

Luis Fajardo in *No escape: Coronavirus and the Bible* explains in a simple and profound way what the real conspiracy behind the Coronavirus is. Through its pages, we not only understand the current crisis but reflect on our role and project with hope towards a better future with God. This book should be a must-read for every Christian in these times.

Dr. Henry Barrios
SDA Florida Conference, USA

Luis Fajardo has dared to write a book on biblical certainties amid uncertainties. He has agility in writing it so fast that it arrives just in time in the middle of the pandemic. In it, he makes a valuable contribution to frame the current Coronavirus crisis through the biblical worldview. Well written, with a clear and straightforward style, this book will help the reader to find in-depth answers to relevant questions and, most importantly, help find the hope for a world without “death, tears, nor pain” (Revelation 21: 4) that has guided Christianity throughout all history. Thank you very much!”

Daniel Bosqued, Ph.D.
President of the Adventist University Center of Sagunto,
Valencia, Spain

Amid a tragedy, which is currently affecting millions and has caused the death of hundreds of thousands, it is important to have a voice that investigates, analyzes and presents a perspective that brings peace. This work, analyzes, intellectually defends, and at the same time based on faith, makes the role, feeling, and attitude of God clear during all this. Using history of ancient pandemics, analyzing the human feeling to blame the most powerful of the universe, or whoever created it for not doing anything to prevent it, or to conclude that God, inactively continues to “enjoy” human suffering, draws a victorious end for God and his people of faith and helps to have confidence that this too will pass.

Reading this work will lead us to the proven conclusion that “all the promises of the Lord Jesus are a powerful support of my faith” and gives peace amid the storm. The reader who honestly inquires, cannot be left with another conclusion than that God is great and as he has done in the past, he will take us out of this as well.

Pr. Israel Leito
International leader

Does the Bible really have something to say about the Coronavirus? How is COVID 19 related to Lucifer, the originator of evil? What role does the God of love, as described in the Bible play, in all this? This is still a topic in development, Luis R. Fajardo

makes a very good approach, and in fact, it is a pioneer in doing so. I invite you to consider these arguments carefully.

Manuel A. Rosario, MDiv, PhD
Director of Personal Ministries and Sabbath School of the
Association of the Greater New York Conference

NO ESCAPE

Coronavirus and the Biblia

Biblical answers to main COVID-19 questions

Luis R. Fajardo

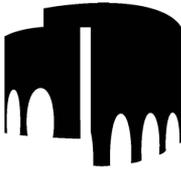
Luis R. Fajardo

NO ESCAPE

Coronavirus and the Bible



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DEDICATION

For all those who have been infected with coronavirus
and in memory of those who died

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INTRODUCTION

In mid-January 2020, the entire world watched powerlessly as the devastating fires in Australia reduced thousands of square miles of living space and forests to ashes, causing the death of animals and people.¹

At the same time, some people anxiously held their breath to see how the tension between the United States and Iran would end. Everything seemed to indicate that it would be the beginning of a war with unpredictable consequences.²

At the same time another news story, that did not seem to be very relevant, appeared. It reported the outbreak of some type of “flu” in Wuhan, a city in the center of China,³ perhaps an unknown place for most of us. This did not seem to be anything new and much less something to be alarmed about. After all, flu outbreaks are normal, and in general, we have been able to contain them without much difficulty. Besides, we believed, “China is far away” and therefore there was no need to worry.

However, by the end of January 2020, heavy rains and hailstorms had put out Australia’s wildfire. Fortunately, the tensions in the Middle East ceased as well.

Nevertheless, by that time the “flu” had its name, “Coronavirus” or according to the World Health Organization (WHO) COVID-19, (Coronavirus + Disease + [20]19)⁴. By then, the Coronavirus threatened to become a pandemic, because it had spread throughout much of China and Asia and started to approach the West.

By the end of April 2020, Spain (the country where I live) was on lockdown for two months⁵, the same situation for many other European and American countries. We are witnessing an unprecedented event, a global pandemic in our generation. The COVID-19 has turned our lifestyles upside down, on a national and international level.

Many people have tried to explain the global crisis that has caused the pandemic, which makes sense, because in general what is not understood causes concerns. This explains why we try to consult a doctor as soon as we feel a strange symptom. It could be something that we should not worry about, but if we do not know what it is, it is difficult to stay calm.

Others, not understanding and thinking that there is withheld information, generate conspiracy theories and fake news, which try to tie up the loose ends of the versions offered by governments. These conspiracies and fake news are usually negative and are aimed at finding “someone to blame for pandemic”.

On the other hand, preachers do not agree among themselves. Some of them say it is “God’s well-

deserved judgment”, others believe it is an apocalyptic plague while others say “peace, peace” and focus on how to have “your best life” now, when in fact, there is no peace. Others simply recognize their perplexity and incapacity to explain what is happening.

However, some Christian scholars try to explain it differently; they divide evil into two big categories: moral evil, and physical or natural evil. Moral evil has its origin in humanity. Examples of this are wars, injustices, abuse of power, etc. On the other hand, physical or natural evil includes everything that causes suffering and has no origin in humans, such as natural disasters, diseases, etc.

Following this classification, it is assumed that COVID-19 is a natural evil. We are aware that this is something to prove, but up to now, evidence suggests a natural origin evil⁶ and it classifies as a zoonosis⁷: a disease transmitted from animals to people. Nevertheless, the Bible indicates that both moral and natural evil have a common origin, sin, which begun in heaven with Lucifer and then came to Earth after Adam and Eve’s fall.

In the middle of a crisis like this, we wonder if we can find valid answers in the Bible. Could the Bible offer hope in times of the Coronavirus? Can we talk about the fulfillment of a prophecy in the present crisis? Moreover, does the Bible offer precise steps on how to face this pandemic?

The purpose of this book is to present the Biblical point of view and understand how to apply this to the crisis that we are living in. It explains where a tragedy like Coronavirus fits within the biblical worldview. Moreover, we discover what the Bible says about who

is responsible for the Coronavirus, what we can do to stop him, and how we can keep hope during and after the crisis.

Before continuing, allow me to welcome you to this wonderful exploratory journey throughout the Bible in search of clues for Coronavirus. I hope you enjoy the journey and as we reach the end, you find enough evidence to understand where the Coronavirus fits in the biblical context. If this crisis has frightened you, I hope your fear will be transformed into strength and peace. If on the other hand, you feel safe and confident in God, this book will give you motivation and tools to share your peace.

1

AN ENEMY HAS DONE THIS

“An enemy has done this” (Matthew 13:28)

In mid-March 2020, I was heading to Switzerland to fulfill some evangelistic commitments. As usual Sjury, my wife urged me to pack my luggage on time, an activity which I am not characterized for. The day before my departure, the Spanish newspapers and TV news highlighted the measures that the government considered taking due to the Coronavirus.

Those last hours were filled with tension. At any moment, they could close the border and I would not be able to go home. At the last minute, following the recommendations, we decided that it was not wise to travel, even that meant that we would lose the tickets. It was very frustrating, especially for the hosts because they had to cancel the hotel reservation where the event was going to take place. Three days later, the Spanish government announced the closure of the borders; this situation would have made it very difficult the return home.

Things began to change very fast since then. In the blink of an eye, our lives were altered with countless measures to avoid the spread of the virus. The list

in Spain was long; you cannot leave your house, you cannot be on the rooftop, it is recommended that you do not touch your face and limit the physical contact with other people. On the other hand, panic buying began; the chaos affected the entire society. Suddenly the Coronavirus became a nightmare, one of which we still struggle to wake up from.

In this context, for some skeptical people, the old epicurean paradox about God and the existence of evil makes sense. This paradox claims that if God were omnipotent, then he would remove evil if he wanted to, if he does not it is because God is cruel.¹ With this, they try to find someone to “blame” for the origin of the pandemic. Others propose that the question should not be “who is guilty” but “why” and “for what purpose the Coronavirus exists”.

In the Bible, the Word of God, we can find convincing answers to these three questions. Besides, we can have the certainty of knowing where we are in human history and where we are going.

LET US FIRST SEE WHO THE ORIGINATOR OF THIS IS

In the past days, theologians and pastors have given their opinion on who is responsible for this pandemic. In the past month, several books were published about this topic. Some authors talk about COVID-19 as a part of the existence of evil in general. Others confirm that it is the divine consequence of individual sin, in other words, the fact that a person is infected with Coronavirus is proof of some sin committed.

Others affirm that God is the cause of evil, which in this case is the pandemic. We find an example of this point of view in the words of John Piper who, in his

most recent book “Coronavirus and Christ”, affirms: “Coronavirus was sent by God”. Later, he says: “this is not the time to see God in a sentimental way”.² Then he claims:

The Coronavirus is one of the thousands of ways that God calls us to repentance. All-natural disasters—whether they are floods, famines, locusts, tsunamis, or disease—are painful and forgiving calls from God to us to repent.³

However, the Bible does not support this point of view. God is sovereign, and he is in control over everything. However, he is not the creator of human calamities. If suffering has its origin in God, then what happened with Jesus on the Cross was not a murder, but a suicide. The apostle Peter is clear on this matter: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18).

WE ARE AT WAR!

The Bible claims that the world is the battlefield of a conflict between God with his angels versus Satan and his demons. The beginning of this crisis is described in the book of Revelation as follows: “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and His angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon and His angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Revelation 12:7-9).

The text makes clear that the war which began in heaven continues with even more intensity here on Earth, and God's enemy tries to deceive everyone. Satan is your enemy and the enemy of all good and righteous things because his purpose is always the same, to deceive and murder. That is how Jesus asserted when He said: "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44).

This war is the framework in which human history unfolds and if we are not aware of this reality, we cannot understand the existence of evil, and more specifically, that of Coronavirus. If we follow the clues to understand the origin of the pandemic we are facing, we will realize that Satan is the originator.

Before continuing with the war in which humanity is involved it is essential to explain what the plan of salvation is about, which is an essential part of the great conflict.

THE PLAN OF SALVATION

God created humankind and He granted them free will. By misusing this freewill they chose to believe the lies of Satan, leading to humanity turning their back on God. Sin created a separating breach between God and His creation (Isaiah 59:2). In His infinite love, God established a plan to re-unite humanity back with Him. "Now all things [including the new life] are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:18).

So, was the purpose of Jesus' sacrifice, to save those "predestined" for salvation, or offer salvation to the lost? Jesus himself answered this important question: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Mark 2:17). The apostle Paul later said: "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15).

The plan of salvation transcends the physical aspect of each person. Of course, God wants us to be physically healthy, but even more, He wants us to obtain eternal life. God is not a conformist; He wants you to be happy in heaven for eternity. This double desire of God, this to say, to enjoy good health and be saved, can be understood from the words of the apostle John addressed to Gaius: "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (3 John 1: 2).

It is not biblical to say that people who have been infected with Coronaviruses are suffering God's punishment for their sins. This is evident in Jesus' answer to his disciples when they asked: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him" (John 9: 2-3).

Furthermore, for those who have died due to this pandemic, the Bible teaches that death in Christ is not synonymous with failure (Philippians 1:21), we must not forget this. When Christians speak of victory, they refer not only to a temporary victory or physical health but also an eternal victory of salvation in Jesus.

AN ENEMY HAS DONE THIS!

It is necessary to emphasize that Jesus, while He was among us, never felt guilty for the tragedies, pain, or death that even He suffered. He never asked for forgiveness for the suffering that happened around Him, nor did he blame His Father for the origin of human calamities. This is simply because He knew that God is not the cause of human disease and suffering.

In the parable of the wheat and the tares, we find a clear reference to the origin of evil. At one point the parable tells us that the servants were alarmed because they saw tares which they did not sow, so they went to the owner with the following question: "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?" (Matthew 13:27).

The servants trusted on the experience of the owner of the field blindly to find an explanation for this 'calamity' because no one knew the land better than its owner. With his answer the owner explained who planted the tares; "An enemy has done this" (Matthew 13:28). Later Jesus explains the parable and identifies this adversary: "The enemy who sowed them is the devil" (Matthew 13:39).

**FROM ANGEL TO THE DEVIL: LUCIFER'S
TRANSFORMATION**

Before continuing, it is necessary to make a parenthesis to explain how "an enemy" has the opportunity of planting tares in the field of God. For this reason, we must keep in mind some truths that the Bible reveals.

