'See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind' (Isaiah 65:17). This life's sad memories will be forgotten forever. Traumas that human beings hold onto, or sometimes try in vain to get rid of, will be forgotten. It will be the life God always wanted His children to have."

Gilberto felt moved. He did not want to show it, but his heart was touched by the divine promises. He had recently

lost a 10-year-old son in a terrible accident, and was having many doubts because he had tried to save the life of his beloved son. His life felt upside down. Suddenly he was confronted with the Scriptures, and hope began to shine in the heart.

“Are there many people who have this hope?” he asked reflectively. “Yes, of course!” Cristiano replied. “Many people died throughout the ages ‘looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. [...] Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them’” (Hebrews 11:10, 16).

Gilberto cleared his throat and, emotion in his voice, he said, “This will be a wonderful world.”

“No doubt,” Cristiano agreed. “Take a look at how Isaiah describes it: ‘They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord’” (Isaiah 65:21-25).

“I... I... sorry... I...”

“You don’t have to say anything, Gilberto,” Cristiano assured him. “Let the Spirit of God work in your heart, and trust in this promise. Very soon, when Jesus returns, everything will be much better than you have ever imagined.”

As the months passed, Gilberto and his wife continued studying the Bible truths.

Today they both have found the only hope.

## Hope of a new beginning

### *You can have hope for a new beginning.*

Learn a little more about what God is preparing for those who love Him.

1 - After the second coming of Christ, the saved will be in heaven with Jesus. *Revelation 20:6*

2 - During the thousand years, the earth will be empty and desolate. *Jeremiah 4:23-26; Revelation 20:1*

3 - During this period, the unbelievers will remain dead on earth. *Revelation 20:5*

4 - Meanwhile, the faithful participate in the judgment confirmation. *1 Corinthians 6:2, 3*

5 - At the end of the millennium, the holy city will descend from heaven. *Revelation 21:2, 3, 10*

6 - After the millennium, there will be a new heaven and a new earth. *2 Peter 3:13*

7 - In the new earth, there will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain. *Revelation 21:4*

8 - The pure in heart will see God. *Matthew 5:8*

9 - Those who follow the truth will live on the new earth. *Psalms 15:1, 2*

10 - The saved will have eternal peace. *Isaiah 32:18*

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# Chapter 10

## PATH OF HOPE



Renan was a military police colonel, trained in the rigorous discipline of the military. He sincerely believed in standing firmly for his convictions, and defended his ideas with bravery and honor in the same

way he would defend the colors of his country.

However, on that day, Renan was distressed. He had been studying the Bible for four months, and the truths he discovered were shaking his stability. At the beginning of the studies in the small group he participated, he used to argue a lot and continually interrupted the teacher's presentation. But he could not fight the evidence, and he accepted the Bible as the Word of God. From then on, he began to accept new concepts, as long as they were grounded in Scripture.

Currently, the study group was meeting at the home of a neighbor who had a stall at the fruit market. Every Tuesday, three families met there: he, his wife and two adult children, the family of a Sergeant, and a still young resident doctor. That day he came with his fiancée. Their wedding was not far away.

The teacher was a man with a noble face and melancholic eyes. He seemed to have suffered much in the past. He related the concepts they covered in the group to the issues in people's daily lives. His word was reliable, though he did not talk unnecessarily. He regularly read the Bible and allowed the participants to draw their own conclusions. The host family was happy to receive the group.

All awaited the theme of the day with great interest. In the previous week, the eldest daughter of the Colonel had asked, "What can you tell us about the Adventist Church?"

There are so many churches in the world, and they all base their teachings on the Bible.”

“At least, they all say they do,” the Colonel added, fixing his gaze on the teacher.

On that day, it was already very late, and there was no time for a complete answer. They all waited to hear what the teacher had to say.

