

MY CREATOR

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THE STORY OF MY RE-CREATION



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If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yes, the darkness hides not from you; but the night shines as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to you. For you have possessed my minds: you have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise you; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are your works; and that my soul knows right well. My substance was not hid from you, when I was made in secret, and curiously done in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in your book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. (Psalms 139:11-16)

Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

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PROLOGUE

The book you hold in your hands contains a special account of my life, tracing in stages the recreating work of our loving heavenly Father, accomplished through the Lord Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. My prayer is that as you read this story you will be encouraged to desire and experience your own unique re-creation.

I. THE LIGHT IN MY CHILDHOOD

This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created. And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth: And the days of Adam after he had fathered Seth were eight hundred years: and he fathered sons and daughters: And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died. (Genesis 1:1-5)

My first memories are from kindergarten. I don't remember much, which I later realized was due not only to the fact that I was only four years old, but also because I wasn't in an environment that builds a family identity and gives a feeling of warmth and belonging; an environment in which events are not monotonous and impersonal, but rather remain in the memory forever.

In the little free time my mother had between work shifts, she was always by my side. The aroma of her delicious dishes and our tender personal conversations filled me with a feeling of home coziness.

Once a car had hit my favorite puppy, leaving it lifeless on the asphalt in a pool of blood. The neighbor opposite us pointed it out to me, but at first I couldn't believe that the irretrievable loss was a reality. How was it possible for this sweet and defenseless creature to have such an end? I shared this with my mother and she listened to me sympathetically. In vain, however, did I get an explanation and hope for some meaning in life. My poor mother had lived her life in the nearly absolute atheism of communist Bulgaria, where all hope for meaning and creativity ended in the grave. Still, she always taught me to follow the good, and that gave me the understanding

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that what happened could not be in vain.

In my childhood my father was a powerful figure, and although I could communicate with him less often he would take me fishing, to the seaside, and to the markets. His sincerity, straightforwardness and courage, combined with his technical skills, formed in my mind an image of fatherhood - a divine heritage that I often keep and cherish in my heart.

The light of life reached me for the first time through his mother. She would attend one of the evangelical churches in my hometown of Dimitrovgrad and would take me there whenever possible. I remember the atmosphere of solemn adoration for the love of Jesus, through which I sensed something about my true abode and purpose. My grandmother often invited believers to the first floor of our house where she lived with my grandfather. He was not an actively religious man, but his communications with the other believers changed his attitude and so he would almost uncomplainingly follow their ritual.

Sermons would be listened to on a cassette player and then verses from Psalm 119 would be read, which my grandmother called candies. The children were taught to choose a random number and the correlating verse was read as a divine message to that child. This practice assured me that God wanted to communicate with me.

I so greatly desired for God to tell me something that one day, as I was standing in front of our house, within me sounded the words: "Listen to your grandmother!" I wasn't sure if God was talking to me or this was my imagination, but I really wanted it to be Him. Although I was young, I realized that even if the message felt right it was not a guarantee that He was speaking to me, because the logic of a message to listen to my grandmother could still have been constructed by myself.

According to my understanding then, I had a vague sense of a big problem that made God change His attitude toward me every time I did something that was not good. I once looked at the illustrations in one of my grandmother's books and came across one whose contents are deeply ingrained in me. There were two paintings of a person; in the first he had a

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grim expression on his face and animals like pigs and snakes were dwelling in his heart. The second picture depicted the same man, but with a bright and radiant expression, and in his heart were white doves, flowers, and light. So the idea of purifying my heart was presented to me in a very expressive way. But how could I purify my heart? Day by day I felt more and more the unbearable weight of sin in my life. The sad song of my heart was reflected in one of the songs in my grandmother's collection:

1. My soul is grieved, and my heart aches,
poor sinner without hope, who will grieve for me?

Chorus: Oh, Jesus, only in You is my salvation,
I have no hope elsewhere if You do not help.

2. Ah, my soul is exhausted under the burden of sin.

Who will reach out to me for salvation?

3. Sins eat me, I have no joy and peace.

Who will unload me from the burden of my sin?

4. Don't let me perish, reach out to me.

Give me healing to the troubled soul.

5. Forgive my sins, take away my burden

Only in You do I find healing, peace and tranquility.

I had memorized the song and would sing it often, but although the lyrics spoke of the hope of Jesus' forgiveness, something prevented me from experiencing the joy of being free from sin. My age from 4 to 10 coincided with the end of communist rule in our country, and the social environment of school in those early years was completely atheistic. On the other hand, because of my parents' busy schedule, I was sometimes under the care of my grandparents. In an effort to make me stand firm for the faith my grandmother often told me what she had been taught about the fate of those who disobeyed God. Many times, when I lay on my bed in the

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evening, I pictured how I was constantly burning in hell and how this would NEVER stop. At the time I could not realize that such a picture portrayed God as an extremely sadistic person. Subconsciously these notions did their devastating work, pushing me later into a life independent of God.

During these years I continued to go to church with my grandmother, but the changes in my adolescence that were coming would open new and completely unknown horizons for me.

II. SPACE FOR EXISTENCE

And God said, 'Let there be an expanse in the middle of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.' And God made the expanse, and divided the waters which were under the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse: and it was so. And God called the expanse sky. And the evening and the morning were the second day. (Genesis 1:6-8)

Space appeared in my life after the change of the governing regime in the 90s. The removal of the Iron Curtain unleashed a cultural wave of Western influence in our country and placed me in a completely different, vast and pluralistic environment, where I began to get acquainted with global information in its various forms. Until then, my mother read only the literature available in our country, and she bought me the French PIF, the Bulgarian RAINBOW, and I also subscribed to the Russian MURZILKA.

Relying on my ability to learn with comprehension, I did generally well in elementary school... until the fourth grade. From then I gradually fell behind because I lost the desire to be attentive in class and to learn my lessons at home. It just wasn't my way of learning. Our class teacher tried to convince me that I could be an educated and disciplined child, and her desire really made me try, but soon after I returned to my usual "loose" behavior. After 4th grade, I was already leaning towards one of the groups in the class and gathering with the boys to play table tennis, basketball, football, to go to the river for fishing or swimming, or to watch videos in one of our homes. This overlapped with my friendships and activities in the neighborhood, except for games like hide-and-seek, Schmeiser, shooting paper funnels, and the not so harmless minium and white bronze bombs.

Three of my mother's friends were from so-called "aristocratic" backgrounds. I remember one day when one of them came home and started making changes. I was wearing a long, gray, hand-knitted sweater; she made me

take the colored shirt out of my pants so that its end could be seen under the sweater. With this seemingly insignificant change, I was suddenly introduced to the liberal world of the new culture. In the afternoon, she, my mother and I went to the city center, where we entered the stamp collection store. We bought binders and several series of stamps: one collection was dedicated to the 1986 FIFA World Cup, the other featured works of art by Titian, the third featured Olympic disciplines, and the next featured the treasure of Nad Saint Miklos.

These small events opened me up to the global horizons of the wider world, without, however, being able to filter out what was immoral. Gradually, I began to gather more and more with friends from the city center, assimilating the new culture. At that time, listening to music became my favorite pastime. My mother had a gramophone and records, which I started listening to. At first I listened to classical music, but I quickly got tired of it. I continued with the *musical ladder* of Toma Sprostranov¹, Italian pop, CC Ketch, Modern Talking and the *Moonwalk* by Michael Jackson. To me, this process did turn out to be a ladder, but one that rather descended to the dark floors of human misery.

On the walls of my room where I would listen to music was filled with posters of my musical heroes, who with their intoxicating works would bring me out of reality. Sometimes I would write down on a piece of paper my thoughts on life. The search for meaning continued, but now I was beginning to think, more and more, as a worldly person.