The first truth is that Satan is a creature of God in rebellion against Him. The prophet Ezekiel, in his

review of the king of Tyre, reveals the appearance of this newly created angel of God:

*“You were in Eden, the garden of God;
every precious stone was your covering:
the sardius, topaz, and diamond,
beryl, onyx, and jasper,
sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold.
The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes
was prepared for you on the day you were created”*,

*“You were the anointed cherub who covers;
I established you;
you were on the holy mountain of God;
you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.
You were perfect in your ways from the day you were
created,
till iniquity was found in you” (Ezekiel 28: 13-15).*

Secondly, it is necessary to understand that God’s motivation to create angels and humanity was love. In response, God wants to be loved by his creatures; but for this love to be genuine, the creature must be free to choose to love or not. We know this as “free will”.

This freedom was not granted only to human beings, but to all intelligent beings that God created.

Therefore, angels also can choose to love God or not, and like us, they can exercise the will to benefit or harm other creatures.

Satan, the first and most powerful of these creatures, used his free will to rebel against God. The Bible confirms this fact when it says:

*“By the abundance of your trading
you became filled with violence within,
and you sinned;
therefore I cast you as a profane thing
out of the mountain of God;
and I destroyed you, o covering cherub,
from the midst of the fiery stones.
“Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;
you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your
splendor;
I cast you to the ground,
I laid you before kings,
That they might gaze at you”
(Ezekiel 28: 16-17).*

24 Although we cannot understand how sin could appear in the heart of Lucifer, the prophet Isaiah, in a parable addressed to the king of Babylon, reveals the selfish thoughts of this cherub. This helps us understand his intentions:

*“How you are fallen from heaven,
 o Lucifer, son of the morning!
 How you are cut down to the ground,
 you who weakened the nations!
 For you have said in your heart:
 ‘I will ascend into heaven,
 I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
 I will also sit on the mount of the congregation
 on the farthest sides of the north;
 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
 I will be like the Most High.’
 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol,
 to the lowest depths of the Pit” (Isaiah 14: 12-15).*

In this way, the protective cherub became the adversary of God and his creation. Now he uses the same freedom that all creatures have and his power to harm the children of God causing chaos and all kinds of wickedness.

COLLABORATING WITH THE ENEMY

We have identified the instigator of Coronavirus, Satan. However, we must make a parenthesis asking ourselves the following questions: Is Satan the only one responsible? Could our attitudes have contributed to aggravating the pandemic?

At first, there were various attitudes toward this problem. Some took the virus seriously, but others were indifferent. Again, others made fun of it. Considering the attitude of indifference, we must realize that a neutral position in a conflict is similar to “supporting” the oppressor. When we misuse our free will, unintentionally, we are supporting the enemy.

It is also true that some people are better equipped and prepared to destroy than to build or to murder rather than to heal. Could it be that the lack of preparation to heal has brought us so far? Some measure their power, or that of their country by their capacity to destroy and not by their capacity to construct. We must be aware that this is precisely the way Satan measures his power (John 8:44, 1 Peter 5:8).

On the other hand, God measures His power through His ability to create, give life, and love. This is demonstrated in the following texts: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes —His eternal power and divine nature—are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse “ (Romans 1:20).

About His ability to give life, the Scripture says: “Know that the Lord, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves”(Psalms 100: 3, NRSV). About His ability to love, Jesus said: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

NOW LET US SEE THE WHYS AND WHEREFORES

A DESPERATE ENEMY

“The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one,” says the apostle John (1 John 5:19). Satan is not only an intelligent enemy but also a powerful one. Still, this should not worry us, “because He who is in you [God’s spirit] is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4: 4).

From the beginning, God knows the end and that is why He gave us biblical prophecies, to reinforce our faith. Jesus affirmed it to the disciples when He said: “I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe” (John 14:29). All the biblical prophecies show that we are living in the last days of human history and the war we have just mentioned, with all its pain, is coming to an end.

Our adversary knows this as well. Seeing that his side has already lost because Christ defeated him on the cross, he has intensified his attack against the most precious thing that God has on Earth: Humans. Such is his fury that the Bible expresses it with an acclamation of pain: “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time” (Revelation 12:12).

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE USURPED EARTH

The current situation of the Earth leads us to wonder: How is it possible that Christ defeated Satan on the cross, but the war is not over yet? The Bible also explains this.

When God created humanity, He blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over the living creature that moves on the ground” (Genesis 1:28, NIV). Adam and Eve were the rulers of the world, but when they fell into Satan’s deception, the government of Earth passed into the hands of this dangerous enemy.

This explains what happened during the temptation in the wilderness. There Satan offered Jesus all the kingdoms of this world if he would worship him. He said: “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish” (Luke 4:6). Although the enemy made this assertion, God is the owner of the world because He created it. Jesus referred to Satan as “the prince of this world” (John 12:31; John 14:30), that is, he is not the king.

For his part, the apostle Paul declares that “The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4: 4 NIV).

A CONDEMNED ENEMY

It is important not to forget that the salvation of humanity was made possible because of the price of Jesus’ blood. This is clarified in the New Testament. The apostle Paul declares that “you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body” (1
28 Corinthians 6:20). In the next chapter, he reminds us: “you were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men” (1 Corinthians 7:23).

In the book of Revelation, the Lamb (Jesus Christ) is acclaimed with a song in the first part saying: “you are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; For you were slain, And have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation”(Revelation 5:9).

At the cross, the devil’s dominance on earth was condemned to end. The resurrection started a period of transition of the reign of this world that will finally pass from Satan’s hands, who achieved it through deception, to Jesus Christ who redeemed it at the price of His blood. This change of government will take place at the second coming of Jesus. The book of Revelation affirms this: “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15).

NOW LET US LOOK AT THE “WHAT FOR?”

THE AGENT BEHIND THE CALAMITIES

The inevitable handover of the world government at the end of history has a lot to do with the Coronavirus. The Bible says that as the end of Satan’s dominion on earth is drawing near and his transfer of command to the rightful ruler, Jesus, the enemy would bring more destruction and cause greater pain to God and humanity. Jesus already said it: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; **I have come that they may have life and have it to the full**” (John 10:10 NIV).

Death causes pain to God, which is Satan’s purpose, using his freedom to cause suffering to God and mankind. This must be clear: “For I take no

pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!” (Ezekiel 18:32 NIV). Jesus also said: “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:17).

Jesus described many of the ways that Satan, being desperate, would use to kill in the last days of the war with God (Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21). He would use calamities against the sons of God: wars, plagues (like the Coronavirus), and famines (Matthew 24: 7; Luke 21: 10-11; Mark 13: 8). However, all of these would be only the first part of Satan’s strategy to cause pain and suffering. Jesus confirms this by saying: “ All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24: 8).

We can illustrate this situation with the pains of a woman in labor. Her contractions begin and little by little they increase and become more intense, but she is not yet at the point of giving birth. What we experience with the Coronavirus is a contraction, labor pain, but we are not giving birth yet. Some births take longer than others, but we know that a baby will soon be born. Similarly, the coming of Jesus will end the final war.

God does not need the Coronavirus for people to repent. God does not need evil to show His goodness. The apostle John affirms: “Let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. **For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested, that He might**

destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3: 7-8). Diseases are among the works of the devil (Luke 13:16; Luke 4:18), and of course also pandemics.

AN ENEMY THAT CHASES

In the future, the attacks will be directed at those who try to remain faithful to God. Through persecutions, restrictions, and injustice he will kill as many as he can. Jesus says it in the following words: “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me” (Matthew 24: 9 NIV).⁴

If we understand these calamities in the context of Jesus’ speech at the end of time, the persecution of Christians, wars, plagues, and famine, have a common origin. Therefore, if we can identify the person responsible for the persecution of God’s people, also we would identify the person responsible.

We can find a clarifying example in the story of the appearance of Jesus to Saul, who was going to Damascus intending to capture Christians. In response to the persecutor’s question: “Who are you, Lord?”, Jesus’ answer denotes a deep love for his people: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting!” (Acts 9: 5). He did not simply say, “You are chasing my people,” but identified His people with himself. In this way, whoever persecutes God’s people is directly persecuting Jesus. Therefore, it would be ridiculous to say that Jesus “persecutes himself”.

Jesus claimed the same thing in his response to the Pharisees when they accused Him saying: “He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons, He is driving out demons” (Mark 3:22 NIV). Jesus answered, “How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand” 31 (Mark 3: 23-24 NIV).

It is clear whoever persecutes Christians is the enemy of God, and Satan is the only one who will also cause calamities that will serve as signs to announce the end of the world, signs such as famines, wars, and plagues as the Coronavirus.

After these calamities, he will draw his best weapon, the one that has given him the best result: deception. Jesus warned that “many false prophets will appear and deceive many people” (Matthew 24:11). But we do not have to fear, because as the Scripture says, the Holy Spirit will give us the necessary strength, to stand firm in the truth. So, His power will change our weakness to strength.

Jesus was clear when he said, “all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet” (Matthew 24: 6). However, this gives us certainty because as He won so we also will overcome. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

CHRISTIANS LIKE SANDALWOOD

Jesus claimed that, even during the terrible persecution, the gospel message would be preached to the world, even in the palaces of government (Luke 21:13). This indicates that God and His church will continue to give love and hope in very difficult times, and many people will be convinced of the gospel’s value by seeing the testimony of Christians, who will act as the sandalwood tree that perfumes the ax as it cuts it.

This has been repeated throughout Christian history, because during the hardest crises and

persecutions, God has strengthened Christians to carry the message of peace and hope to the world, just as Jesus did. Moreover, we will investigate several examples that show this Christian commitment.

The message of Jesus has not always been understood. We must not forget that Jesus also suffered persecution, He said: “Remember what I told you: A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:20). We should not only be Christians for the blessings, but we are also called to be “the light and salt of the world” (Matthew 5: 13-15) both in “good” times and difficult times.

THE JUDGMENT WILL BE EXECUTED

The Bible indicates that God is making a “supernatural” effort, so everyone can accept the salvation offered by Jesus. He is not happy with the death of anybody, not even for those who we consider “bad”. Do you know why? God does not have nieces, grandchildren, or Goddaughters, He only has sons and daughters made in His image and likeness and He loves them, but He does not approve of their decision to use their freedom to follow the enemy’s path.

Soon Jesus will come, and the war will end. The end of Satan and all his injustices will also come. The rebel deceiver will have to raise his hands full of his victims’ blood and take responsibility for all the damage he has caused throughout the centuries. We will see this in more detail in the following chapters.

Jesus said: “And will not God bring about justice for His chosen ones, who cry out to Him day and night? Will He keep putting them off? “(Luke 18: 7 NIV) and

He answers next: “I tell you; He will see that they get justice, and quickly” (Luke 18:8 NIV). In the end, God “will wipe every tear from their eyes. There shall be no more pain [nor death, nor mourning, nor crying], for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

We have seen that God is not responsible for the Coronavirus, He does not want us to suffer. However, other questions could arise such as: What is God doing during this pandemic to help us? The answer to this question can be found by studying His attitude towards pandemics that occurred in the past. We will dedicate the second stop of our journey to this.

2

GOD, A WARRIOR AGAINST PANDEMICS

“For I am the Lord who heals you.” (Exodus 15:26, NKJV)

This chapter aims to learn more about the character of God. We will also research some passages of the Old Testament in search of evidence that can show us God’s attitude towards pandemics. Also, we will try to find out what God does in the middle of human calamities, especially the Coronavirus.

THE FORGOTTEN ATTRIBUTE OF GOD

God is love. This is a truth that we can find throughout the Bible and extends to all creation and every creature. Much has been said about the attributes of God: **Eternal** (Isaiah 40:28; Deuteronomy 32:40; Job 36:26; Psalm 102: 12), **Omnipotent** (Psalm 91: 1; Jeremiah 32:47; Luke 1:37; Revelation 1: 8), **Omniscient** (Romans 11:34; Isaiah 46:10; Psalm 33:11; Isaiah 48: 3), **Omnipresent** (Psalm 139: 7-12; Jeremiah 23: 23-24; Acts 17:27; Matthew 18:20).

But little is said about the “forgotten” attribute: God is “Omnibenevolent”. Omni (from the Latin “Omnis” which means everything) and benevolent

(from the Latin “benevōlus” which means goodwill or sympathy towards people or their works). This term helps give a proper attribute to the character of God since God is love (1 John 4: 7,8,16; Psalms 136). We must understand clearly the attributes of the character of God when we open the Bible in search of answers for human suffering.

The Bible wants to make two things clear: first, **God is the source of all good** (James 1:17; Psalms 85:12; Matthew 7:11; 1 John 2:21). **Second, Satan is the originator of all evil** (Genesis 3: 4; John 8:44; 1 John 3: 8). About God, the Bible declares: “He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He” (Deuteronomy 32: 4, NKJV). Centuries later the psalmist claimed: “[...] The Lord is upright; He is my Rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him” (Psalms 92:15).