“Could you open your Bibles, please?” asked the teacher. “Today, we will consider a prophetic period that was announced more than 500 years before the birth of Jesus. This prophecy shows the date of the baptism and death of Jesus, and also the time that God would raise up a people to proclaim the gospel to all the world. It has been called ‘the cornerstone of the prophecies’ because it puts in place all others. Undoubtedly, this is the greatest prophecy in which there are aspects related to time. Many Christians don’t even know of its existence.”

“What is this prophecy?” the doctor’s fiancée anxiously inquired.

“It is recorded in Daniel 8:14,” the teacher replied. “‘For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.’”

They all looked at each other, not understanding a word he had said. The teacher continued, “To understand this prophecy, we need to know that, in the previous verses, it mentions a religious power which persecutes the followers of Jesus and tries to distort the truths of the Bible. After knowing about this power, a question arises: ‘How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled – the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, the surrender of the sanctuary and the trampling underfoot of the Lord’s people?’ (Daniel 8:13). And the answer comes in verse 14: ‘For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.’”

“I’m sorry, teacher, but I cannot follow your thinking,” the Colonel’s daughter said. “My question is with regard to the

Adventist Church.”

“Don’t worry,” the teacher replied. “Daniel himself didn’t understand this at the time of the vision. He even got sick because of what he had seen. ‘And I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for days; afterward I arose and went about the king’s business. I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it’” (Daniel 8:27).

“If he couldn’t understand, how are we suppose to?” the Sergeant asked. “Have patience, Sergeant,” responded the teacher. “It says, ‘And I heard

a man’s voice between the banks of the Ulai, who called, and said, Gabriel, make this man understand the vision. So he came near where I stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me, Understand, son of man, that the vision refers to the time of the end’” (Daniel 8:16, 17).

“That means this prophecy refers to the time of the end?” the doctor asked. “Yes, the end of the prophecy,” the teacher replied. “But to understand it correctly, let’s keep reading the biblical account. ‘Yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision’ (Daniel 9:21-23). Do you understand what Daniel was praying when the angel Gabriel appeared again and said he had come to explain him the vision?”

“The vision of the 2,300 evenings and mornings?” the group asked, almost in unison.

“Yes, that’s right,” the teacher replied. “That was the only vision Daniel had not understood, and Gabriel explained it to him. ‘Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for



your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy' (Daniel 9:24). The angel told Daniel that 70 weeks of that period of 2,300 days were related to Daniel's people, that is, the Jews. God was giving them 70 weeks to repent and become a faithful people."

"I'm a bit confused," said the Colonel. "This prophetic period consists of weeks, or days, or evenings and mornings?"

"In prophecy, one day symbolizes a year," explained the teacher. "This is biblical. See, for example, what is said here: 'And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on you a day for each year. Therefore you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem; your arm shall be uncovered, and you shall prophesy against it'" (Ezekiel 4:6, 7, italics added).

"Interesting! Is it always like this?" the doctor's fiancée asked.

"When it comes to prophecy, it is," the teacher answered. "Let's look at another text: 'According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection' (Numbers 14:34).

"The same interpretation principle should be applied to the prophecy of Daniel. There is no doubt when we see the exact fulfillment of the announced events. Therefore, the 2,300 days represent 2,300 years, and 70 weeks are equal to 490 years. Both prophetic periods have the same starting point because the 70 weeks are part of the 2,300 years."

"Yes, so far we understand it, but when does that prophetic period begin?" asked the Colonel's wife. She was a distinguished lady who usually preferred to remain silent.

"The angel Gabriel answered your question," replied the teacher. "'Know therefore and understand, that from the

going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times' (Daniel 9:25). This prophetic period began on the same date that the decree to rebuild Jerusalem was issued. The decree was issued by Artaxerxes, king of Persia, in 457 BC and it is a historical fact recorded in chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra."

There was a special glow reflected in the eyes of all participants. It is amazing how the Bible explains itself! All that human beings need to do is open it and study it with humility and faith.

"In the verse you've just read, seven weeks and 62 weeks are mentioned. What does that refer to?" asked the young doctor excitedly.