My grandfather was in poor health. One night he went to bed and started suffocating. When he was taken to the ambulance, he was already unconscious. He died the next day. It turned out to be a stroke caused by thrombophlebitis. This encounter with the death of a loved one shook me to the core. My existential questions became more painful and urgent than ever. When I passed the coffin in the room for farewell and then sent his body to the cemetery, the suffering of relentless reality seemed unbearable to me. I remembered my misdeeds, which he witnessed during his life; I watched my grandmother's grief over the loss of her closest person, and

1 A famous Bulgarian radio and TV presenter at that time

II. SPACE FOR EXISTENCE

everything seemed to me as if there would never be any consolation.

I saw comfort only in my favorite activities and music, which I could now use as a distraction from these painful questions regarding the meaning of life. In addition, my father bought me a blue bike - BALKAN², which I quickly learned to ride and with which I freely split the wind.

2 A popular brand in Bulgaria for bikes at that time

III. THE DARK ZONE OF SKATEBOARDISM

And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear:' and it was so. And God called the dry land earth; and the gathering together of the waters he called Seas: and God saw that it was good. And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth:' and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after its kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after its kind: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day. (Genesis 1:9-13)

One day we were playing outside and someone suggested to me that we could make a skateboard. We cut a board with two tips, attached roller skates to the bottom, and that's how a *value-seeking lifestyle through show and performance* started for me, which I've been trying to heal from ever since.

Entering this new identity of mine was marked by receiving the nickname DODO - the name this world gave me in accordance with the price it set for me. During a free class, I took some classmates to my house to fight with boxing gloves. Then one of them saw that there was mouse faeces behind my wardrobe. I don't know why I figured it wasn't faeces but eggs. When I told this to my classmates they started making fun of me, inventing price list menus that included mouse eggs. A little later, one of my classmates developed the concept of eggs by linking them to the extinct Australian bird, the Dodo, and someone else wrote *Dodo Skater* on the blackboard, and everyone started addressing me that way.

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This did not seem to irritate me much, as my own self-esteem was not high - I was yet to struggle desperately to increase my value through self-expression and performance. My first hopes of such an increase in my value were lifted up when I started doing skateboarding tricks. A friend of mine took me to an older generation skater who had videocassettes with skate programs. When I watched for hours how American skaters did tricks on the streets of big cities, against the backdrop of hip-hop or other similar music, I was completely intoxicated by the miracle of human potential and the ability to gain value through raising one's skill.

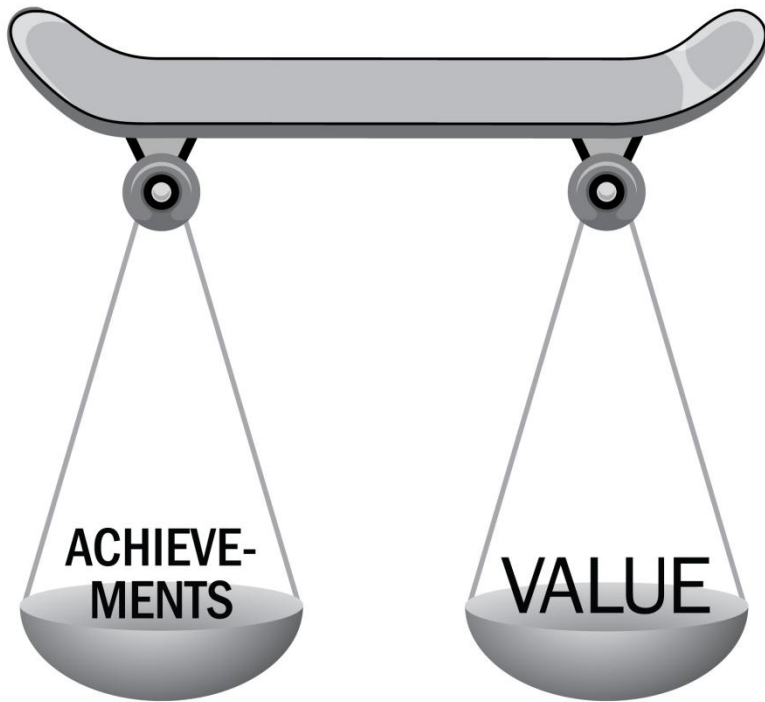
Music and skate videos became the stimulants that spurred me to improve my performances until I became fully committed to this sport. I often would practice late into the night until I did the trick I wanted. When after tireless efforts I would finally achieve it, I would then gain even more confidence that I could get better and have even more value. Over time, however, the dose and quality of these stimulants had to increase. So I switched to increasingly aggressive, immoral and vulgar music, which fed enough the engine of my ambitions to achieve more and more. Since skateboarding was not very popular in Bulgaria at that time, I imagined that I was doing something exceptional and unique. I did not realize that the principle of seeking value and identity through achievement was followed by people all over the world, but in different forms.

By high school I had a scandalous image, which I formed through means that I can only be ashamed of now. The student organization at the college nominated me as the most attractive person, but in those days, deep inside me, darkness and fear grew and thickened.

Once carried away by the adrenaline rush, the tricks I did with the skateboard became more and more difficult and risky, but because the real and satisfying sense of value was absent, I was inclined to risk an insane amount – in the end, what did I have to lose? Gradually, a skate community of young people my age was formed in our city and this made me hope that in such an environment of my own kind I would be understood and would experience the feeling of belonging. For a period of time, on a superficial level, things looked exactly like that. But after about 2-3 years, I began to

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feel that my beloved friends were struggling with the same value problem, yet without talking openly about it.



Since my father often spoiled the family atmosphere because of alcohol consumption, as a child I had decided that I would never touch the bottle. Now as a teenager, however, this decision of mine was losing its meaning. At first I drank 2-3 beers a day, but later I lost all measure and drank until I was unconscious. I was told how one evening the owner of a club where all the metal heads, skinheads, rappers, skaters, grungers, etc. used to gather, tried to persuade me to let go of the ashtray that was in my mouth, and how I stubbornly refused to do it. Finally she stroked my head and I agreed.

Later, I saw how the lack of value was destroying others, and not only in the skateboarding community. One of our rollerblading boys committed suicide. One would probably say that this is a natural trend in an isolated society

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that listens to dark music, such as that of the group *Suicidal Tendencies*, but the changes in our Bulgarian society in the years since have shown that we were just the first generation who experienced a hangover from the assimilation of freedom-promising Western values.

During this period what I considered entertaining began to expand into the field of criminal or delinquent behavior. Once, at dusk, a friend of mine and I were returning home and passed by a parked van. He noticed that its door was unlocked and waved at me to enter. I was scared, but I decided that I would not "expose" myself as being fearful. We took off the car radio and picked up a bag with some pens and notebooks. On the way back we passed through the park so that no one would notice us. As we approached our neighborhood, we saw a patrol jeep and realized that we would be caught if we didn't do something. Two policemen got out of the car and headed for us. At that moment, I let go off the things I was carrying and rushed to run at a speed that only fear can produce. My friend ran in another direction. Shortly before I turned the corner, I heard a shout behind me, followed by several gunshots. Without slowing down, I entered the yard of a house, jumped the fence, ran through it, and then climbed onto the roof of a garage and from there into the other yard. I don't remember exactly how, but I managed to get to my house and entered in quietly, hoping they wouldn't find me. I wondered what was happening to my friend and hoped he had escaped from them.

The next day I stood frightened in my grandparents' room, waiting for the outcome. When a police car stopped on the street, I knew it was for me, and I could already imagine the horrors of an investigation, and especially the shame of my parents. I looked at my mother as they took me away, and I couldn't stand what I was doing to her by instantly melting the illusions about myself that I had been sustaining before her.

It turned out that my friend had been caught the day before and the police had forced him to tell them who I was. As we were minors, after a reprimand and a blow with a truncheon we were released, but the case remained pending. After a while, a law came out that required the cleaning of such cases, and we had to pay an amount corresponding to the damages. I paid

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the amount personally to the injured person. This was useful for my humility and self-awareness.

The more I improved in performing skate tricks, the deeper the crisis of my identity was, as I realized that the thrill of this performance, which won the attention of others, did not give me a real sense of belonging and value. Comparing my skills and achievements with those of other skaters, in the context of gaining value through performances, had proved extremely exhausting, as there is always someone who is better than you. This intense life in search of pleasure in self-expression had wasted my childhood sensitivity and joy of the natural things in life. The abyss of my loneliness and misery was getting darker and scarier. To soothe the pain of this crisis, I was unconsciously pushed to listen to even more mind-boggling music, devoid of any natural components of melody, harmony, and meaningful textuality.