Therefore, it is very important to highlight what the Bible has said, God is not responsible for the Coronavirus, nor material nor intellectual.

THE EVIL ONE AND THE MORAL EVIL

We have already seen that evil has its origin from sin, and natural calamities frequently have their origin in Satan. We say ‘frequently’ because, as we saw in the introduction, selfishness, ambition, hatred and other moral problems cause forest fires and destruction due to war. In these cases, human beings would be responsible for these situations, because of the evil that dwells within, in other words, sin (Romans 1: 29-31).

This is one of the great changes in the last two centuries. Until recently, humanity’s concern, as a

species, was fear of the destructive power of nature. However, since the Second World War, the main concern of our species is our ability to self-destruct. Therefore, moral evil becomes increasingly lethal, and Satan stimulates negative feelings in people to cause even more destruction.

GOD HAS ALSO SUFFERED

Just a few days ago, after watching a documentary about the revolutions in Latin America in the seventies, I wondered: “Why does God allow all this?”. With this thought in mind, I decided to pray and ask Him the reason. As I prayed, it seemed as if I entered a beautiful “heavenly room” where Jesus assisted people kindly and received me smiling. He welcomed and invited me to take a seat.

While I was sitting, I saw the wounds in his hands, and I remembered Calvary, the crown of thorns, the lashes, the nails in his hands and feet, and the spear in His side. My question was answered. How could I ask someone that suffered more than anyone, if He is responsible for suffering? He kindly asked me: “Luis, what brings you here?”, at that moment I could only answer: “Nothing, Lord, I just came to say hi”.

The main objective of Satan is to attack the children of God, who suffer under his power in the middle of this evil rebellion. This situation affects God, who also has suffered the consequences of this war. Therefore, we can say God knows our suffering firsthand.

God suffered the painful betrayal of one-third of His angels, the uncertainty about His love, and finally the betrayal by humanity. Moreover, we accuse him of

not doing what seems “best” for us. And that’s not all, he experienced the rebellion of His chosen people and the pain of seeing so much bloodshed as a result of an evil that only increases.

We can also add the murder of the ancient prophets, His messengers of truth. The constant outcry of nature that, because of the destruction human beings have caused groans “as in the pains of childbirth” (Romans 8:22 NIV). And as if that were not enough, the cruel crucifixion of his beloved Son, the author of life (Acts 3:15).

GOD’S ATTITUDE TOWARDS PANDEMICS

As a result of the current health crisis, many governments have put various restrictions in place to contain the pandemic. However, few people know that the most effective measures to stop the spread of the Coronavirus were given by God to Israel 3,000 years ago.

Leprosy is an infectious disease that for a long time has caused suffering to millions of people. Although nowadays leprosy is less common and some treatments can cure it, in ancient times it was highly contagious, and a single sick person could infect many others, introducing a high risk for entire populations.

The people of Israel, on their journey through the desert, were not exempt from this disease and we see in the Bible that some people were infected. To avoid the spread, God Himself instructed Moses on the sanitary procedures that should be taken to assure the well-being of the people. These measures are described in chapters 13 and 14 of Leviticus.

Now, I would like to present an equivalent that relates the measures that governments have taken to stop the spread of the Coronavirus, and its direct connection with the orders given by God to Israel registered in the Bible.

1. Precise indication of the symptoms of the disease: “When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling, a scab, or a bright spot, and it becomes on the skin of his body like a leprous sore, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests” (Leviticus 13:2).

2. Identification of the possibly affected people: “The priest shall examine the sore on the skin of the body; and if the hair on the sore has turned white, and the sore appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous sore. Then the priest shall examine him and pronounce him unclean” (Leviticus 13:3).

Before continuing, it is necessary to clarify that priests also diagnosed patients as now `physicians ‘do. Nowadays diagnosing, prognosticating, and prescribing is the responsibility of a health professional. Therefore, it is not recommended to self-diagnosis or self-medicate.

3. Isolation of probable infected cases: “But if the bright spot is white on the skin of his body, and does not appear to be deeper than the skin, and its hair has not turned white, then the priest shall isolate the one who has the sore seven days” (Leviticus 13:4).

4. Monitoring of probable cases to understand the evolution and confirm the diagnosis: “And the priest shall examine him on the seventh day; and indeed if the sore appears to be as it was, and the sore has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall isolate him another seven days. Then the priest shall examine him

again on the seventh day; and indeed if the sore has faded, and the sore has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only a scab, and he shall wash his clothes and be clean” (Leviticus 13:5-6).

5. Treatment and confinement of confirmed cases: “He shall be unclean. All the days he has the sore he shall be unclean. He is unclean, and he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp” (Leviticus 13:46).

6. Cleaning of everything that has been in contact with the infected people: “He who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean. After that he shall come into the camp and shall stay outside his tent seven days” Leviticus 14:8.

There are several elements that we find in the measures taken regarding leprosy and that it is necessary to highlight:

First, it is evident that a lot of things, that governments are doing today, are written in the Bible. However, you could think, “well this is just common sense”, and you’re right, it is indeed common sense. This indicates that the Bible is not a fairytale book as many people think, but it is very close to our reality because it deals with real issues and proposes practical solutions to our problems.

Secondly, the sanitary laws of hygiene and isolation for the treatment of leprosy, which we have just seen, show us God’s position about pandemics. He took effective measures to protect his greatest treasure on earth, his sons, and daughters. We can therefore

say that God is a warrior who fights for us against pandemics.

Thirdly, pandemics can also affect God's people. Yes, dear reader, while we are in this world of sin some calamities can touch and impact us. Nevertheless, this should not make us lose hope, because Jesus gives us the certainty that in the end, we will be victorious. Jesus claimed it: "I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

It is wrong to think that Christians are immune to pandemics like Coronavirus. This is a dangerous thought that we should avoid. God will indeed protect us, but we should not face danger unnecessarily because we would be tempting God, and "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'" (Matthew 4: 7).

In sum, **God is not the originator of pandemics**, such as the Coronavirus, because He would be fighting against Himself, which would be absurd (Mark 3: 24-26; Luke 11: 17-23). The Israelites were fully aware of this, therefore one of the names of God in the Old Testament is "YHWH-Rapha", the Lord our Healer (Psalm 103: 3). Besides, this is the origin of the name Raphael (God heals).

WHERE IS GOD IN TIMES OF CORONAVIRUS?

We have already seen that only good things come from God, because of His nature. Especially in this pandemic, God has been working in favor of humanity in multiple ways. God is more interested than the government in taking the right measures to stop the

Coronavirus. He also offers help to scientists in search of a cure for the disease.

Moreover, He applauds those who recognize the work of health professionals, He wants to strengthen them to bear the endless working hours to save lives. We could say that those who serve in health centers are fighting on the side of God in the war against the Coronavirus, conscious, or unconsciously.

Through his death, Jesus suffered for those who have been affected by this virus. However, His death and resurrection made it possible for anyone who accepts Him as Savior, even if he dies due to Coronavirus, his death will not be forever (Isaiah 53; John 11: 25-26). This is the last purpose of the plan of salvation.

Perhaps someone might think “God’s inaction makes Him a co-conspirator”, but as we saw, God is not inactive, He “is working” (John 5:17) to defend His creation from this disease caused by God’s adversary and humanity.

“GOD WRITES PROPERLY ON CROOKED LINES”

As we saw in the previous chapter, although Satan has tried to destroy God’s people through persecution, God has sustained His people, who in very difficult times have kept the Gospel Light burning. Likewise, “our light affliction, which is but for a moment,” (2 Corinthians 4:17), God can turn it into a blessing for which we will praise Him.

42 The Bible states: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). “God would never guide His children in a different way than they would choose if they could

see the end from the beginning and discern the glory of the purpose they are fulfilling as his collaborators”.¹ What a wonderful thought.

As we have seen, in the Old Testament we find evidence that shows us God is a warrior against pandemics. Also, it shows us His love through all the good things that happen in these sad and dark times.

In the next chapter, we continue our journey through the New Testament in search of new evidence about a God who heals. We will pay special attention to the ministry of Jesus, God with us, and I’m sure that we will find precious pearls of truth.

3

IMMANUEL: OVERCOMER OF EVIL

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Jesus was a master of practical lessons, that can help us to have full lives on this earth while we wait for the new one. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is an example of these teachings. When reading the Sermon, we realize that its teachings are still valid for us nowadays and it is very important for us to consider them. Many people practice the teachings of Jesus without knowing it. One of those teachings is the famous golden rule: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (Matthew 7:12).

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus used a comparison to teach the importance of putting His teachings into practice and show how useful they are in daily lives. He did this through the parable that we know as “the wise man that built his house upon a rock and the foolish man who built his house upon the sand”.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE “FOUNDATION”

Jesus said: “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall” (Matthew 7: 24-27).

I would like to invite you to stop for a moment to analyze some aspects that stand out in this comparison made by Jesus and to see which practical lessons we can learn from this parable.

It catches my attention that both kinds of people have the same problems and in the same order: “the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew”. However, the result is different. The first one remains, while the second is ruined.

This helps us understand that suffering does not discriminate between people, and this suffering does not have to ruin us. Jesus did not say that his followers would enter a bubble protected from everything; on the contrary, He warned that in this world we would find afflictions, but we should be encouraged because He overcame the world (John 16:33). Furthermore, He promised that as long as we remain faithful to his word, he would turn everything that Satan does to us into a blessing (Romans 8:28).

TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Among his many lessons, Jesus did not overlook those topics that most people could relate to. For example, the attitude at work, the importance of family planning, how to treat others, divorce, the importance of lecture, and of course, the need for the salvation of every human being.

In fact one of the main teachings of Jesus where He referred to priorities and explained employing wealth: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). Later He says: “Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!” (Mark 10:24).

Jesus is not promoting scarcity and poverty, nor is He saying that wealth is bad, but He addresses the danger of trusting in it and living only to increase wealth. These words make sense nowadays because most of us see how our income has decreased drastically.

It is important to emphasize when Jesus talks about “wealth”, He uses it to illustrate activities for which we invest a lot of effort, but ultimately, they don’t have eternal value. At some point, we all, regardless of our financial position, might be tempted to invest our precious time in activities that cannot bring happiness.

In this society of consumerism, some live to work and spend, while others spend their lives hoarding like bears that are preparing for a winter that never comes. Unexpectedly Coronavirus arrives and now there is no vacation and students cannot go to school. The possibilities of losing jobs increase, debts grow, and family problems overwhelm us.

YOU AND YOUR SALVATION ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

In moments like these, we must ground ourselves and remember that we are human beings, we are all in the same boat. We are more vulnerable than we think, and in vain, we live to accumulate wealth. Material things are necessary, but they are not essential. **Jesus says that the most important thing is you**, not what you have. Yes, you. Your health, your life, your salvation.

On one occasion Jesus asked His audience: “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26). Jesus cares about the most important thing you have, your life, and He came to save it. Not only your current life, which ends after 80 or 90 years old, since as He said: “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him” (John 6:27).

The prestigious medical journal The Lancet on the 21st of April 2020, published an article entitled: “Suicide risk and prevention during the COVID-19 pandemic” where the real risk of an unusual increase in suicides is addressed.¹ This risk has been confirmed by some public health institutions.² This could show the concern of some governments about the collateral damage the pandemic may cause

48 At this point, it is necessary to remember that beyond the current crisis, it is worth living. At some point, we will go back to “normal”, at least to a new normal because many things that we now consider

normal can change. Nevertheless, we must not forget the most important and authentic things are your life, your family, your health, and your salvation.

THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARDS DISEASES

As we saw in the previous chapter, God is an enemy of pandemics. When Jesus, the incarnate God, came to earth He demonstrated the character of God by dedicating a lot of His time to heal. Jesus made His purpose clear when He declared: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18).

Moreover, the New Testament says that “Jesus passed through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people” (Matthew 9:35). This has been recorded in the books that describe His life and work on earth.

The Gospel promotes good health: “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well” (3 John 2 NIV).

Jesus was clear when he identified the originator of many diseases. In response to the Pharisees’ accusation of disobeying the Law because He healed a crippled woman on the Sabbath, he replied: “Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?” (Luke 13:16 NIV).

Paul confirms that many diseases have their origin in Satan when he claimed: “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how he went about doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him” (Acts 10:38).

JESUS OFFERS YOU HOPE AND PEACE IN THE STORM

As we have seen, Jesus has not promised to free us from the problems of this world. He did not even free Himself, but He assured us that if we practice His teachings, we will be able to stand firm in the storms of life. I would like to share five reasons for us not to lose our hope in Jesus, whether for this Coronavirus crisis or future crises.