"If we add the days of seven weeks plus 62 weeks, we'll have 483 prophetic days. That means, years," the teacher explained. "This means that these 483 years, beginning in 457 BC with the decree of Artaxerxes, lead us to the time of Jesus Christ in AD 27, exactly the year in which He was baptized and anointed by the Spirit to start His ministry. The surprising thing is that this prophecy was given to Daniel more than 500 years before it was fulfilled. Consider the accuracy of the divine announcements!"

"Amazing!" the Colonel exclaimed.

"But it does not end there," the teacher added.

"Really?" practically everyone asked, looking forward to learning more. "Yes. Let's continue reading," said the teacher. "'Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate'" (Daniel 9:27).

"What is the meaning of 'he shall bring an end to sacrifice?'" asked the Colonel's wife.

“The period of 483 years takes us to the year 27 AD, when Jesus began His ministry,” the teacher replied. “But verse 27 mentions a last week, that is, seven more years. In those last seven years, the Jews had the opportunity to repent and turn back to God. However, they rejected Jesus, who died three and half years after 27 AD, in the year 31. Again, the prophecy was accurately fulfilled. Daniel said in that year Jesus would cease the sacrifice. And He did, when He died as the great sacrifice for the sins of humanity. From then on, it was no longer necessary to sacrifice animals.”

“This is incredible!” exclaimed one of the Colonel’s children.

“Yes, it is incredible,” the teacher agreed. “And Matthew confirmed it, saying, ‘and Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split’” (Matthew 27:50, 51).

“The veil of the temple was torn because it was no longer necessary to sacrifice animals,” the Colonel added. “Jesus was the sacrifice that all sacrifices pointed to.”

Everyone looked at the Colonel with an air of admiration. He was a tough man, and at the beginning of their studies he asked many difficult questions. However, over time he became a brilliant student.

“And what about the other three and a half years?” the doctor asked. “The prophecy speaks of a whole prophetic week, but Jesus was sacrificed in the middle of it. What happened at the end of that week?”

“This question came up in the appropriate moment,” the teacher replied. “The angel Gabriel had said that 70 weeks (that is, 490 years) were separated for Daniel’s people, the Jews. That time ended just at the end of that week in the year 34 AD.”

“What happened on that date?”

“Stephen, one of the Christian leaders, was stoned,” answered the teacher, “and, with this attitude, the people of

Israel sadly missed the opportunity to accept the Messiah. At that time, the 70 weeks of opportunity they had come to an end. From that moment on, the people of Israel, as a nation, no longer were the chosen people of God. Today, if a Jew wants to be saved, he must accept Jesus as anyone else."

All the group members seemed surprised. It was getting very late, and, despite the interest in the study they all showed, the teacher said, "Tomorrow we will continue with this study. So far, we have seen the 490 years separated for the people of Daniel. This period ends in the year 34 AD, but if we continue counting down the 2,300 years of prophecy from 457 BC, when it started, we'll get to the year 1844. Tomorrow we'll see what happened on that date."

On their way back home, the Colonel's daughter remarked, "Father, it's all very interesting and incredible, but did you realize the teacher did not answer my question?"

"What question?"

"The one I asked in the beginning. There are so many churches in the world. What does he have to say about the Adventist Church?"

"Well, have patience," the Colonel replied. "The study continues tomorrow, doesn't it?"

The next night it rained heavily. Lightning tore sharply through the darkness. Despite the bad weather, the group all gathered again. A neighbor who also had some spiritual restlessness accompanied the Colonel.

The teacher began by saying, "Yesterday we studied the prophecy of the 2,300 years. 'For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed' (Daniel 8:14), the prophecy says. Counting the years from the decree of Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem, that prophecy ended in 1844."

"How could the sanctuary be cleansed in 1844 if at that time the sanctuary no longer existed?" the doctor's fiancée wondered.

“To understand this, we need to know why the sanctuary existed at the time of the people of Israel,” the teacher replied. “The Bible says, ‘and according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission’” (Hebrews 9:22).

“Why blood?” the Sergeant asked.

“Paul says, ‘For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord’” (Romans 6:23), the teacher responded.