As a child, I dreamed of meeting a girl who would understand me. Until 1994, when I began to reap the fruits of my life crisis, I had never met such a person. At that time I went on vacation to a resort village with two of my friends. There I met her, a girl with a soul like mine, even though she was one of those who we skaters contemptuously called "bar-goers." Accordingly, the "bar-goers" perceived us as the sludge of society and called us "baggy-panters" because of the way we dressed. This difference was an obstacle that she and I easily overcame without having to reach the fatal end of Romeo and Juliet.

We loved talking for hours about our worldviews and enjoying the fact that we understood each other, in depth, as no one else could. Loneliness and the feeling of insignificance and fear in the big world became our common treasured experience. But because we both suffered from the common problem of low value, we soon began to quarrel and blame each other for our mistakes. Our fruitless attempts to seek our worth in the other ultimately led us into fierce rivalry with each other. The lack of true peace of mind exacerbated the problem with our relationship to the point that we were no longer able to communicate and tolerate each other. I did not understand what this was due to, given that we knew the other's soul so well, and I did

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not find the theory of repulsive similarities at all logical. My friend once wrote the following thought on the envelope of a letter she sent me:

"People are like hedgehogs - they want to be together, but when they get close to each other, they start stabbing each other with their thorns."

This was the very truth about our relationship, but it did not show me the cause of the problem, let alone its solution. Because of the failure of this relationship that I originally had so much hope in, my personal identity crisis reached its lowest point. My skate friends had decided that I had abandoned the board because of some "bar-going" girl. From time to time I went to the square again to skate, only to find once again that I had lost all sense of real meaning and enjoyment in life.

During this period I was extremely vulnerable to self-harm, and only the fear of the unknown kept me from doing something fatal. Looking back, I know for sure that the Lord has been watching over me to protect me from the full power of the harvest I was reaping.

On one of my outings in the center, the boys in the square mentioned that someone had brought marijuana, which had just become popular at the time. I decided to try its lauded impact, and then I saw that the things I was going through could affect me on an even more awful level. I panicked for no reason, and as I passed a restaurant where I saw my friend, I decided that she was making fun of me. I felt as if the whole world would fall on me and crush me. My heart was pounding. I took a taxi and quickly returned home, hoping to wake up the next day and be out of this state. And so it happened. A few months later, I dared to try again to see if this time I would experience the state of lightness that my friends described. Like the prodigal son in the parable of Jesus, I have tried in vain to alleviate my condition with the food of pigs.

The pain of futility and the fear of death and the unknown made me read the philosophical and psychological literature I had in my room. I saw how thinkers over the centuries had tried to give answers to existential questions, but all the human wisdom I read seemed utterly fruitless when it came to

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finding the true meaning of life at all – and how much more so when it came to my own personal life!

My uncle is a smart and witty man. At that time he lived with his family in the capital (Sofia) and provided services related to the interior of buildings. When he invited me to help him, I hoped that I could do something useful and different that could make me free from my painful feelings. I shared with my uncle about my crisis. Though he could not solve the problem, I was grateful that I could share how I felt with someone close to me, and for a while my depressive thoughts were silenced.

Somewhere around this time, when I was back in my hometown, I went for a walk along the local river with the woman I thought was my soulmate. The weight of despair and depression had become unbearable. We talked about our relationship and how, looking at cards to see her fortune, my friend saw that a blond man would appear in her life. After we parted, I returned home with a heart full of sorrow and despair. I entered Grandma's room. At that time Grandma was still suffering from the loss of my grandfather and was constantly sad. I sat on a chest and tears began to run down my cheeks. My inner state could no longer be hidden.

IV. LIGHT BECOMES EMBODIED

And God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of sky to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the expanse of the sky to give light upon the earth:' and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day. (Genesis 1:14-19)

I didn't think Grandma could understand me. She was a simple poorly-educated woman who reduced everything to her faith in Jesus and used every opportunity to talk to me about God, which had begun to seem too artificial to me. I remember how my friend and I once giggled together as she explained something about the Second Coming. Her religion had come to seem to me like an old person's tale.

When I cried in front of her, collapsing under the weight of my personal crisis, she told me that I should go to the evangelical church again. I agreed because I felt absolutely helpless to solve my problem. At that time I did not have any preference of Christian denomination; if my grandmother was a zealous member of the Orthodox Church I probably would have gone there. I simply capitulated to the crisis of my life, so I sought the help of my Creator.

There was a regular worship service in the church with many songs, and then the pastor went out to preach. I have no clear memory of what he said, except that it was about the love of Jesus... I felt as if I were not there. The setting was just a means by which, after so much time wandering away from

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God, I could finally direct my thoughts to Him. It was as if I had waited for this moment to dump all my pain out, the result of a life independent of Him. Could He still love me after all this? My Savior was now assuring me of just that – so I couldn't say anything else, I just cried with joy and gratitude.

Meanwhile, my grandmother was diagnosed with abdominal cancer. The grief of losing my grandfather was drawing her end near. I used to hear her sing gospel songs at home as she walked. Now she was just praying bitterly, and her most fervent pleas were for her son, my father, to believe in Jesus.

Shortly after I had confessed to her that I was at a dead end, she gave me a Bible. One day, as I was standing in my room, I opened it and read in one of the gospels. The works of Jesus, filled with mercy and restorative power, now had such a living effect on me. Deep down I realized that I could only entrust my life to a person like Him.

Grandma's condition worsened and she could no longer get out of bed. Although I was afraid of death, I dared to try to encourage her. She had my mother with her, who gave her painkillers. When I met Grandma's gaze, the words seemed to get stuck in my throat. I couldn't comfort her. She couldn't speak either, because she was in the last phase of the illness, but she raised her hand high: a gesture whose meaning was greater than all the words I could hear then. She died soon after.

The loss of my grandmother brought me back to the abyss of darkness and despair. There was a stone quarry near the cemetery in our town. I needed a place like this where I could be alone and pray.

Sadness and darkness just didn't want to leave my heart. I prayed for a long time, and on the way back, despite the painful feelings, I already knew that a new stage in my life was coming. I went home and, as usual, watched one of my favorite skate videos. I no longer felt a gram of pleasure from it. The weight of serious existential questions about life and death was crushing me. Just then a text appeared on the screen that was part of the program, but I had never paid attention to it before. It was in English, but the reference seemed familiar to me:

"Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I

IV. LIGHT BECOMES EMBODIED

will fear no evil: for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me." (Psalms 23:4)

I found it in my Bible, and what was written there was like a voice coming straight from heaven to me. How precious these words were to me then! I knew this was the consolation of Someone who knew what I was going through and Who cared about me. I already knew that my life's journey would not end in the agony of this despair.

I had stood in church and cried out my pain, my heart opened to Jesus, but now I longed to know what I believed in. Once my girlfriend and I were sitting in a restaurant (the blond man that I feared would take her away from me hadn't come yet) and she was leafing through a small book in which there was written something short about the intellectual foundations of the Christian faith. We talked about this for a while, and we both came to the conclusion that it was good for these issues to be studied in more depth.

I began to read everything I could find about faith and science. For me, it was an unsuspectedly rich dimension of life, filled with so many unexplored things. I was surprised to find that many of the authors who were known in our society as secular writers actually had their own rich spiritual history and works. But our atheistic society has taken only what fits its worldview and favors its goals, and the spiritual part has been completely ignored.

For example, it was strange to me that the children's stories about Max and Moritz were the idea of the German evangelist Wilhelm Bush, whose book *Jesus, Our Destiny* told such inspiring incidents from his life. Scientists like Kepler and Newton were presented to me only as geniuses of physics, mathematics, and astronomy, while their spiritual creativity remained completely inaccessible. When I read all these things, I felt like a discoverer of a new continent who had to tell others what he had discovered.