1. JESUS UNDERSTANDS YOU

Jesus came as the son of a poor family that led him to identify himself with the most vulnerable in society. His birthplace was a humble stable, a place for cattle. While He was still a child, His family fled as refugees to Egypt as Herod wanted to kill Him simply for being born.

As an adult, things got worse, He spent 40 days in the wilderness without food or shelter. During His career, He faced criticism and constant attack from His enemies. Furthermore, He suffered the disbelief and suspicions of those whom He came to save, including his own family.

Towards the end of His life, He suffered the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, the denial of Peter, and the abandonment of all His disciples. He suffered beatings,

mistreatment, insult, and an unfair trial. Finally, He died crucified in an extremely painful death.

Yes, Jesus can look at any person who has suffered a lot because He has also suffered. Isaiah chapter 53 describes the harsh way Jesus suffered. Paul continues by explaining: “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses (and suffering) but was in all points tempted (suffered) as we are, yet without sin. [He has overcome]” (Hebrews 4:15). Furthermore, Jesus said: “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you” (John 15:18).

In times of great difficulty like these, Jesus identifies himself with us, pities us, and says, “I’m sorry”, not as a mere phrase, but because He has suffered and feels the pain. Jesus promised to be with us always and He is faithful to His word. Now more than ever He is near mankind (Matthew 28:20).

2. YOU CAN OVERCOME AS JESUS DID

Just as Jesus encouraged His disciples, He also encourages us with these words: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). In Him, we find peace during the Coronavirus afflictions. “[...] Because I live, you will live also” (John 14:19). Jesus solved the biggest problem of mankind, death.

It is important to remember that the victory Jesus refers to is more than material and physical, it is spiritual and for eternal life. His victory encourages us and assures us that for this tribulation there is a way out, for this problem there is a solution, for this disease, there will be a relief and for death, resurrection. This

certainty helps us to be resilient during Coronavirus times.

RESILIENCE IN JESUS

Perhaps for some the term ‘resilience’ is new, so I would like to take a moment to explain what it means. Resilience is a term used in psychology that refers to the “capacity of a person or group to continue projecting themselves in the future despite unbalancing events, difficult living conditions and sometimes, severe traumas”.³

*It is a concept taken from Physics that refers to a property of certain materials returning to their original form after the action of the force. A very visual example is that of a rubber ball that after squeezing firmly, recovers to its original form when released, without any specific action from our part.*⁴

Unlike recovery, which “involves a gradual return to normality” after a traumatic event, “resilience reflects the ability to maintain a stable balance throughout the process”.⁵

By thinking resiliently, we can face the crisis caused by the pandemic. It is important that during the process we control our emotions by detecting them and turning them into something better. We must visualize the future with hope, knowing that we will return to the same normal state as a rubber ball has, but renewed and stronger to face a new world that is already changing.

3. TO STRENGTHEN OUR FAITH JESUS PROVIDED PROPHECIES

As we saw in the first chapter, Jesus predicted that diseases would come (Luke 21:10), later He said: “So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time” (Mark 13:23 NIV). What is the purpose of having said it before? Jesus Himself answers this by saying: “And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe” (John 14:29).

By this Jesus applies to Himself the criteria to identify a true prophet, found in the book of Jeremiah: “As for the prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes to pass, the prophet will be known as one whom the Lord has truly sent” (Jeremiah 28: 9). Like this, we have even more evidence to recognize **Jesus as Lord!**

The Coronavirus did not catch God off guard, He was not on vacation and, of course, **God was not in quarantine**. God is in control of everything that happens in this world. God is working for the salvation of humanity as He has done since Adam and Eve, deceived by Satan, sinned. Jesus assured us: “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:17). Today, more than ever, we can trust God.

4. JESUS OFFERS A PEACE THAT IS IMMUNE TO THE CORONAVIRUS

Jesus has confirmed that “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do, I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). The peace that many of us have become accustomed to is conditional.

Yes, it depends on whether you have the mortgage paid. It depends on whether you lose your job or not. It depends on whether you have internet on your mobile phone. It depends on the car brought to us on time from the garage. It depends on whether you find the clothes you want to wear. It depends on the bank approving a credit loan requested. It depends on...

On the other hand, Jesus offers an independent peace. Independent of having a job or not. Independent of government policies about confinement. Independent of whether the Coronavirus reaches you or not. Even though your son is about to be born during this pandemic. Independent of a decrease in your salary due to the company's sustainability. Independent of having a business loss because you were not able to open your store. In short, independent of life or death.

Someone might think: "Only a fool can think this way, how can someone be at peace in such a situation?" The answer would be these are those who built their house on the rock. They reflect on God: "You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you" (Isaiah 26:3 NKJV). Those who understand that we are in a cosmic war also understand that all things work together for good to those who love God (Romans 8:28).

It is important to highlight that the peace Jesus offers is not a synonym of "passivity", but rather an "active" peace that is especially worried about others and acts not only to preserve himself but also to extend. The apostle Paul explained: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all

understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 6-7).

He continues saying: **“Brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things”** (Philippians 4:8). Today more than ever it is important to keep positive thinking. God’s Word is full of positive and hopeful messages that are reliable.

5. JESUS PROMISED TO RETURN

The greatest promise Jesus made was his return to earth a second time. “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14: 1-3). This most certainly can help us to be happy in the middle of the Coronavirus. Let us see how with the next example.

We often look forward to a vacation, a moment where we can rest and get away from our routinely busy lives. Imagine when the long-awaited vacation day comes, you begin your trip to meet the rest of your relatives and enjoy the company of them. On the route, even though the path has curves and hills, the trip makes the journey pleasant.

As you get closer to your destination, you leave the highway and enter a side road. This road is full of potholes, water, mud, and rocks. Even so, your

excitement and joy do not decrease but increase. You are not excited because of the potholes on the road, but because you know that you are getting closer to your long-awaited destination. You know that soon you will feel the warm and sincere hug of your parents, and you will hear the incredible stories of your uncle, the adventurer, again. Besides, you will be surprised by the growth of your youngest nephew or another beloved relative.

As Christians, we can keep peace and joy in times of Coronavirus because we know it is a sign that indicates the road is coming to an end. Jesus Himself said, “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:28).

That’s right dear reader, the return of Jesus is the greatest hope of Christianity. As we know His return will mark the beginning of a new world, where we will enjoy the incomparable joy of living in the presence of God. Therefore, together with the apostle Peter, let us say: “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

The apostle John caught a glimpse of that new world and said: “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also, there was no more sea” (Revelation 21:1). Besides, he added: “**And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away**” (Revelation 21: 4).

The return of Jesus? A new world? Later, we will spend more time to see whether it makes sense to continue waiting for the fulfillment of this promise of Jesus in the 21st century.

PEACE AMIDST THE STORM

For the reasons we just saw, we can be at peace in the middle of the Coronavirus crisis. Although to be honest, if your life is like those who built their house on sand, perhaps it is because yours is also built on sand. It is time to honestly check what the foundation of our life is and make sure we are built on the “eternal Rock” (Isaiah 26: 4), God. This certainty will help us to have resilience in times of the Coronavirus.

I invite you to join me in the next chapter. There we will discover how the hope Jesus offers through the gospel strengthened Christians to help other people in past pandemics. We will see how they served even their enemies, who ended up recognizing the selfless dedication of these disciples of Christ. The best of this work is yet to come!

4

CHRISTIANITY IN THE FACE OF PANDEMICS THROUGHOUT HISTORY

“There were no needy persons among them” (Acts 4:34 NIV)

Someone said: “The worst thing about the plague is not that it kills bodies, but that it bares the souls and that spectacle is often horrifying”. This expression shows the selfishness that often comes up in times of crisis. The alarm caused by the Coronavirus has revealed our unpleasant side which in good times usually is hidden.

We have heard the expression “hard times will always reveal true friends”. Some events reveal who we truly are when words are not enough, and we need to act. At times it is not enough to say ‘I am sorry, but it is important to be present even if in silence. Some moments mark a milestone in personal relationships, showing that not all people are worthy of being called “a friend”.

Throughout history, the love for neighbor and enemy preached by Christians was tested. During the most horrifying pandemics, when even physicians fled and abandoned patients causing “a terrible spectacle,” Christians were tested. The command of “loving your neighbor with no distinction” was tested.

In this chapter, we will briefly review three plagues that spread in large regions after the ascension of Jesus. We will study the Antonine Plague (2nd century), the Bubonic Plague (16th century), and the “Spanish Flu” (1916-1918). Our main purpose is to understand how Christians faced these crises and discover the results of their actions. Surely, we can learn life lessons.

I hope these cases can serve as examples, although we are separated from them by decades and in some cases centuries. The motivation they had in their time is still valid today because the saving power of Jesus and the Gospel gives us hope.

THE EARLY CHURCH DURING THE ANTONINE PLAGUE (2ND CENTURY)

Sarah K. Yeomans, director of the Educational Programs of the Society of Biblical Archeology, in her article “The Antonine Plague and the Spread of Christianity”, clearly describes the magnitude of what happened in the Antonine Plague.

At the end of the second century, when the Roman Empire was in its full glory, an incident happened that would mark Rome and the western world forever. The Antonine Plague impacted the very foundations of the Empire since “it probably took the life of Emperor Lucius Verus in 169 and of his co-regent Marcus Aurelius in 180”.²

The effect on the civilian population was evidently no less severe. In his letter to Athens in 174/175, Marcus Aurelius loosened the requirements for membership to the Areopagus (the ruling council of Athens), as there were now too few surviving upper-class Athenians

who met the requirements he had introduced prior to the outbreak. Egyptian tax documents [...] attest to significant population decreases in Egyptian cities.³

To give us an idea of the impact this plague had on the Roman Empire, Sarah K. Yeomans presents us some numbers:

Dio Cassius describes the deaths of up to 2,000 people per day in Rome alone during a particularly lethal outbreak in 189. It has been estimated that the mortality rate over the 23-year period of the Antonine Plague was 7–10 percent of the population; among the armies and the inhabitants of more densely populated cities, the rate could have been as high as 13–15 percent.

Nevertheless, physical pain and death were not the only consequences of the plague,

Aside from the practical consequences of the outbreak, such as the destabilization of the Roman military and economy, the psychological impact on the populations must have been substantial. It is easy to imagine the sense of fear and helplessness ancient Romans must have felt in the face of such a ruthless, painful, disfiguring, and frequently fatal disease.⁴

What intrigues us during this pandemic is the following:

While civic architectural projects were put on hold, the building of sacred sites and ceremonial ways

*intensified. Marcus Aurelius [the emperor] is said to have invested heavily in restoring the temples and shrines of Roman deities, and one wonders whether it was in part due to the plague that Christianity coalesced and spread so rapidly throughout the empire at the end of the second century.*⁵

As a historical fact, we would like to add that the famous physician, Galen (129AD – c.200/c 216), whose name in many countries is used to denominate health professionals, was heavily tested during the pandemic to the point that this pandemic is also known as the Plague of Galen.⁶

Would you believe Christianity grew during this plague? And if so, how could it be possible? Yes, there was growth and the reason for this was hope and the calling to serve. Christianity can offer people care and the answers they need in times of great turmoil and perplexity.

THE PAGAN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

Before knowing what Christians did, it would be good to know what the pagans did during the pandemic. Rodney Stark, quoted by John Piper, indicates that:

*Two plagues struck the Roman Empire in AD 165 and 251. Outside of the Christian church, there was no cultural or religious foundation for mercy and sacrifice. “There was no belief that the Gods cared about human affairs”. And “mercy was regarded as a character defect and pity as a pathological emotion: because mercy involves providing unearned help or relief, it is contrary to justice”.*⁷

The most impressive thing is that “for this reason, while a third of the empire was dying because of the plague, physicians fled to their country houses. Those who had symptoms were expelled from the houses. Moreover, priests abandoned the temples. Incredibly, “Galen’s sense of self-preservation surpassed his scientific curiosity, and he retired to his hometown of Pergamum. His retirement did not last long; with the epidemic still strong, the emperors summoned him to Rome in 168 “. ⁸

THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE PLAGUE

In this social context, it was time for the long-suffering Christian church to act. “Christians claimed to have answers and, most of all, they took appropriate actions”. ⁹

“Christians carried the Gospel that assures eternal life at the return of Christ”. ¹⁰ A precious message in a season of medical helplessness and total despair”. As for their actions, many Christians cared for the sick and the dying men”. ¹¹

Over time, this countercultural, [which is uncommon in Roman culture] care for the sick and the poor – offered by the grace and power of Christ– had the effect of winning many people away from the surrounding paganism. Two centuries later, when the Roman emperor Julian (AD 332–363) breathed new life back into the ancient Roman religion and saw Christianity as a growing threat. ¹²

In his 84th letter addressed to Arsacius, a pagan high priest of Galatia, the Roman Emperor Julian

recognizes the great work done by the Christian church favoring both Christians and pagans.¹³

*Atheism [i.e., Christian faith] has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the Godless Galileans [i.e., Christians] care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.*¹⁴

As a result of the Christian effort, “the religious sociologist and demographer Rodney Stark claims that the death rate, in cities where there were Christian communities, would have been the half in comparison to other cities”.¹⁵

THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION AND THE BUBONIC PLAGUE (16TH CENTURY)

Fourteen centuries had passed, and another outbreak emerged, this time the Bubonic Plague threatened to decimate the European population. Cities were once again filled with sick people and death. However, Christians, showing their vocation of selfless service learned from Jesus, once again took charge of this problem in favor of God and humanity.