“And...?” everyone questioned.

“Because the wages of sin is death, humanity can only have forgiveness through the sacrifice of Christ,” the teacher explained. “Therefore, God established the sacrificial system. The people needed to understand that there is no remission of sins without the shedding of blood.”

“The blood of Christ,” the Colonel said.

“Yes, the blood of Christ,” agreed the teacher. “The sacrifice of animals in the Old Testament was just a symbol of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross of Calvary.”

“Is that in the Bible?” the Sergeant’s wife asked.

“Was the sanctuary the place of those daily sacrifices which people offered God for their forgiveness of sins?” the doctor asked.

“Yes,” responded the teacher. “Every day they offered sacrifices in the sanctuary. However, once a year something different happened.”

“What do you mean by different?” the Sergeant’s wife inquired. Her eyes reflected the glow of someone who wanted to learn.

“God had commanded the following to Israel, ‘This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you. For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord’” (Leviticus

16:29, 30).

“I think I understand the idea,” said the Colonel. “Here it’s speaking of the cleansing of the sanctuary.”

“Exactly!” exclaimed the teacher. “The sanctuary on earth was purified once a year, and that day was a day of judgment and repentance. See, ‘also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the Lord’ (Leviticus 23:27). On that day, the people were summoned up to ‘afflict their souls.’ That means to do a self-examination of conscience in order to know if someone had a hidden sin or something that would turn him away from God.”

“Did they all do this?” the doctor asked.

“Yes, all of them,” replied the teacher. “But this was also a day of judgment for the people. Through the blood, the person received forgiveness and symbolically his guilt was transferred to the sanctuary. However, if the sinner did not confess his sin, the guilt would remain with him.”

“You mean that, on that day, the confessed sins were transferred to the sanctuary?” the Colonel inquired.

“Yes,” said the teacher. “The sanctuary symbolically carried the sins of the people from then on, and when Day of Atonement came the sanctuary was cleansed.”

“Do you mean the prophecy of the 2,300 years indicates that, in the end, there will be a judgment and the cleansing of the sanctuary?” the doctor’s fiancée asked excitedly.

“The prophecy says ‘the sanctuary will be cleansed,’” answered the teacher. “And, if the earth sanctuary was cleansed in the day of atonement and judgment of Israel, the same thing will happen with the heavenly sanctuary.”

“Is there a sanctuary in heaven?” she asked.

“It’s what the Bible says,” the teacher replied. “At the end of the period of 2,300 years, Jesus began His work of judgment and intercession in the heavenly sanctuary.

‘Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in

the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that he should offer himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another – he then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, he has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself ' (Hebrews 9:23-26). What do you think?"

"It is amazing to know that there is a sanctuary in heaven, and that Jesus ministers in the sanctuary," said the doctor, looking at the Bible in his hands. "Even more impressive is to know Jesus entered this sanctuary to atone for our sins," his fiancée completed.

"And did this atonement begin in 1844?" the Colonel's daughter asked. "Yes," said the teacher. "The prophecy says, 'For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed' (Daniel 8:14). These 2,300 years ended in 1844 and on that day began the judgment of the nations. Daniel adds, 'I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him. A thousand thousands ministered to him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened'" (Daniel 7:9, 10).

"I thought the judgment would be Jesus' return to earth," the Sergeant commented.

"The day of Jesus' return is the day of the reward," said the teacher. "'And behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every one according to his work' (Revelation 22:12). Jesus could not give a reward if He first did not determine who deserves it. This suggests a

judgment before His second coming.”

“And according to the prophecy, this judgment began in 1844?” asked the Sergeant.

“Exactly,” replied the teacher. “This was one of the special events that happened on that date. In heaven, God began the investigative judgment, but on the earth another significant event happened.”

“What event?”

“God raised up a people to proclaim the message of judgment with- in the framework of the everlasting gospel,” the teacher answered. ““Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth - to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people - saying with a loud voice, Fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water”” (Revelation 14:6, 7).