On another occasion, I was visited by a classmate and friend with whom we often went to the river. He, I, my mother and my girlfriend were in the kitchen at home. I began to speak of what I had learned, very much hoping that my girlfriend would get serious reasons for her faith – but raising these

questions before my mother and my friend led to something like a contest in which everyone presented their arguments to show their intellectual superiority. The three gradually took a united stand against the world being created, making me look ridiculous with my beliefs. Then I realized that the upbringing we had under an atheistic regime had a decisive impact on the formation of prejudices and preconceived opinions in relation to the meaning of life.

I realized that I couldn't convince anyone with my scientific arguments, and that made me sad. I so wanted my loved ones to be able to look at life through my newfound perspective to taste the joy I was experiencing with my Creator!

In the evangelical church, I made many new friends with whom I gathered at youth classes to worship God together with song, prayers and sharing experiences. If only Grandma could see the joy of my new life. And didn't she actually see me from heaven? After all, the popular belief was that believers go to heaven after death. I began to read the Bible more often, because now it had become for me a source of revelations about life, from which my Creator wanted me to draw constantly. In the book of Job, I came across texts about the condition of people after death that were not clear to me:

It shall go down to the bars of Sheol, when once there is rest in the dust. (Job 17:16, ASV)

What is this *Sheol*? This is the first time I've read about such a thing. I asked those in the church who knew about it, and the answers were unclear. Some told me that they did not know what it was, and others that it was a place inhabited by passers-by on the other side of the grave. This explanation was not satisfactory to me because it did not show me what the purpose of such an intermediate state would be.

Another thing that bothered me was the style of music used in worship. Although in a different form, it made me feel stimulated like the music I listened to when I skated. The joy of forgiveness of sins made it difficult for me to ascertain that my uncomfotability was coming from the ecstatic, emotion-based religion that was practiced at the church. At the time, I

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couldn't define the problem, but I felt it clearly because of my experiences as a skater.

I met a man I had seen in the city before, and he asked me for a loan. I would not have guessed that he is also a believer. He was well-read and offered me a synthesis of Christianity and Eastern philosophy. I had no idea that it was the ideas of the *New Age* that created a bridge between religions. But how could Christianity be combined with other religions? What about the meaning of biblical warnings against pagan beliefs and the worship of other gods? Conversations with this man confused me, and I felt like someone who had lost ground. I saw that when I wasn't sure what I believed, I was actually in great danger.

Once this man and I were returning from a service at the evangelical church and passed a house near the elementary school I had attended. He pointed to a sign on the second floor that read *Seventh-day Adventist Church* and then asked, "Do you know what these people believe?" I told him I didn't know anything about that church. Then he explained to me that they had a false prophet, washed their feet in basins and beat the children in the church with a stick. It was funny to me that there could be people who practiced such things in the name of Jesus. At the same time, I had already begun to realize that the diversity of Christian beliefs and denominations required the believer to know very well the reasons for his faith. I could not accept that all these contradictory beliefs and different churches was God's will. This led me to study the Bible much more carefully and systematically to find the truth.

Years later, when I no longer lived in my hometown, I realized that God was protecting me from many dangers along the way that I did not suspect. My father told me that the man I had met earlier at church and another acquaintance had deceived local people with mental health problems by forcing them to sign wills that would give them their property if they died, and then they killed them to receive it! Later, I read an article in the local newspaper that detailed what my father had told me. I am grateful to my Creator for protecting me from many such things. As for the Seventh-day Adventist Church — I was yet to understand the truth about this society — a

truth very different from what this man had told me about.

The warmhearted young people in my grandmother's evangelical church prayed for me to receive the special sign of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, but it didn't work for me. As I studied the Bible on this subject, I realized that this apparent failure was a real blessing. The spiritual gifts that God gives to believers are real, but they are not the sure sign that we belong to the Lord and have His Spirit:

Why **by their fruits you shall know them**. Not everyone that says unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but **he that does the will of my Father** which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, **have we not prophesied in your name?** And **in your name have cast out demons?** And **in your name done many wonderful works?** And then will I profess unto them, **I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity.** (Matthew 7:20-23)

Love never fails: but where there are prophecies, they shall fail; **where there are tongues, they shall cease;** where there is knowledge, it shall vanish away. (1 Corinthians 13:8)

But **the fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

I gradually began to realize that the confidence in our citizenship in the kingdom of heaven did not have to come from any outward manifestations of power, because they could be imitated by the realm of darkness. Proving my identity through manifestations of power (spiritual gifts) would only put my personal philosophy of gaining value through achievement in a religious framework. I would only continue to serve the god of achievement, whom I also had served in the world.

As a child, I was amazed to hear my grandmother say some incomprehensible words during her prayers. I have often heard this practice justified by the special gift given to the apostles to proclaim the gospel of the risen Savior among the various nations who came to Jerusalem for Pentecost:

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And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were living at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was heard abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because **every man heard them speak in his own language**. And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans? And how hear we **every man in our own tongue**, where we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we **do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God**. (Acts 2:4-11)

Here, however, it is clear that the languages in question, which God gave to the apostles through His Spirit, were real and intelligible languages. The purpose of the gift was to help preach the gospel.

The strange Glossolalia³, which in charismatic⁴ communities is considered a heavenly language, did not have the support of Scripture, though charismatics would quote the following verse on its defense:

For he that speaks in an unknown tongue [G1100, Γλῶσσα, glossa] speaks not to men, but to God: for no man understands

3 Glossolalia is from the Greek word γλωσσολαλία, itself a compound of the words γλῶσσα (glossa), meaning "tongue" or "language" and λαλέω (laleō), "to speak, talk, chat, prattle, or to make a sound". Glossolalia or speaking in tongues is a phenomenon in which people speak words that are apparently in languages unknown to the speaker. One definition used by linguists is the fluid vocalizing of speech-like syllables that lack any readily comprehended meaning, in some cases as part of religious practice in which it is believed to be a [divine language](#) unknown to the speaker. Glossolalia is practiced in Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity as well as in other religions. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossolalia#Medical_research

4 Charismatic Christianity (also known as Spirit-filled Christianity by its supporters) is a form of Christianity that emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, and modern-day miracles as an everyday part of a believer's life. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charismatic_Christianity

him; but in the spirit he speaks mysteries. (1 Corinthians 14:2)

Taken out of its context⁵ this verse might look like it supports the speaking of incomprehensible language in one's personal prayer, but, when the whole 14th chapter of this 2nd letter to the Corinthians is read, it becomes plain enough that Paul is warning the believing Christians in Corinth against a misuse of the gifts and against the speaking of non-existing languages. I encourage everyone to read Paul's statement in this chapter carefully. Here are some key statements from the context of his letter that clarify the apostle's true intention:

For he that speaks in an unknown tongue speaks not to men, but to God: for no man understands him; but in the spirit he speaks mysteries. ... Now, brothers, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by teaching? ... If therefore the whole church has come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that you are mad? (1 Corinthians 14:2, 6, 23)

Corinthian believers had lost the true meaning and proper use of spiritual gifts. On the day of Pentecost, the apostles really needed the manifestation of this gift, but the Christians in Corinth began to abuse its use, showing off that they knew other languages and even uttering words in a language that was incomprehensible to mankind. These things made me research even more the Bible my grandmother gave me to understand the truth.

Communicating with Jesus led me to realize my sinful habits in behavior and in the way I expressed myself. It was not difficult for me to feel that the music I had listened to so far was absolutely hostile to Christian principles, but there were also issues more difficult to spot that my Creator was yet to

5 Apostle Peter warns us against the potential of scriptures to be misunderstood, especially Paul's letters: "And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given to him has written to you; As also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things; **in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable bend**, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction." (2 Peter 3:15-16)

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teach me.

The distance between my girlfriend and I had increased, and I wanted her to participate in the joy of my new and full life. I looked for her and tried to tell her what I was going through. I invited her to come with me to a youth gathering at the church. Her consent gave me a lot of hope, because it meant that my Creator foresaw and orchestrated for my girlfriend and I to be together even before I accepted Him into my life.