In 1527, when the bubonic plague hit Wittenberg [Germany], Martin Luther refused calls to flee the city and protect himself. Rather, he stayed and ministered to the sick. The refusal to flee cost his daughter Elizabeth her life. But it produced a tract, “Whether Christians Should Flee the Plague,” where

Luther provides a clear articulation of the Christian epidemic response: We die at our posts.

*“Christian doctors cannot abandon their hospitals, Christian governors cannot flee their districts, Christian pastors cannot abandon their congregations. The plague does not dissolve our duties: It turns them to crosses, on which we must be prepared to die”.*¹⁶

The description given by Martin Luther cannot be clearer:

Therefore, I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine, and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me, and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely, as stated above. See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God”.

*“Moreover, he who has contracted the disease and recovered should keep away from others and not admit them into his presence unless it be necessary. Though one should aid him in his time of need, as previously pointed out, he in turn should, after his recovery, so act toward others that no one becomes unnecessarily endangered on his account and so cause another’s death”.*¹⁷

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN THE FACE OF THE SPANISH FLU (1918-1920)

Four centuries later we were faced with the Influenza (H1N1) pandemic at the beginning of the last century, the “Spanish flu”. Although this term is a misnomer. During this time Christians showed a similar reaction as their predecessors in the faith.

“It began in the fall of 1918 near the end of World War I. This flu was especially fatal to young people. People woke up feeling fine in the morning only to be dead by nightfall.”

It is estimated to have killed as many as 50 million people worldwide, including more than 650,000 lives in the United States, about six times the number of U.S. soldiers who died in WWI. Few older cemeteries across Georgia are without tombstones with dates from the fall and winter of 1918-1919.

Furthermore, after it subsided there was a lingering fear that it would return the following fall and wipe out the entire human race. Few families in America did not know the death of a family member, and certainly, everyone knew someone who died of the flu.¹⁸

To continue we would like to show how some Christian denominations have faced this crisis and the result of effort.

THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH

Influenza (H1N1) represented a great test for the newly formed Pentecostal movement. It was barely 8 years since spiritual revival started in Azusa Street

(California, USA), led by Pastor William J. Seymour, which marked the beginning of the movement.¹⁹ This revival could still be felt in different cities, but due to the pandemic, the new church faced one of the most difficult challenges of its time.

Beginning in 1918, tales of the “Spanish Influenza” filled the pages of The Christian Evangel (Christian evangelical), the AG’s (Assemblies of God) paper of record, later known as the Pentecostal Evangel. (Evangelical Pentecostal). In Springfield, Missouri, where the AG had recently relocated, a great outbreak took place. The paper recorded that all AG churches were closed.

Churches and ministers complied with health department mandates to close their meetings and quarantine those who were sick. [...] On several occasions, ministers canceled revival meetings because influenza was spreading across the town. Some saw the epidemic as resistance to the great work God was doing.

[...] Yet, these believers also went to the homes of those who were sick to pray, and they saw many answers to prayer. They weren’t afraid to pray for the sick. [...] Some of the areas hardest hit by the pandemic were outside the U.S., particularly India. [...] Sadly, many missionaries also died from the pandemic. One in particular, Nellie Andrews Norton, died because of her ministry to people infected with the H1N1 virus. The tribute to Norton published in The Christian Evangel states: “When the Influenza came into our midst last month, she did not spare herself, [...] Early Pentecostals endured the worst

flu pandemic to that point in history. Although they believed in healing, they didn't claim that their faith in God would protect them from the disease. Many caught the flu; some died. Yet, early Pentecostals continued to proclaim that God was a healer, and many were preserved through the flu or healed of it. In either case, they testified that their faith in God and prayer got them through the crisis.²⁰

THE BAPTIST CHURCH

The Baptist Church is another Christian denomination that stood out for its outstanding work in the face of the pandemic and became a great blessing for the community in the United States.

*When the Spanish flu swept across South Carolina, 50,000 cases were reported. The flu began with a small number of cases in the spring of 1918. It declined over the summer, but returned in the fall with a vengeance, often bringing death just days after the first symptoms. The most harrowing of reports came from the superintendent of the Baptist Hospital, Louis J. Bristow. Established in 1914, the hospital was small but had already proven itself to be an important ministry in the state's capital. Bristow wrote to *The Courier* [*The Messenger*] on November 7, 1918, that "these October weeks have been the busiest of my life, perhaps the situation at the Baptist Hospital has been one without a parallel in its history*

Bristow provided an eyewitness account of the devastation that the epidemic caused: "I have been on duty continuously sixteen, eighteen, and even twenty

hours in a day, while Death was on a hideous spree, destroying precious lives of men and women”. In many cases, all that he could do was to bring comfort to families as their loved ones passed. Even that overwhelmed him, because “death was too agile, and would jump from room to room, and from building to building, and seize his victims almost before we knew it”.

In his subsequent report to the convention, Bristow could not help but express his pride in the work of the hospital staff during the crisis: “A pardonable pride is felt for the service rendered in the crisis, a season of sickness which in volume and number of fatalities is unparalleled in the knowledge of this generation”. He bore testimony of God’s favor: Although many of the nurses contracted the disease, none died.

The legacy of the Baptist brethren could be summarized in three main aspects:

First, they believed that caring for the sick was the duty of every believer. Superintendent of the hospital Bristow argued that the statement of Jesus, “‘I was sick, and you visited me,’ is an expression full of suggestion”.

Second, one of the ways that they cared for the sick was to adhere to the government requirements about not assembling together. Adherence to the health department’s recommendations helped “stamp out the evil as rapidly as possible”. Third, South Carolina Baptists did not cease to do ministry, even though they could not assemble together. Pastoral care, church giving, caring for the sick, and raising the largest amount of cooperative giving in any year of

their history —South Carolina Baptists stepped up to the challenge.²¹

THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

The Southwestern Adventist University professor of religion, Michael W. Campbell, in his article “Adventists and the 1918 Influenza Pandemic,” tells how the Christian community dealt with the pandemic. Some Adventists were among the death victims, “The lists of church committees point to this fact. Besides, the Adventist school for Native American children lost its teacher due to the “Spanish influenza”.”²²

Campbell highlights that on October 11, 1919,

*“General Conference leaders passed a resolution titled “Organizing Churches for Emergency Work”. They recommended that “in time of epidemic, or other serious health emergencies, everything possible be done by conferences to rally our churches and prepare them for meeting the needs of our own people, and to render help to others, by calling upon our available doctors and nurses to instruct and direct in such work [...]giving the emergency needs as prompt and full attention as the situation may demand”.*²³

For his part, the secretary of the General Conference Medical Missionary Society, Dr. W. A. Ruble, “called upon Adventists to see this as an opportunity “for carrying the gospel to the world”.”²⁴

A SUCCESSFUL JOB

A worthwhile experience was published on the 9th of January 1919 in the magazine *The Review and Sabbath Herald*, which I quote below:

“The 7th day Adventist seminary of Hutchinson, with one hundred twenty of its one hundred eighty students and teachers housed under one roof, was invaded by the malady three weeks ago. Symptoms of the malady developed in about ninety of these persons, and, under the direction of Dr. H. E. Larson, a graduate physician and a member of the seminary faculty, every person showing indication of sickness was at once put to bed, with a trained nurse taking temperature and watching for symptoms of the epidemic. If those symptoms developed, the patient was required to remain in bed. There were no drugs to be given, but with complete rest and quiet went a carefully regulated diet and fomentations applied to the throat, chest, and abdomen. This treatment, in almost every case, reduced the temperature of patients, and in a day or so they were seemingly well. [...] The next danger was that of relapse. To guard against this every patient was required to remain in bed from two to five days after an apparent full recovery, according to the state of their “flu”.

“As a result of this system of handling a disease that is scoring thousands of victims every day, there has not been one case that could have been called serious or a single death in the seminary, although there were more than ninety persons affected.”²⁵

It is necessary to highlight the result of this Christian community's effort in the treatment of patients. We have a good example in the testimony of the director of health of the city of Hutchinson (Minnesota, USA), who congratulated the Hutchinson seminary on its management and treatment of the influenza epidemic they recently suffered on December 13, 1919:

On the authority of Dr. Fred Sheppard, health officer of Hutchinson city, it may be stated that no public institution in the State of Minnesota has up to date made a record in handling influenza, the world-wide epidemic that has swept millions into their graves, like that to the credit of the Hutchinson Seventh-day Adventist seminary.²⁶

SHINY SOULS

We confirm that helping those in need is a constant attribute among Christians that has its roots in the teachings of Jesus: “whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

In the book of the prophet Isaiah, God asks the people of Israel a question that is still valid for us today: “Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness. You will not fast as you do this day, to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the Lord?” (Isaiah 58: 4-5).

God immediately answers His question by saying: “Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard” (Isaiah 58: 6-8).

The apostle James in the New Testament confirms this answer by saying: “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

In conclusion, when a plague showed the nakedness of the souls of the whole world, Christians’ souls shone and by their example, multitudes believed the message of the Lord whom they served. This is exactly what Jesus referred to when he said: “ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

GROWING UP IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Christianity has had more influence or even gained more adherents when talking was not enough, but the action was the most important thing. The Christians of the 2nd century played an important role in solving the Antonine Plague leading to the growth of the church. The Christians of the Reformation understood this

principle and served their generation even at the cost of their own lives. The Christians of over 100 years ago understood this principle and helped to save many lives.

Today it is up to us. We should ask ourselves, what would they say about us? Will we talk or act? We can continue the testimony that our Christian ancestors gave us and bless the world, especially during and despite the pandemic.

In the following two chapters, we will analyze in detail this important principle. We will look at what we can do as Christians, individually or as a church, to bless the world through the Coronavirus and thus honor the legacy of those who preceded us on the path of faith.

5

FACING CORONAVIRUS AS A CHURCH

“Freely you have received, freely give.” (Matthew 10:8)

In recent years, the relevance, motive, and purpose of the church in the community have become a topic of interest. When trying to tackle the role of the church, we faced the following dilemma: the more influence the church has on the society, the more secular it becomes, while when it clings to its principles, it is less relevant.¹

The answer to this apparent dilemma is Jesus. He kept his principles and was more relevant than others in the society of his time. From his example, we can learn that faithfulness to God’s Word is the secret to be a genuine biblical church and, at the same time, relevant to society.

Often, the younger ones ask about the legitimacy, relevance, and (even) the necessity of the church in the 21st century. Ellen White defines the church, its reason for existence, and its mission. She states: “The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world”.²

As we have seen in the previous chapter, in times of a pandemic the church's reason for being (serving) and its mission (announcing the gospel to the world) becomes more relevant and decisive than before. Unlike other organizations, the church is called to be the mouth of God for society, sharing a message of hope, and his hands by helping the most vulnerable people. This is the only way that the purpose can be fulfilled.

In this chapter, we tackle the importance of the church and its mission in times of coronavirus. Today more than ever a special union with Christ is necessary, which is the foundation of the legitimacy of the church to be faithful in the mission. In general terms, the church has a double mission at this moment, assisting its people without neglecting others (Galatians 6:10). Moreover, we will see the practical things the church could do in this regard.

Before continuing, it is essential to highlight that some of the recommendations offered in this chapter are already being done in some places. This work deserves recognition and I hope that more churches get involved in serving a perplexed society by the coronavirus. Moreover, we request all activities that we suggest to be carried out according to the local governmental regulations.

THE CHURCH AND HIS INTERNAL RESPONSIBILITIES

76 In the turmoil of this pandemic, many of us end up in the group of people who seek to assure their provisions stock and other supplies. However, many people, more than we think, have been left "behind"; even some members of the Christian communities. In

some cases, the government has considered them in their aid plans as they are the great forgotten group during the pandemic. God remembers them and sends his church to serve and take care of them.