“Is this the Adventist Church?” the Colonel’s wife asked.

“The Adventist Church appeared exactly on that date,” the teacher re- plied. “It was only located in the United States in the beginning, but with time it expanded until it was organized as a church in 1863. Today it is established in 208 countries and preaches in 738 languages.”

“Why do you think the Adventist Church is described in the text you’ve just read?” asked the Colonel’s daughter.

“For a variety of reasons,” the teacher replied. “The first one is because the Adventist movement arises in the end time predicted by the prophecy we’ve studied. Second, because it appears to preach the everlasting gospel. It is not a new gospel. It is the only everlasting gospel that is found both in the Old and New Testaments. It is not the gospel that emphasizes only one aspect, but that highlights both the cause, which is grace, and the result, which is obedience to the eternal principles of God’s law.”

“What are you specifically talking about?” the Sergeant wanted to know. “Revelation 12 presents the characteristics



of God's church, symbolized by the woman dressed in white," the teacher explained. "There it says, 'and the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ' (Revelation 12:17). The central message of the Adventist Church is our salvation by the grace of Jesus, but at the same time it believes in obeying God's law. This is not the cause of salvation, but is a result of it."

The wall clock indicated it was almost midnight. It had been a long journey. Many felt a knot in their throats.

Out of the heavy silence, the Colonel said, "Teacher, I think these last two studies are something one should seriously think about. This is not simply about choosing a church. It is a matter of eternal life. I am very grateful to you for your patience in answering our questions."

The young doctor, filled with emotion, held his fiancée's hand tightly.

Before leaving, he said, "Thank you! We all know what to do now. I believe we all feel the Holy Spirit working in our hearts."

Time will tell what the outcome will be. These people now understand that today is a day of good news. Today is the day of decision.

## Path of hope

*You can be part of the people of hope.*

Learn more about the characteristics of God's people.

1 - God's people is eagerly awaiting the second coming of Jesus. *John 14:1-3*

2 - It is essential to know and accept God's will. *John 7:17*

3 - The church of God is the bearer of fundamental truths.

1 *Timothy 3:15*

4 - Healings, miracles, and wonders do not prove that a church is true. *Matthew 7:21-23*

5 - The enemy of God popularized doctrinal errors. *Daniel 8:11, 12*

6 - By faith, we can keep the commandments of God. *Revelation 12:17*

7 - The elected people proclaims forgotten and unpopular truths. *Revelation 14:6-12*

8 - The faithful are invited to proclaim the restored truths. *Revelation 18:4*

9 - We must discern the marks of the corrupted religion in the end time. *Revelation 17:1-5*

10 - God asks us to accept the seal of hope. *Mark 16:16*

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# CONCLUSION



Living is going forward. Going forward is learning, and learning is entering deep and unknown waters. Human beings instinctively fear the unknown. It is easier to navigate close to the shore. Perhaps that is why learning is a challenging and painful experience.

The book you just read is not a complete exposure of the relevant biblical themes. Each chapter is only a thread of yarn that needs to be searched until the end. The Bible is like a diamond mine. As you advance in the study, you discover precious gems, each one more beautiful than the last.

The purpose of the Bible is not to inform, it is to transform. No one reads the Bible and stays indifferent. Its reading provokes varied and diverse reactions. Throughout history, it was loved and rejected, approved and criticized.

The wonder of the Bible is that it does not get lost in the intricacies of theories and concepts. Its teachings come from simple philosophy and reach the details of daily life. It teaches us how to live, how to deal with the dramas and conflicts that daily life presents us.

This is what happened in the lives of the people whose stories were presented in this book. And it is also what can happen in your experience if, with an open attitude, you continue to investigate the passionate themes the Bible has to offer.

If you liked this book's message and want to get more information on the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its services, such as churches, colleges and universities, hospitals, publishing houses, or on projects such as "Ação Solidária", "Vida Por Vidas," and "Quebrando o Silêncio," go to: **[www.esperanca.com.br/livro](http://www.esperanca.com.br/livro)**

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