We visited the evangelical church together for a while, until 1996 approached – when I had to enter military service.

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And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creatures that have life, and birds that may fly above the earth in the open expanse of the sky.' And God created great whales, and every living creature that moves, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.' And the evening and the morning were the fifth day. (Genesis 1:20-23)

The military service summons showed that I would spend half of its term in a city in the opposite part of our country. A new stage in my life was coming. The young people from the Evangelical Pentecostal Church (EPC) sent me a special postcard that contained inspirational and encouraging messages. I felt grateful for their sincere and loving care for me. My girlfriend was with us at the church to send me off and that made me even happier. I knew that the time in the military would be a serious test for our relationship, and I prayed that we would both stay faithful to each other so that we could then get married and continue together in God's way.

Life in the barracks was my first long-term experience away from home. My Creator used these circumstances wisely to teach me to trust Him more, to develop my communication skills, and to share my faith with others. I experienced both exciting and difficult moments. The first thing that bothered me was the ritual of swearing allegiance to the motherland. I felt there was a contradiction between the idea of devoting myself to the well-being of my homeland and carrying a weapon to kill human beings who are children of God. The tension grew until the day of the oath, and I decided to calm my conscience with the thought that this was just a regular ceremony that was not worth making much noise about. After the ceremony I realized that I was wrong because I had lost the sweet peace I had experienced

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since surrendering to my Savior. I was sorry for this compromise, because I knew that it suppressed my faith in my Creator. I asked Him to forgive me and help me to be more determined when faced with such situations, and He graciously restored my precious peace. I was just learning to trust His protection to solve problems instead of relying on human means.

In the large military camp there were places of nature. I loved going for walks and prayerful reflection. Once I approached the unit's fence without realizing that I had entered a guarded area. One of the guards came to me with a machine gun and asked me what I was doing there. I told him that I had gone for a walk, and he took me to the guardhouse where I had to wait for the commander of our unit to come and pick me up. While I was waiting there, I heard machine gun fire. I was later told that one of the young soldiers had tried to jump over the wall and the guard had fired at him. The boy was apparently in critical condition because an ambulance was sent to pick him up. I suddenly realized the seriousness of the situation; the soldiers who had taken me were really willing to shoot their own fellow servicemen. I was later told that when someone was caught trying to escape, the soldier who captured him received a certain number of days off as a reward. I realized what my Savior had protected me from, because I could easily have been considered as someone trying to escape the barracks. I prayed for the life of the boy in question, but never learned what happened to him.

In the barracks I often witnessed how official powers revealed the evil inclinations of the individual which otherwise remained hidden in civilian life. For example, a soldier from our unit, who had allowed himself to be absent for longer than the allotted time for leave (he apparently could not bear the social climate in the barracks), was ordered by the major to be punished by the soldiers themselves. I watched as he passed through the ranks of his squad's soldiers, each punching him.

Time passed and I started writing and receiving letters regularly. My mother had found out about my faith and it disturbed her, because she thought I had become a sectarian like my grandmother. My girlfriend also wrote to me. Her letters were full of quotations from the Psalms and words of praise to God. For a while it made me think she was firm in her faith, but I also

wondered if she was doing it for me. I also received letters from one of my closest skater friends. His military service was coming, so he was using his remaining time to devote himself even more to skating, trying to re-inspire me to this passion by telling me about his "skater" experiences. He even managed to connect me to another skater in the same barracks. We met and communicated, but my heart had already been captivated by the love of my Savior and skating dethroned, so I used the opportunity to tell him about my Creator.

In the barracks I met a boy from the evangelical church who shared my faith, and his example often encouraged me. Like me, he was careful with the new type of music used in church services. We shared many valuable experiences. I also communicated with others from my unit, and the closest to me, of course, were those in the same room as me.

My Creator taught me not to waste my time as I had done in the past. Whenever I had free time I learned words in English from a list I had made. I was reading my grandmother's Bible and the literature I had bought from the evangelical church in my hometown. To my surprise, I found that I could find more such literature in the military department's library. I read everything I could find about the Bible - from a family, scientific and historical point of view. My interest was so strong because it was not just a process of absorbing information, but part of getting to know my Creator. Even while lining up for breakfast, lunch and dinner I would silently recite the Lord's Prayer. I later realized that using the same memorized prayers erased the authenticity of my personal communication with my Creator, and I began to try to share my thoughts with Him as they were. This opened my heart to a more alive and true relationship with Him, and in the future I felt His sweet whisper in my mind more and more.

As I read everything I had available, I became interested in Bible prophecy. I wanted to know what Scripture says about the times we live in. I was particularly interested in the book of *Revelation*. I knew this book was special because in it my Savior said the following:

Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it: for the

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time is at hand. (Revelation 1:3)

The book was full of symbolism incomprehensible to me. I found a book about the New World Order that tried to connect historical facts and figures with the symbols in the book of Revelation, but I felt that it did not help me at all. I asked my Creator to give me understanding of the meaning of these mysterious texts.

Once when I was on leave, my girlfriend met me and we went for a walk around the city center together. There we came across a man who was selling religious literature. I was happy and even had difficulty choosing because I couldn't buy everything. I looked at the titles and bought the ones I thought were most important. One of the books was about the *Revelation of John*. Tired of our tour, my girlfriend and I sat down by a fountain and I immediately started reading the book in question. Everything in this book answered my inquiries of Revelation. I had no idea that anyone could know so well the meaning of the prophecies described in Revelation. My friend fell asleep and I continued reading. I realized that this book was from my Creator in response to my desire to understand the significance of events in the time in which I lived. When I returned to the barracks, I continued reading it.

The author of the book used the Bible itself to decipher the meaning of all those symbols that I had not understood. Through this method, the symbols took their place in a global picture that represented the past and present development of the great struggle between the forces of darkness and those of light.

The author of the book began with an interpretation of Revelation chapter 12, where the church of Christ is represented as a woman giving birth:

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, laboring in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them

to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up to God, and to his throne. (Revelation 12:1-5)

The dragon described here was Satan, as the Bible itself shows elsewhere (Rev. 12: 9; 20:2). The woman symbolized the church of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Isa. 62:5), and the child she gave birth to which the dragon tried to destroy was Christ himself - the glorious hope of all believers through the ages (John 16:20-22). Although the primary meaning of the dragon symbol is the devil, it also represented the earthly forces used by Satan, with which he tried to destroy first Christ and later the church. He failed to do this with Christ, because the Son of God remained faithful to His Father, and His crucifixion only sealed His victory over the forces of darkness:

And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brothers is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.' (Revelation 12:10)

Then Satan's attention was turned against the church of Christ:

And when the dragon saw that he was cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. (Revelation 12:13)

I understood that these words described the persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire after the ascension of Christ to Heaven. These cruel tortures and massacres lasted until the beginning of the 4th century when Satan changed his tactics, as the blood of the murdered Christians served only as seed for many more people to accept the Savior of the world.

The period of the Middle Ages followed, during which Roman Catholicism continued the destructive work of Satan in an even more dangerous way, adopting a religious character and introducing paganism into the church itself.

And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that

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she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for **a time, and times, and half a time**, from the face of the serpent. (Revelation 12:14)

And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshiped the dragon which gave power to the beast: and they worshiped the beast, saying, who is like to the beast? Who is able to make war against him?

And there was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given to him to continue **forty and two months**. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that live in heaven. And it was given to him to make war against the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. (Revelation 13:2-7)

The prophecy was fulfilled with astonishing accuracy. Pagan Rome (the dragon) gave its power to the papacy (the beast) and therefore the whole earth worshiped this power representing Satan. The author of the book I bought showed that this period of "time, times, and half a time" was the same period of "forty-two months," which a little earlier in chapter 12 was presented as 1260 days (Rev. 12:6). These were prophetic days, equivalent to 1260 literal years (Ezek. 4:6; Numbers 14:34). The period of 1260 was the time of papal rule (538-1798), up until the papacy's hegemony was broken through the indignation of the peoples expressed in the French Revolution. In the prophecy, this was represented by the words, "And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death." On February 20, 1798, these events were marked by the capture of Pope Pius VI by Napoleon's troops under the command of General Bertier.