THE REALITY MANY PEOPLE FACE

In these difficult times, some Christians, especially in developing countries, may be hindered from getting the necessary foods. Not all of us can have essentials at home during the confinement.

The so-called “informal employment” in some Latin American countries is more than 45% of the active population.³ By “informal employment” we mean:

“The labor of an independent workforce, like street vendors, domestic service workers, window cleaners.” These types of jobs are generally low paid and offer poor working conditions. Furthermore, as they do not have the proper legal protection for labor relations, they are jobs without social protection that do not provide economic stability for employees.”³⁴

In other words, in most cases, if these people do not work, they do not eat. Some members of our church community face this terrible reality and this sad paradox: “leave home and expose yourself to the spread of the virus or stay home to die of starvation.”

OPPORTUNITIES DURING THE CRISIS

In every crisis, there are big opportunities. This pandemic could be a perfect time to demonstrate our

deep brotherly love and to practice the pity of the early church by being guardians to especially the members of Christ’s body. Paul mentioned: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

Through planning and implementing auxiliary projects for members of the congregation, each believer can become united as a group and each member can be strengthened in faith.

Indeed, some congregations do not have the resources and infrastructure to cope with the possible needs that may arise therefore cannot satisfy the needs of their members. In these cases, the church could promote mutual solidarity among brethren. By doing this, whoever has more resources can help another one who needs it.

Whenever possible the church could arrange, with the local government, a request for financial aid or food to its members and the rest of the community. Many churches have renowned Non-Governmental Charity Organizations that could be a suitable channel for this type of assistance.

THE CHURCH AND ITS COMMITMENT TO SOCIETY

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the church has always collaborated with the community lightening the burdens of others and especially in times of pandemics. Today this commitment must be renewed as we offer our sincere and selfless support to the community. I think many people would agree with

me when I say that Jesus would not sit with his arms crossed in a situation like the one we live in.

Therefore, although it is true there is an internal dimension we must consider, and if you let prioritize (Acts 1: 8), we must not deny there is an external dimension we must not neglect. Let us not forget the words of Jesus: “You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone” (Luke 11:42 NIV).

To continue I would like to refer to some activities that we should continue to do, to support as a national church or local congregation to stop the pandemic. We can do this by caring for the sick, helping the poor, and comforting relatives of the victims. Of course, all this be done respecting the local legislation and recommendation.

BEING AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT

At this moment, I think it is relevant that national church leaders are available to support governmental authorities. The church embraces its surroundings and cannot be isolated from the social, political, and economic reality.

Presidents, Ministers of Health, the army, and other authorities must know with all certainty that we are praying for their families so that God can give them wisdom and intelligence in their fight against this big challenge. At this moment, few of us would like to be in the minister of health’s shoes.

The authorities should see churches as an unconditional ally in fighting this pandemic. Not only with words, but also in action. So, after establishing crisis management strategies, they should see churches

as efficient channels to assure the effectiveness of execution in the adopted measures.

The apostle Paul motivates us with the following words: “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2: 1-2). He continues saying, “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2: 3-4).

Indeed brethren, praying for our rulers is to collaborate with God for the salvation of humanity and in the case of the coronavirus, for the salvation of many lives. We must not only pray but also act. Remember that, acting should be according to what the authorities ask of us. Nonetheless, it is important to be available to support.

AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Another thing we can do, both as a national and local church, is to hold awareness campaigns. We can join the government’s efforts by informing people about recommendations given, particularly those related to isolation or house confinement, social distancing, and especially the prohibition of organizing massive events.

The Bible teaches that the church must promote obedience to governmental law unless they contradict divine laws. There is a Jewish concept that expresses “Dina Demalchuta, Dina”, that is, “the law of the land is law”.⁵

This principle is confirmed by the apostle Paul when he asks Christians: “Let every soul be subject

to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves” (Romans 13: 1-2).

The church should be prudent and not only support the measure that governments are taking, but also promote respect among members and within the community.

A tool that could be useful for this purpose is the media (radio, television, social media, newspapers, etc.) that many national churches and local congregations own. These could be used to reproduce the government’s call to follow the advice recommended by experts.

MATERIAL COLLECTION CAMPAIGNS

Something else that can be done to collaborate with society in solving the pandemic, as much as possible, is to make PPE (personal protective equipment) like masks, face shields, etc. to protect those who are continuously exposed, like the health care personnel and members of state security forces.

Many Christian churches have supported these initiatives. An example of this is the initiative taken by the Sagunto Adventist College in Valencia, Spain. They joined “the ‘Covidmakers’ initiative to make face shields from 3D printers destined for health care personnel, policemen, or nursing homes.”⁶

The local press when referring to this initiative highlighted an interesting fact: “on one of these trips [for the distribution of the material], a Civil Guard stopped them and said ‘I am stopping you to thank you, on behalf of everyone, for the work you are doing.’”⁷

Based on this, the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew came to mind: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16).

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT CAMPAIGNS

We cannot end without referring to the emotional pressures and psychological conditions this crisis has generated. Many of us were used to a very active life or at least one without limitations and suddenly we could not leave home.

In big cities, people live in very small spaces making confinement more difficult and causing side effects on personal moods leading to family fights and a lot of stress. Family fights have increased during isolation.⁸ Besides, there is anguish caused by financial insecurity and a sense of emptiness.

On the other hand, some families have sadly lost relatives during the pandemic. This has an additional aggravating factor since in many places the fear of infection has caused authorities to take a drastic measure such as forbidding funerals for family members.⁹ The pain and the awful effect this can cause on the emotional health of people facing this situation is unimaginable.

The psychological stress generated by the coronavirus and its possible consequences is one of the fears that governments currently face, since there is a high probability of a drastic increase in suicides because of isolation, loss of income, frustration, etc.¹⁰

As a church, these people should always be in our prayers:

The Lord has special grace for those who cry, and there is power in it to soften hearts and win souls. His love makes its way into the wounded and afflicted soul and becomes a healing balm for all who mourn. The “Father of mercies and God of all consolation ..., comforts us in all our tribulations, so that we too can comfort those who are in any tribulation, through the consolation by which we are consoled by God.”¹¹

WE CAN DO A LOT OF GOOD

In many of our congregations, there are professional psychologists and even associations Christian psychologists. In these times these professionals can provide a service to God by consoling their fellow men. Jesus said: “I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40).

As a church, we have a special commitment to these people, as we can be “God’s shoulder” at the moment. We can offer help to both church members and the community. We can be the salt that gives flavor and sense to those who are suffering.

As an organization, the church can do a lot to bless humanity in an anxious time like this. We must not focus only on ourselves and forget those around us, especially those who need to hear the message of hope that only the Gospel can offer.

Surely as a church, there is a lot of things we can do. Besides, as individuals, every Christian could do good in their circle of influence during the coronavirus pandemic. Therefore, it is important to consider what we could do as individuals, that is to serve and bless

others. We will focus on this in the next step of the journey.

6

CHRISTIANS IN THE FACE OF THE CORONAVIRUS

“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” (John 15:8)

Photography is a hobby that lately I take more and more seriously. Through the lens of the camera, I have been able to capture beautiful moments in natural sceneries such as plants, animals in the wild, and urban landscapes. With photography, I enjoy the beautiful scenes as well as being a witness to the creation of God.

At the end of 2018, my wife and I were invited to preach in Gibraltar. We decided not only to pack our bibles, hymnals, and sermons but also our photographic equipment because we didn't want to miss the chance to photograph the Barbary macaques, also known as “Barbary Gibraltar macaques”. After finishing our commitments, we took a few days to explore the beautiful peninsula.

The experience was incredible. We could take our long-awaited tour through the Rock of Gibraltar, which is a characteristic rocky mountain of the peninsula, and I could take beautiful photos of the monkeys. At the end of our tour, while waiting for the arrival of the cable car to return to the foot of the mountain,

something very interesting happened. A monkey opened the backpack of another tourist and started to rummage in search of food.

These monkeys are known for “stealing” food from tourists and that find this situation is funny. When the monkey found what he was looking for, he ran away from the ‘crime scene’ to enjoy his food. Meanwhile, another monkey observed the scene, he also wanted some of the stolen food. When the first monkey realized the intentions of the second one, he jumped from one end of the cable car parking spot to the other (about 16 feet).

Almost in unison, my wife and I exclaimed, “I can’t believe that jump is possible!” at the same time, we noticed that the other monkey would not give up and would follow the first one. Immediately I turned on the camera and set it on burst mode to capture the foreseeable precise moment when the monkey would be in the middle of his jump, an image that would be spectacular. The value of photos, particularly of animals, is in capturing a striking action scene. I thank God I was able to capture this picture.



CHRISTIANS, THIS IS OUR MOMENT!

Someone might say, “Is there a relationship between this and the Coronavirus?” My answer would be “yes”, in this chapter, I will show you why I believe that the crisis caused by the Coronavirus is a favorable moment to shine.

First, it is necessary to understand the word “moment”. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “moment” comes from Anglo-French and Latin “momentum”. Oxford dictionary defines it as “a particular time in somebody’s life, or in the course of an even or the development of something”. Lastly, a third meaning, this time from Cambridge Dictionary: “it is a special time or opportunity”.¹

The Coronavirus is the right opportunity for Christians in this generation. The best occasion to demonstrate the love of Christ to the world. It could be that we do not have another opportunity like this in our generation, and even if we have, for those who die there is no other opportunity to accept Christ and be blessed with the hope of the resurrection.

Beatriz Vera Poseck, in her book *Positive Psychology: A New Way of Understanding Psychology* refers to the three types of changes that a person can experience after living a traumatic experience. She says:

*Changes in spirituality and life’s philosophy are the most frequent type of change. Traumatic experiences radically shake the concepts and ideas on which we build our way of seeing the world; everything falls apart and we must build it from the beginning.*²

Today more than ever, we must offer hope to those who surround us, the hope that strengthens us and makes sense in our lives. At this moment, the words of the prophet Jeremiah make sense to the deportees in Babylon: “And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace” (Jeremiah 29:7).

Do not lose this opportunity to bless, guide, console, preach and proclaim Jesus to present the power of God’s word. We should look for the right moment to say something “what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29).

Do not misunderstand me; I do not expect that we take advantage of people’s vulnerability. Absolutely not! I am against those who want to fill up their churches with scared people due to Coronavirus; later we will discuss that in more detail. “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”. (John 4:24).

However, we must not go from one extreme to another by staying silent at home with our “light” of hope hidden under the bed, while millions of people die in the anguish of darkness.

GOD IS WAITING WITH OPEN ARMS

God continues to call at the door of the human’s heart: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20). He offers a peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4: 7). This is the message

we must announce so that everyone can experience it in his life.

Today, the Holy Spirit makes the words of the apostle Paul resound in our minds: **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”**. How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard of? And how can they hear when no one is preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: **“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news”** (Romans 10: 13-15 NIV)!

Still not all the Israelites accepted the good news. Isaiah says: **“Who has believed our report “(Isaiah 53: 1)? “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ”** (Romans 10:15 -17 NIV).

REPORTERS OF THE HEAVENLY NEWS NETWORK

Avoid presenting the Bible in an alarming tone that provides little hope and causes panic. Let us not scare people even more. Let us not say that God is angry with the world. That is not true. Although God does not approve of the wrong decisions of many people, saying that God wants to destroy humanity is not biblical (Romans 1: 18-32).

The Bible claims the opposite: **“But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury”** (Revelation 12:12, NIV)! To be honest, if God wanted to destroy us, who could defend us? Jesus, God incarnate, affirmed, **“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly”** (John 10:10).

The apostle Peter adds: “your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5: 8). The Coronavirus is not an apocalyptic plague; it is a sign of the soon return of Jesus. We have already seen who is causing these catastrophes. People should know this truth.

The death of each person in this pandemic and all the suffering caused to human beings is a thorn of Satan to the Heart of Infinite Love. God loves humanity and all the resources of heaven are devoted to saving humanity from physical death, but especially from eternal death.

Today, we should continue collaborating with God in this noble task of bringing hope to a world that dies being a victim of a virus more damaging and contagious than COVID-19, the virus of sin. By serving others, we serve Jesus and His mission, and we can be greatly blessed.

To continue, I would like to suggest some things that can be done as a Christian to bless others in times of Coronavirus without having to leave home. In times of a pandemic, a good Christian is as necessary as a good doctor. The first one works to save the soul, while the second one seeks to heal the body, and both work for God.