I continued reading to be even more amazed by the astonishingly accurate fulfillment of this prophecy:

And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. (Revelation 12:15-16)

This happened towards the end of the 1260 year period, when the papacy persecuted all faithful believers through the Inquisition and the Crusades. When there was no place left for the faithful Christians to hide, they received the help of the newly discovered sparsely populated continent of America. This is symbolized by the earth/land, as it is the opposite of the waters, which are "nations and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" (Rev. 17:15). The story unfolding in the prophetic kaleidoscope was getting closer and closer to our time. I continued reading:

And the dragon was angry with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Revelation 12:17)

Sometime after 1798, when the era of compulsion and subjection in Christianity had ended, Satan would direct his efforts to a remnant of the church's offspring. This remnant differed from other Christian societies in that they kept God's commandments and kept the testimony of Jesus. It was easy to guess that it was the Ten Commandments, but what did the testimony of Jesus mean? The Bible interpreted itself again:

And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, see you do it not: I am your fellow-servant, and of your brothers that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for **the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy**. (Revelation 19:10)

From this I could understand that the gift of prophecy would be manifested in this group that Revelation called "the remnant". These two signs - the observance of God's commandments and the Spirit of prophecy - were quite specific. I wondered which society in the world could meet these criteria.

The author went on to make it clear that the attacking forces described in Revelation 13 are Satan's campaign against the whole world, and especially

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against God's people in the last days of human history just before the Second Coming of Christ. Verses one to ten described the papacy, which received the power of pagan Rome and ruled for 1260 years before receiving that deadly wound, and then the wound healed and the whole earth marveled at this beast. From then until the end of the chapter the actions of Protestant America are described as a two-horned beast coming out of the ground and performing great signs in order to make mankind worship the first beast. This power would also force the inhabitants of the earth to create an image of the beast, and whoever refused to accept the mark of the beast would be persecuted:

And deceives them that live on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that live on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. And he had power to give life to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, except he that has the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that has understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred sixty and six. (Revelation 13:14-18)

During the Dark Ages the papacy persecuted those who loved the truth through its influence over those with political power (the kings and nobles), and therefore an image of the beast at the end of time was also to involve the renewal of the union between church and state. But what did was this mark of the beast? This question was the culmination of my research.

By linking biblical texts the author showed that the mark of the beast is a forgery of God's seal:

Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, until

we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.
(Revelation 7:3)

And I looked, and, behold, a Lamb stood on the mountain Zion,
and with him a hundred forty and four thousand, having his
Father's name written in their foreheads. (Revelation 14:1)

If one could understand what God's seal is, it could easily become clear
what the forgery was. I was then quoted the following texts:

And it shall be for a sign unto you upon your hand, and for a
memorial between your eyes, that the Lord's law may be in your
mouth: for with a strong hand has the Lord brought you out of
Egypt. (Exodus 13:9)

Speak you also unto the sons of Israel, saying, truly my Sabbaths
you shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout
your generations; that you may know that I am the Lord that
does sanctify you. (Exodus 31:13)

Moreover also I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me
and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify
them. (Ezekiel 20:12)

And hallow my Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between
me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.
(Ezekiel 20:20)

I understood that the Lord was sealing His law in the hearts and minds of
His people and that the fourth commandment of the Sabbath is a special
sign of this process.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you
labor, and do all your work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of
the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work, you nor your
son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant,
nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is inside your gates:

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and
all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: why the Lord
blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. Honor your father and

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your mother: that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God gives you. (Exodus 20:8-12)

The Lord knew that this commandment would be the object of Satan's special attacks and therefore it was the only one that began with the word "remember." From this text I also learned that the seventh day of the week is Saturday, not Sunday, as was the widespread belief. I also learned that the book of Daniel contains the first volume of prophecies for the last days (Revelation being the second volume). In the seventh chapter of this book, the papacy is presented as a small horn coming out of the fourth kingdom of the earth (pagan Rome). What was told in Daniel reaffirmed the period of its rule in the Dark Ages, but with a clarification of the focus of his attack:

And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and **think to change times and laws**: and they shall be given into his hand until **a time and times and the dividing of time**. (Daniel 7:25)

I learned that the papacy made two changes to the Ten Commandments of God: it changed the Sabbath to Sunday and abolished the second commandment against the worship of idols, splitting the last commandment into two so that there were still 10 Commandments. I wondered how it was possible for a Christian institution to change God's law?! In that case, is it possible that the mark of the beast is associated with the worship of Sunday? It was all so logical to me.

Soon the five months that had been set aside for my service in this unit of the army passed, and the time came for us to be distributed to different parts of the country. The usual practice was to assign soldiers to units that were close to their hometowns. And in my case it turned out that way. I was assigned to a division in a town that was only 22 kilometers from my hometown.

Returning to my hometown for a few days, excited by the discovery of all these amazing facts of Revelation, I tried to share what I had discovered with my girlfriend. Unfortunately, she wasn't as enthusiastic as I was about this reading. I left the book with her, thinking that if she read it she would immediately understand how important it was for our future common path

in the faith. After all, in the beginning she had appreciated Christianity through me inviting her to visit the evangelical church.

Although I had been assigned to a nearby town, vacations in the new unit were even rarer than before. At that time the term of military service was reduced to one year. The old soldiers waited angrily at the doors of the unit to assure us that they would make the rest of our service painful. They asked each of us what our zodiac sign was and after the given answer they said: "No, you are no longer a Virgo; from now on you are a Beetle." I foresaw that I would have more problems in this unit than in the previous one, especially because of my faith.

My Creator had begun to awaken the sensitivity of my conscience, and things like swearing and lying I experienced as offensive to Him. When I was assigned to be on duty on the phone, the old soldiers quickly realized that they could not count on me to cover them, and this began to infuriate them. On another occasion, during a march two soldiers from my department openly began to mock me for my faith. When we returned in the afternoon, feeling burdened and humiliated by their insults, I opened the Bible in prayer and heard my Creator speaking gently to me:

Are the consolations of God too small for thee, even the word that is gentle toward thee? (Job 15:11, ASV)

Another young soldier who was with me in the first unit, feeling at home because this new assignment was in his town, became especially bold and began to behave defiantly, even towards the old soldiers. No one dared tell him anything, because he knew those in command over the unit. He started behaving aggressively with me too. I felt fed up with this and so I told the sergeant. I knew that this would only solve the problem temporarily and that he would then be even more aggressive. My Creator taught me to trust His care and to overcome fear. I was surprised that the man who previously tormented me became a friend of mine and even was defending me when others treated me badly. This is how I saw the fulfilment of God's promise:

When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. (Proverbs 16:7)

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The boy from the evangelical church was also sent to this unit, and we met from time to time to share our experiences.

I learned that there was a man in the division who kept the Sabbath, and I looked for him. They called him "thy pope" but his real name was Biser Yordanov. He told me about the difficulties he had in the beginning when he had stated that he would not work on Saturday. In contrast to the generally accepted styles of music popular in the religious societies I knew until then, I was impressed by his personal preferences for music – he listened to classical music.

Once we were walking behind the building of his unit and started talking about biblical prophecies. He opened his Bible to Daniel 9 and read to me the following passage:

Seventy weeks are determined upon your people and upon your holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.

Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and sixty and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troubled times.

And after sixty and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end there shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.

And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate. (Daniel 9:24-27)

For me this was the next amazing prophecy I discovered, predicting with mathematical accuracy when Christ would be born and the periods of Christ's life when He was on earth. These 70 weeks were $70 \times 7 = 490$ prophetic days, or 490 real years, beginning with the "commandment to rebuild Jerusalem." The date of the decree, which included not only the construction of the temple but also the restoration of Jerusalem, could be traced in the book of Ezra:

And the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and **according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.** (Ezra 6:14)

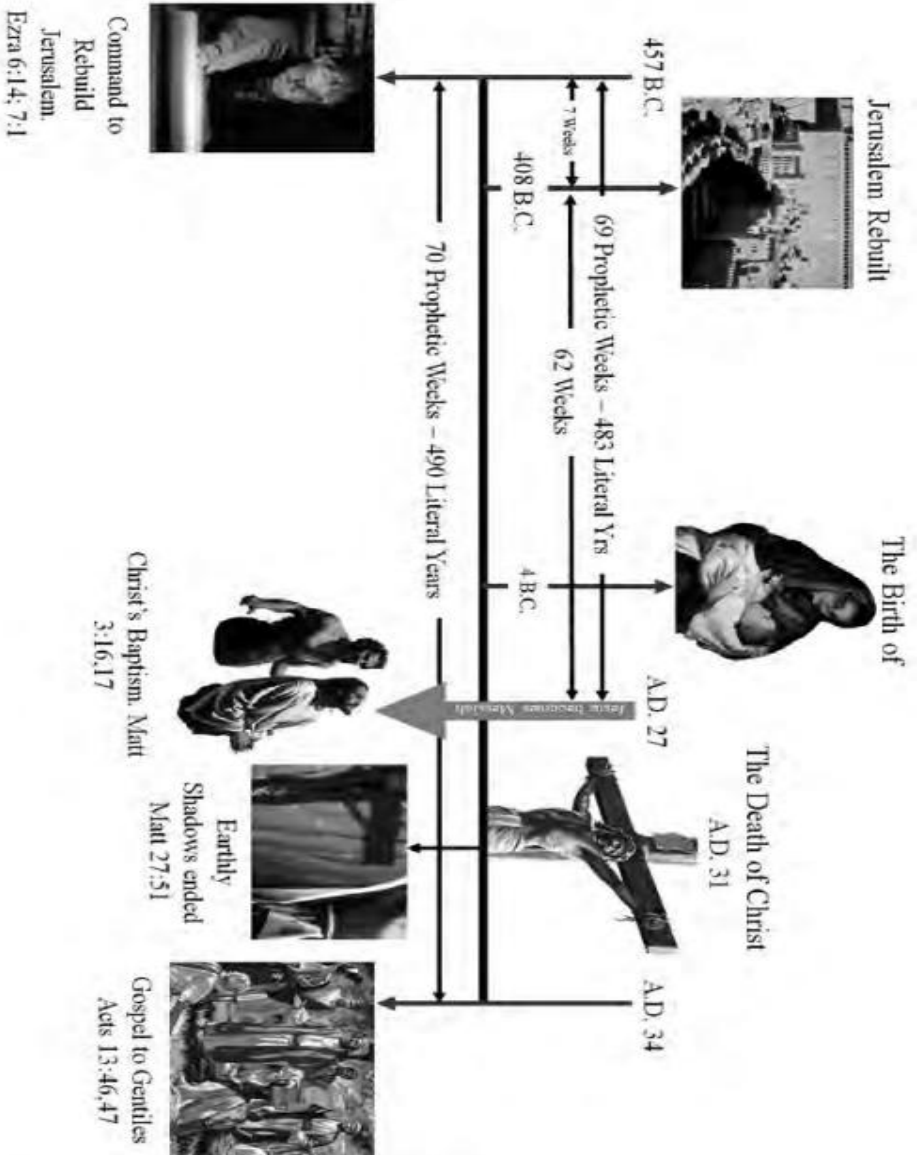
There were three successive decrees that could meet the requirements of the prophecy in Daniel chapter 9. The first was for the restoration of the temple (Ezra 1:1-4), the second strengthened the first after the work was stopped by the enemies of the Jews (Ezra 4:24; 6:1-12), and the third included the restoration of the city (Ezra 7:1-26). Historians show that the seventh year of Artaxerxes, when the third decree was issued, was 457 BC. Therefore, this is the starting point of the prophecy for the 70 weeks.

Of these 70 weeks, 69 reach the time when Christ began to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom some time after His baptism in 27 AD (457 BC + 483 years = 27 AD with the removal of the 0 year). It should be borne in mind that Christ was born 4 BC. and this discrepancy is due to the error of a monk named Dionysius Exiguus. The last week of the prophecy was set to confirm the covenant with all who would accept the teachings of Jesus. In the middle of this week, Christ was to be crucified, and this happened in the spring of 31 AD. The other half of the last prophetic week ended in 34 AD with the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60), and thus ended this period of grace and mercy for the Jews, who in the prophecy were called "his people."

After meeting Biser, I continued to read the other books I had purchased along with the one that commented on the *Revelation of John*. I had completed the Seventh-Day Adventist Bible course, and now I was convinced that they were the end-time society that was called the remnant in Revelation.

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Their story was an amazing fulfillment of the prophecy in Revelation chapter 10 which talks about how the sealed book of the prophet Daniel would be unlocked after August 11, 1840 - the date the Ottoman Empire lost its



autonomy when the Great Powers of Europe became arbitrator in its conflict with Egypt.

The eighth and ninth chapters of Revelation speak of seven angels with trumpets, the successive sounding of which represents the story from the first coming of Christ to the end of time. The symbols of the first four trumpets represent the destruction of the Western Roman Empire by barbarian tribes. The fifth and sixth trumpets speak of the expansion of Islam until the defeat of Byzantium in 1453. The fifth trumpet defines the period of Arab rulership as "five months", which is the 150 literal years starting from when the Muslim world united under a "king" – the Sultan Osman I, founder of the Ottoman Empire – and attacked the Byzantine Empire, until the Byzantine Empire surrendered to the rule of the Ottomans (1299-1449).

The sixth trumpet gives the prophetic period for the power of the Ottomans: "hour (15 days), day (1 year), month (30 years) and year (360 years)" - 391 years and 15 days. If we add this to the start date of July 27, 1449 when the new emperor of Constantinople humiliatingly asked the Ottomans for permission to rule – a 150 years (the "5 months" of Revelation 9) after July 27, 1299, the date of the beginning of the Ottoman attacking of the Byzantine Empire – we reach the date August 11, 1840.

In 1838 The Adventist Josiah Leach presented this prophecy, declaring that in two years Turkey would fall, and when it was fulfilled on the exact date it gave confidence to many scholars that the Bible prophecy principle of a day equaling a year was true. This is immediately followed by the 10th chapter of Revelation, which foretells what Adventists (those who awaited the imminent return of Christ) would experience:

And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven

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saying to me, “Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.”

And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, And swore by him that lives for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that in it are, and the earth, and the things that in it are, and the sea, and the things which are in it, that there should be time no longer: But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he has declared to his servants the prophets.

And the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again, and said, “Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which stands upon the sea and upon the earth.” And I went to the angel, and said to him, “Give me the little book.” And he said to me, “Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make your belly bitter, but it shall be in your mouth sweet as honey.” And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. (Revelation 10:1-10)

The open book was the prophecy of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary at the end of 2300 days, which remained sealed for Daniel (Dan. 12:9). This prophecy reads:

And he said unto me, “unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.” (Daniel 8:14)

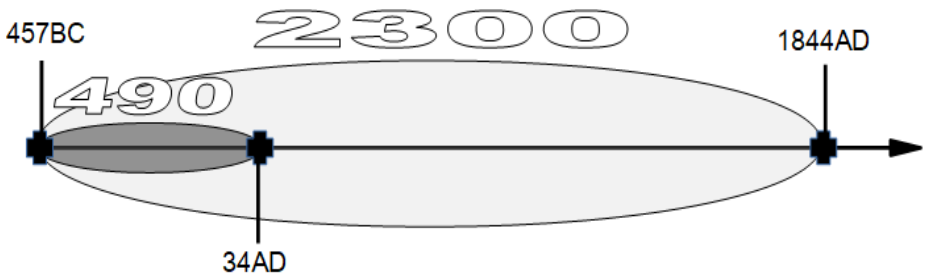
I realized that the beginning of this prophecy was given to Daniel in the next chapter, as it states the 70 week prophecy there was “cut off”. “Cut off” from what? From the greater period of the 2300 years. Therefore the start of the 70 week prophecy – the “commandment to rebuild Jerusalem” (Dan 9:25) – is also the start of the 2300 years, which then continues on after the first 70 week period ends.