**TIME TO STRENGTHEN OUR RELATIONSHIP
WITH JESUS:**

PRAYER

During the Coronavirus pandemic, the dedication to God must be a priority for every Christian. Prayer should be as important as breathing. It is time to

open our hearts to God with all sincerity and to get the necessary strength from him to walk through the darkest valley.

There is much to say about prayer in the Coronavirus times. Today more than ever, we have a reason to pray. Let us pray for those who suffer and when possible let them know they are in our prayers. Pray for the scientists to find a vaccine soon. Pray for our pastors to be inspired in ways that help their church and community. Remember, “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).

THE VALUE OF READING THE BIBLE

We must establish a direct connection with the Bible without mediators, irrespective of them being pastors, evangelists, or apostles. It is time to put into practice the words of Jesus: “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39).

There is an increase of atheist that simply follow and believe what is shown in documentaries, speeches supporters, and activists based on what they listen to. Therefore, it is time to get in touch with the Bible to avoid being a “simple listener”. Today is the moment to give the Bible the right place in our lives.

Some people are willing to pay a lot of money for on-brand clothes, watches, handbags, smartphones, etc., but few people are willing to spend time in being original. In some cases, the only thing that is not authentic is themselves, because while everything they buy is authentic their life is not. The same happens with many so-called Christians.

Read the Bible, listen to the audio version, and share it with others. As a friend would say, “Fight with the Bible and ask it questions, get angry with it,” but do not let anything intervene in the relationship with the precious eternal truth that only the Bible shows.

WORSHIP TIME

I also believe in the power of worship. I agree with Danny Berrios (Christian singer) that the secret is to praise God during trials, it is to sing to him as you wait for the Coronavirus storm to pass. It is always time for worship, but from experience, difficult times are the most beneficial. We do not worship the difficulty, that behavior would be masochism. We worship God because we know he is in control of our lives, and because of his power, we worship.

Through calamities, Satan seeks to change the worship into curses and turn that certainty that God gives us into doubt. However, God gives us the strength to worship in difficult times as a sign of our unwavering faith in his love and care.

There is much one can say about Job’s story and his patience in a situation he did not understand, but few people are willing to be like him. Perhaps, we never suffer like Job suffered. However, he blessed God while he was in affliction (Job 1:21). Is it time to sing “sad” hymns? No, let us sing songs of praise in recognition of a God who has given everything and that will soon come back to take us with him. “To God be the glory!”

**EVERY CHRISTIAN: BLESSED AND A
BLESSING**

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5: 13-14).

“Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5: 15-16).

Let us ask God to open our eyes and allow us to see the opportunities to be the light and salt of the earth. However, we must remember that no one can give what he does not have. Therefore, we must gather the pearls of God’s word in our hearts because “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

IDEAS THAT HELP US SHINE

I would like to share some practical tips that friends have shared with me, tips of things you can do to bless others in the Coronavirus time.

1. Place a banner outside your house with a message of hope.
2. If you know how to play an instrument or sing, you can bless your neighbors with good music.
3. Try to avoid sharing rumors or unverified news.

4. Investigate who in your church or neighborhood might need food and arrange for some help.

5. Use your social media profile to share encouraging news.

6. Offer virtual Bible studies.

7. Share your cooking skills and offer online courses

8. Many children have homework and their parents cannot help them. You could help these kids by supporting with math or other subjects online.

9. Present the benefits of the 8 natural remedies offered by the acronym” NEW START”

I am sure God will enlighten you about other creative ways on how you can make your light shine wherever you are. Ask God to give you the right words and the ability to find the right moment to be a blessing in your circle of influence for the glory of God.

NOW OR NEVER!

Paraphrasing the famous wedding expression: “speak now or forever hold your peace”, we could say “speak (and act) now or forever many people will not hear us”. We are in a war against the enemy of souls, it is time to take a stand to defend and invite people to look at Jesus.

In conclusion, the Coronavirus is not synonymous with Christian inactivity, but an opportunity to share the hope that the Gospel offers. It is so relevant that
 94 some people who never experienced this hope and others that embraced it in the past could desire to feel the peace and security that only Jesus can give.

Join us to the next stop, where we will address the topic of Gospel, its relevance, its meaning, and its ability to enrich the lives of those who embrace it. It does not matter if you consider yourself a Christian or not; if you have not experienced the incomparable joy of salvation, this is the opportunity that can transform your life. If you are someone who has turned away, this is also relevant for you.

7

JESUS, THE GREAT DIFFERENCE

“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10)

In the fourth chapter, we saw the Christian attitude towards various pandemics that have affected the world in the past. Then we saw how nowadays, Christians can help to lighten the effects of this pandemic and reduce the pain of those who are affected by it.

The fact that many Christians are willing to bless those who are around them does not mean that they do not have problems, nor that they cannot be affected by the Coronavirus and all that it entails (economic crisis, loss of a job, etc.). Of course, they can be affected since we are all in the same “boat”.

We have already seen that Jesus said that everyone experiences “rain, floods and the winds” (Matthew 7:25), but in the end, some remain standing while others are destroyed. Many Christians can help because even though they are going through the storm, their lives are founded on the Rock. They know that **their well-being does not depend on an evil virus but a benign God.**

In this chapter, we address how Jesus can change the reality of people who accept the Gospel and help those who are in the face of the storms of this world. There is life-changing information in this chapter. And I am sure what you will read next will be very important for you because it will enrich your perception of reality, and you will be able to get the peace that is immune to the Coronavirus.

THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE!

Let us start by defining what the word Gospel means. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, this word of Greek origin means “good news”. The good news is that the kingdom of God is within reach of all humanity. Furthermore, we will see that Jesus himself claimed this.

It is interesting to highlight when we talk about the Gospel, we not only refer to a piece of information or learning but a person. Besides, **the Gospel is about a relationship with a person named Jesus**. Therefore, in the middle of the uncertainties caused by all the pandemic’s bad news, the assurance Jesus offers becomes more relevant.

Unlike information, relationships are not known but experienced. This is precisely what the Gospel proposes: an experience with Jesus. We see this in his response to the Pharisees: “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). In this verse, the word “know” does not refer to having information about the truth but to having a relationship with the truth.

To understand better the above-mentioned text, it would help us to know how Jesus defines himself: “I

am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14: 6). In other words, to know Jesus, who is the truth, is to establish a relationship with Him and this can set us free.

Free from what? Free from fear, which is a more prevalent “pandemic” than the Coronavirus that in many places arrives before the virus itself. Free from the uncertainties caused by job loss in April instead of the long-awaited promotion, because you are sure that your well-being is in the hands of a God who, when a door closes, can open many more. Even more important is being free from sin.

THE DISTANCE TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The first words said by Jesus when he began to preach are still surprising today: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). How near is the kingdom? The expression “at hand” answers this question.

Dear reader, the kingdom of heaven and its benefits are within your reach. The kingdom of God is placed in the hearts where Jesus is received. This is what the Master assured in His response to the Pharisees when they asked Him when the kingdom of God would come: “There it is, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21).

In this way, whoever accepts Jesus begins a heavenly experience here and now. Meanwhile, the great day of His second coming is near, which we will refer to in detail later. Therefore, the promises that Jesus made to his followers come true for those who accept them.

WONDERFUL PROMISES OF JESUS FOR YOU**PEACE AND COURAGE ARE ASSURED**

Of the many promises Jesus made to His believers, one of the most valuable in these unstable and agonizing days is found in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”.

I can personally testify that Jesus has fulfilled this promise in my life and helped me to experience peace that does not depend on the circumstances surrounding me. Most of these circumstances I cannot control, but they depend on me trusting in a faithful God who guarantees that with His power He will turn every crisis into a new opportunity.

If we trust in Jesus, we do not have to worry or cower in the face of adversity. This is a wonderful thought in times like these because it has been shown that the stress produced by uncertainty and fear can generate various diseases. In this manner, our health also benefits from trusting in Jesus.

A SOURCE OF HAPPINESS

Another wonderful promise of Jesus is when He enters our hearts, our search for the meaning of life will end. This we understand when He says: “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4: 13-14).

With “this water” Jesus is referring to the things that we consider valuable on this earth, which we seek for the hope of satisfying the thirst for meaning and happiness. Material possessions, a partner, an academic achievement, traveling, and many other things can be a motivation for someone to find a motive and meaning in their lives.

However, many people are very disappointed after obtaining what they longed for. They still feel the same or even worse since now they have also lost the hope of the happiness that they expected to obtain after achieving their predetermined goals. This is real, it is known that happiness caused by a salary increase lasts only 15 days. That is why companies are looking for new ways to motivate their employees.

On the other hand, Jesus says that the water He offers becomes a spring that flows within us so abundantly that it lasts for all eternity. This is where the Christian motivation to serve comes from. Because God gives them so much, to such a degree that even in times of crisis, they can share hope, peace, security, and joy.

TOGETHER WITH JESUS AS OF TODAY

There are many other promises Jesus made, but there are two that I would like to highlight. The first is given by Jesus to his disciples before ascending to heaven: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20 NIV). This is a remarkable promise that shows us that we are not alone. Jesus is with us and as the promise beautifully says, “to the very end of the age”. This means that

the crises caused by pandemics such as the Coronavirus will soon come to an end.

The second promise is found in the Gospel of John: “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also” (John 12:26). Did you notice it? In the first promise, Jesus assures us that He would stay with us while we are in the world, while in the second He confirms that this union will last for eternity. These are real promises, which we can trust.

Having Jesus in your heart and the fulfillment of these promises make a big difference. However, I must warn you that it is not enough to have information about Jesus, you need to accept Him with your heart and experience his promises.

The Gospel could be compared to a delicious gourmet dessert that everyone wants to taste. The Bible represents the recipe. The fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23 (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) are the ingredients. Jesus is the Master Chef and the heart that accepts the Gospel is the gourmet dessert.

It does not matter how much you read the recipe, nor how well you know the ingredients. Even if you have tasted some ingredient separately or if you work in a bakery. You could have seen the finished dish and even enjoyed the smell. However, unless you taste it, you will not know what it tastes like because flavors are not explained, they are experienced. The same happens with the Gospel.

TIME TO EXPERIENCE THE GOSPEL

It does not matter if you go to a church or not. If you have not experienced the joy of salvation, today is the time to ask Jesus to enter your heart. I can assure you that nothing will ever be the same again for you.

Seeing a city from a car or a plane is not the same because the perspective of the plane is bigger. God is willing to lend you His binoculars so that you can see life from His perspective, from above. I assure you everything changes then. Many things that did not make sense, to you before or made you uneasy will make sense and with this perspective, peace will enter your heart” (Isaiah 55: 8-9).

What you do not understand will not be a worry because now you know that everything is in the best hands and that paraphrasing Psalm 23:1 NIV, “Even though you walk through the darkest valley (like now), you will fear no evil for he is with you”. Then, you will be a new source in which you can give the water of life to others that are thirsty.

Jesus says: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20). Is it not awesome? When Jesus enters the heart, he makes a celebratory dinner to share all the happiness he gives. Today you can celebrate this feast and have an encounter with Jesus.

TIME TO GO HOME.

I could not finish this chapter without first extending the invitation that Jesus makes to those who once accepted His offer of love, but for some reason at some point cut off their relationship with Him.

This makes me think of one of the most famous illustrations given by Jesus, the parable of the prodigal son. Although, I prefer to call it the “parable of the father who recovers his son”, as the Spanish Bible version “Dios Habla Hoy” bible calls it.

This parable, recorded in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 15: 11-32), teaches us that God does not get tired of waiting and does not lose hope, that one day we will return to Him and enjoy the warmth of His home and the sweetness of His words.

Many times, like the young man in the parable, the crises we face in our lives help us see that there is no better place in the world than the Father’s house. Often, we then realize that we have built our houses on sand and that the rain leads us to ruin. Suddenly, we stop and look back to the “old path”, the good path, because only in it we find rest for our hearts (Jeremiah 6:16).

As humans, we try to live safely by nature. Consequently, in difficult times, those who previously enjoyed an experience of living by faith and abandoned an active religious life tend to rekindle their faith and seek that hope that brought them so much blessing in the past.

It often happens that we are more willing to seek God in moments of scarcity than in moments of abundance. Although this is not God’s plan, it explains why there are chapels in hospitals and not in business offices.

104 God, who “is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3: 9), opens His arms to receive

everyone who believes in Him regardless of the circumstances in which he does so.

THE VALUE OF MOTIVATION

We must be honest with ourselves and verify if what has moved us to seek God is the fear of losing or the desire to win. If fear is the motivator of our spiritual revival as soon as there is no danger, and we see that “nothing happens,” we will distance ourselves from God and go even further away from where we were.

However, if our motivation is the love that we have always had in our hearts for God, it does not matter if the crisis ends or extends, we remain firm because we love Him. In the case of the Coronavirus, I am sure that this crisis will pass. Nevertheless, others will come.

Without a doubt, the fact that in difficult times we look back and remember the good times we lived in communion with Jesus and fellow companions in faith, is a very good indicator of the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts

I want to tell you that Jesus also remembers you with love and tenderness: “Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; Therefore, My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 31:20). I invite you to make this text about you by replacing “Ephraim” with your name because the Bible is more than a message for humanity; it is a message for you.

Today Jesus is calling you to live the good times with Him again. He invites you to open your heart again and enjoy a peace that cannot be compared to anything

in this world, a peace immune to the Coronavirus, a peace “made in Heaven”.

As we have seen, one of Jesus’ promises is that when He returns, we will be with Him forever. This promise so longed for by believers is what gives them the strength to look to the future with hope during the Coronavirus crisis. We will dedicate our last stop to studying the reasons why the promise of the second coming of Jesus continues to be trustworthy, even in the 21st century.

8

THE BEST IS YET TO COME!

“I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:3)

In the previous chapter, we made several references to Jesus’ promises to believers. We have seen that through the hope the Gospel offers, we can have an enriched perspective of the reality in which we live. Also, we have seen how this hope can offer us peace immune to the calamities of this world, such as the current pandemic.

Besides, the greatest hope of Christianity is anchored in the promise that Jesus made to the disciples: “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14: 1-3).

One of the things that the pandemic has brought, is doubt. Few people dare to predict what will happen even in the immediate future; the Coronavirus has altered all the data that served to provide future projections. However, the message of the Bible is not affected by the changes that this crisis may generate, its prophecies

are still as trustworthy today. In the Bible, we find not only the certainty for the present but also the hope for the future.

Someone could wonder the following: Is the promise of the second coming of Jesus valid in the 21st century? Does it make sense to continue believing? Is there evidence, besides the Bible, that indicates that this could happen? Could the world end as we know it? Lastly, Jesus mentioned this over 2000 years ago and it has not happened yet. Is there enough reason to believe it will happen?

Someone might think that demanding evidence goes against faith. Still, the faith that the Bible offers is not blind, it is based on the evidence that God Himself has provided through scripture, creation, history, etc. In other words, faith can be explained rationally. In this sense, the apostle Paul affirms: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).

In the Bible, we find enough evidence to trust that Jesus will fulfill the promise of His return. This chapter focuses on the analysis of such evidence. For this, we will use history, common sense, and nature, which form the revelation of God that any person can know.¹

By considering the biblical prophecies and the recorded documentation of their fulfillment by historians in different times, we can see if the Bible has been successful in predicting past events. Through a projection of the past, we can be certain of the fulfillment of future prophecies. In this way, we will see if it makes sense to wait for the second coming of Christ and prepare for it.

PROPHECY ABOUT THE FATE OF EGYPT

Egypt was one of the most important civilizations in the world. Its art adorns great museums. Its history is taught in school textbooks. Its huge monuments still impress us. Furthermore, many biblical events took place in this country. For this reason, we can find over 700 references to Egypt, and its people in the Bible.

Nevertheless, the Bible predicted its fall, as recorded by the prophet Ezekiel: “I will bring back the captives of Egypt and cause them to return to the land of Pathros [southern Egypt, where they came from], to the land of their origin, and there they shall be a lowly kingdom. It shall be the lowliest of kingdoms; it shall never again exalt itself above the nations, for I will diminish them so that they will not rule over the nations anymore” (Ezekiel 29: 14-15).

It is important to highlight that, at the time of this prophecy, Egypt was a powerful nation under the reign of Pharaoh Necho II (late 7th century B.C.). Necho dominated western Asia for a short time (approx. 607 B.C.). The prophet Ezekiel lived in that time during the reign of Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.), king of Judah, who for a time was a tributary to Pharaoh.²

EXTRA-BIBLICAL VERIFICATION

Nowadays, we are witnesses to the fulfillment of this prophecy. Without a doubt, there is clear evidence of the greatness of Egypt and its Pharaohs; however, we could recognize this prophecy has been fulfilled because although Egypt exists as a country, it is not among the world or even regional powers.

PROPHECY ABOUT THE DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON

Babylon was the capital of various empires (namely the Babylonian Empire, Persian Empire, etc.). Geographically, it was in the territory that currently occupies Iraq. Moreover, it became the largest city of its time. Its greatness was such that the Bible described it as a proud city (Isaiah 47: 8,10) and considered it queen of kingdoms (Isaiah 47:5).

Not only the impressive Ishtar Gate, which is currently in the Pergamon Museum of Berlin, validates the greatness of Babylon described by the Bible, but we can also quote how its inhabitants considered the city:

*Babylon, the strength of heaven ... Babylon, the city where luxury is inexhaustible ... Babylon, the city of truth and justice ... Babylon, the city that unites heaven with the inferior world ... Babylon, the city that annihilates its enemies ... Babylon, the one that has received wisdom ... Babylon, the holy city ...*³

Despite its greatness, the Bible claimed that a time would come when this city would be left in ruins and would never be rebuilt. This prophecy is repeated more than five times by various biblical prophets. For example, the prophet Isaiah wrote:

“And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms,

The beauty of the Chaldeans’ pride,

Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and
Gomorraah.

It will never be inhabited,

Nor will it be settled from generation to generation;
 Nor will the Arabian pitch tents there,
 Nor will the shepherds make their sheepfolds there”
 (Isaiah 13: 19-20).

HISTORICAL VERIFICATION

It is not difficult to verify the fulfillment of this prophecy because more than 2500 years have passed since Isaiah wrote these words. Though we can verify the existence of the ancient city of Babylon, its great temples and majestic buildings are currently in ruins that have remained as silent witnesses to the accuracy of the Bible.

PROPHECY ABOUT THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM

Finally, let us see another biblical prophecy fulfilled, namely the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem. Much has been said about the grandeur and splendor of this majestic building, which was the pride of the Jewish people. The Gospel of Matthew contains a prophecy made by Jesus about the destiny of the temple:

“Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:1-2).

EXTRA-BIBLICAL VERIFICATION

Often the international news refers to the “wailing wall”, which is part of what remains of the temple. Therefore, we could say that Jesus’ prophecy about the destruction of the temple was fulfilled. Besides, we know part of the events of the precise moment of its destruction by the Romans in 70 A.D. Sulpicius Severus (Roman lawyer and historian) kept the following account:

Titus, who was the general in charge of the siege of Jerusalem, first took the advice and considered whether he should destroy this magnificent work known as the temple of Jerusalem. Many of them believed that such work, should not be destroyed due to its sacred role that exceeded all other works made by humans. Besides, it would serve as a testimony to Roman moderation while its destruction would be eternal ostentation of savagery.

On the contrary, others, including Titus himself, expressed their opinion the temple should be destroyed to eradicate the Jewish and Christian religions. Because despite these religions coming from the same founders, they were hostile to each other. Christians were a branch of the Jews, and if the root were removed, the branches would disappear.⁵

THE BIBLE IS TRUSTWORTHY

112 We have verified only three of the hundreds of biblical prophecies that we could quote, and whose fulfillment is verified in history. Only in Jesus’ life, more than 300 Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled. Besides these, there are other relevant prophecies

such as the rise of the great world empires in a correct sequence. For example, the French revolution and even the emergence of the United States as a world power.

As we can see, the faith that Christianity proposes is based on verified evidence of real events. Through these documented and verifiable proofs of the fulfillment of the prophecies, it is clear the Bible is a trustworthy prophetic document.

The American archaeologist Nelson Glueck, who discovered 1500 ancient sites and besides, appeared on the cover of Time magazine, said: *“For thirty years I have been digging with the Bible in one hand and the shovel in another, and in terms of historical perspective I have never seen that the Bible is wrong”*.⁶

However, could the coincidence explain the fulfillment of the prophecies that we have studied? This is something we can verify for ourselves and find out if it could have been a coincidence. By using three prophecies we have studied in this chapter, we can make a simple validation of the accuracy of the prophecies, considering what the Bible says of three ancient places:

1. **Egypt:** Shall be the lowliest of kingdoms” (Ezekiel 29:15). Checked!

2. **Babylon:** Shall become a heap, a dwelling place for jackals, an astonishment and a hissing, without an inhabitant” (Jeremiah 51:37). Checked!

3. **Temple of Jerusalem:** And Jesus answered and said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Mark 13: 2) Checked!

With this, it is shown that coincidence cannot be the explanation for the fulfillment of these prophecies,

and there is no ambiguity. In this way, we can conclude the Bible is the Word of the eternal and almighty God who loves us with infinite love.

THE GREAT PROPHECY

At this point, we can conclude that based on the fulfillment of the Biblical prophecies and their historical verification, it may be sensible to accept the truthfulness of the Biblical prophecies that still are pending, especially the one related to the Second Coming of Christ.

I invite you to review how the Bible expresses this great prophecy that makes sense and brings value during the Coronavirus crisis. Jesus said, “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:28).

- Matthew 16:27

“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works”.

- Titus 2:13

“looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”.

- 1 Thessalonians 4: 16-17

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with

the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord”.

- Revelation 1: 7

“Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen”.

Considering the past prophecies and their fulfillment, we have complete certainty that Jesus will return to establish a new world, where God Himself “will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21: 4).

In conclusion, today, we can raise our voices and tell the world that there is still hope. Despite the Coronavirus, life still makes sense. It is necessary to love more than ever. Tell people that at the end of the tunnel there is light, one brighter than the sun. Let them know that God is still in control of the world. Some say that “the best is yet to come” and I agree. However, the best will not come by itself, that is why I say: The best is yet to come. Jesus Christ! He will bring the best.

CONCLUSION

The Coronavirus is a tragedy, of this there is no doubt. At times like these, the words of Victor Frankl make sense:

“Varying this, we could say that most men in a concentration camp believed that the real opportunities of life had passed. Yet, in reality, there was an opportunity and a challenge. One could make a victory of those experiences, turning life into an inner triumph, or one could ignore the challenge and simply vegetate, as did a majority of prisoners”. (Man’s Search for Meaning).¹

The crisis caused by this pandemic has generated many questions: Who is behind this? What is the role of God while the Coronavirus affects us? Many people, including myself, believe that the Bible can help us understand current events. What this book has addressed is only an indication of what the Bible has to say about this topic.

With the Biblical worldview, we have got answers to several of the main questions that this pandemic has generated. We saw that Satan is the cause of the Coronavirus, he did it because he knows he has little time left (Revelation 12:12) and wants to kill as many people as possible, causing suffering to God and humanity.

We saw that, since ancient times, God has been a warrior against pandemics. When He was with us much of His ministry was dedicated precisely to walk from city to city “healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people” (Matthew 4:23). Upon His departure, this legacy was faithfully followed by Christians. The Antonine Plague (2nd century), the Bubonic Plague (16th century), and the influenza of the early 20th century are evidence of this.

In the face of the Coronavirus pandemic, the commitment to continue this legacy falls to the church as an organization and each Christian. Through the assurance that the Gospel gives us, we can have peace and strength, not only to stand up during the crisis but also to ease the burden of others who suffer. This assurance is founded on the trustworthy promise of the second coming of Christ.

I am convinced that there is information that can change our point of view. I think the analysis of the current pandemic through the biblical perspective gives us not only knowledge but also the certainty of the divine direction with respect to human fate. But, above all, the confirmation of the promise of God by which “we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13 NIV).

These are hard times, but there is no reason to doubt or fear. On the contrary, it is time to raise our light higher. We must unite with that “true light that gives light to everyone” (John 1:9 NIV) and that “the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5 NIV). It is time to show the light of the Gospel to those who do not yet know the wonderful truths of the Gospel.

It is not the time to feel defeated or dejected, but quite the opposite. Jesus told us: “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:28). As we have seen, His promise is trustworthy because this night will have a morning of eternal light.

For those who have been affected directly by the crisis, either by illness, death of a loved one, loss of a job, or even lack of food shortage, I want to tell you that I am praying for you. Do not forget God is in control of the world and particularly of your life. It is time to trust God and act, I am sure you will see His glory.

In times of Coronavirus, we can be certain that, in the end, God and his kingdom will be vindicated. Soon it will be clear that his handling of the crisis has been the best. It will be clear that there is no evil in him.

The certainty of His love and His fair government can fill us with peace now. We will soon join the heavenly choir to praise Him for His redemption by exclaiming, “Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments” (Revelation 19: 1-2).

Finally, the day will come when “from the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love” (Last Day Events).²

While we wait for that day, we can say with the prophet Habakkuk: “Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls, Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation!” (Habakkuk 3: 17-18).

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