This brings us to 1844 AD. William Miller believed that the cleansing of this sanctuary meant the Second Coming, as the Christian world at that time understood the sanctuary as being the earth and Jesus was coming

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back to "cleansing" it. He was right about the prophetic dates, but he did not understand the nature of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. When Christ did not come on October 22, 1844, Adventists experienced a severe disappointment, which in the above text in Revelation 10 is presented as John's "bitter belly" from "eating the book." This experience would test the faith of the participants in the Advent movement and prepare the sincere to understand that the heavenly judgment for the believers began on October 22nd.

In the aftermath of 1844, one small band of Adventists realized from Hebrews 8:5 that the services in the earthly temple in the Old Testament were modeled on the heavenly one – meaning there was a temple in heaven that needed to be cleansed. They then understood that after His resurrection Christ entered the Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, and in 1844 entered the Most Holy Place for the final intercessory work before He was to return. With faith in their scriptural study they followed Jesus, and what did they find in the Most Holy Place? The ark containing the Ten Commandments of God. Then they realized that throughout the Dark Ages the Sabbath had been trampled upon by Christians and that they must return to the true worship of God.



I read with amazement the detailed fulfillment of these prophecies and decided that I, like Biser, should begin to rest according to the command. It was good that he had paved the road in front of me, but how could I tell my captain that I had decided to rest on Saturday, when by then everyone knew that I, like the other soldiers, performed my regular duties on that day? I

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feared that all the sternness I had witnessed in this still new division would spill over on me in the form of cruelty and revenge. But because I did not want my decisions to be driven by fear, I went to my usual place of prayer and asked my Creator to help me stand up for this decision, no matter how would things turn out.

Shortly afterwards, I went to the captain's office and knocked cautiously on his door. From inside came his clear, piercing voice inviting me to come in. There was also another captain who led some of our practical classes. After a short ritual of my greeting and introduction, I was invited to explain what my wish was. I explained that my convictions had led me to observe the biblical seventh day, the Sabbath, and that I asked to be relieved of my regular activities on that day. The other captain began to say that the day off was Sunday, not Saturday. To this I replied that according to the Bible, the seventh day that God has set aside for rest is the Sabbath. He agreed, but then added that the Catholic Church had established Sunday and that we had to follow her command. I said I wanted to follow the divine authority, not that of the church.

It was at this point that the captain of our unit intervened, saying that it was not the time for such disputes and that his decision was to grant my request. In the corridor I wanted to shout with joy, seeing the obvious intervention of my Creator. It was such a decisive victory for my trust in Him in a humanly impossible situation.

On the first Saturday the old soldiers tried to get me to work, but I explained to them that I had the captain's permission, and from that moment on no one bothered me about it. The Sabbaths became a time to refresh my relationship with my Creator as I studied the Scriptures and enjoyed God's creation.

One of the Adventist teachings explained the problem of the condition of people after death. The harmonization of all biblical texts on the subject made it clear to me that the afterlife was not supported by Scripture. From the beginning of creation it became clear that the human soul is a sum of 2 components - body and living breath:

And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. (Genesis 2:7)

At death, these two components separate and the soul ceases to exist:

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

The soul that sins, it shall die ... (Ezekiel 18:20)

The doctrine of the immortal soul, introduced by the early church fathers, the chief of whom was Origen, was based on Greek philosophy, not the Bible. The spirit or breath of life that returns to God is not some consciousness of man, but the life-giving power of the Creator Himself:

His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. (Psalms 146:4)

For this reason, all the people in the tomb are in a state of unconsciousness, which the Bible compares to sleeping. I learned that the Hebrew word *Sheol* in the Old Testament, which corresponds to the Greek word *Hades* and is often translated in the Bulgarian Bible as "hell," actually means a tomb/grave, not some mysterious place where the dead live.⁶

For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but **the dead know not any thing**, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun ... Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; **for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, where you go.** (Ecclesiastes 9:4-10)

⁶ Compare for example *Psalm* 16:10 и *Acts* 2:27-31, where it becomes plain that David is in the tomb (*Sheol* or *hell*). Many time *Hades* and *Sheol* has to be translated as 'grave' or it doesn't make sense. For example, Jacob saying, "I will go to the grave mourning for my son [Joseph who he thought was dead]." Jacob isn't saying he will go to hell mourning for Joseph.

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But man dies, and wastes away: Yes, man gives up the Spirit, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decays and dries up: So man lies down, and rises not: until the heavens be no more, **they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.** O that you would hide me in the grave, that you would keep me secret, until your wrath be past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, until my change come. You shall call, and I will answer you: you will have a desire to the work of your hands ... **His sons come to honor, and he knows it not; and they are brought low, but he perceives it not of them.** (Job 14:10-21)

These things he said: and after that he said to them, “our friend Lazarus **sleeps**; but I go, that I may **awake him out of sleep.**” Then said his disciples, “Lord, if he sleeps, he shall get well.” But Jesus **spoke of his death**: but they thought that he had spoken of taking a rest in sleep. Then said Jesus to them plainly, “Lazarus is **dead.**” (John 11:11-14)

My hopes for eternal life with my Creator focused on the biblical faith for the resurrection that will take place at the Second Coming of Christ:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning them which are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so they also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. (1 Corinthians 15:51-53)

Here the apostle Paul describes the resurrection of the righteous. The resurrection of the wicked, however, will be a thousand years after the Second Coming:

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be released for a short time.

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

And when the thousand years have expired, Satan shall be released from his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and surrounded the camp of the saints, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

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(Revelation 20:1-9)

The wicked are resurrected only to receive the wages of the sins for which they have refused to repent of, despite the pleas of their Creator during their lifetime. I saw that this biblical sequence was perfectly reasonable and reflected a divine plan to deal with sin and restore peace and harmony in the universe. I found special relief in the explanation that the wicked will not suffer forever, as my grandmother had taught me. Their punishment will be according to the magnitude of their sins, until they finally turn to ashes, under the feet of the righteous, and then they will be as if they had never existed:

For, behold, the day comes, that shall burn as a oven; and all the proud, Yes, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and you shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked; **for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet** in the day that I shall do this, says the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 4:1-3)

For as you have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yes, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they **shall be as though they had not been.** (Obadiah 1:16)

The disturbing texts about eternal hell were explained in the light of God's just character. The Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New allowed a limited temporal application of the word *forever*, where it spoke of the inevitability of the destruction of the wicked rather than concerning an endless period of their torment. This became clear, for example, from a comparison of the following texts:

The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke

of their torment **ascends up for ever and ever**: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the animal and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name. (Revelation 14:10-11)

Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, **suffering the vengeance of eternal fire**. (Jude 1:7)

Sodom and Gomorrah have long since perished, but they are said to suffer the punishment of eternal fire. What a relief it was in my soul to realize that my Creator was not a sadist who tormented much of his creation throughout eternity while others admired the reality of heaven.

The doctrine of life after the grave is a development of Satan's delusion told to Eve in the Garden of Eden:

And the serpent said to the woman, "You shall not surely die:"
(Genesis 3:4)

This teaching opens the door to communication with the demons under the pretext that they are our dead loved ones:

And when they shall say unto you, 'Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter:' should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? (Isaiah 8:19)

The Bible records the story of one such session, a careful analysis of which makes it clear that the one who pretended to be Samuel the prophet, was a demon:

Then said Saul unto his servants, "Seek me a woman that has a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her."

And his servants said to him, "Behold, there is a woman that has a familiar spirit at Endor."

And Saul disguised himself, and put on other clothes, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by

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night: and he said, "I pray you, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto you."

And the woman said unto him, "Behold, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: that is why then lay you a snare for my life, to cause me to die?"

And Saul swore to her by the Lord, saying, "As the Lord lives, there shall no punishment happen to you for this thing."

Then said the woman, "Whom shall I bring up unto you?"

And he said, "Bring me up Samuel."

And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spoke to Saul, saying, "Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul."

And the king said unto her, "Be not afraid: for what saw you?"

And the woman said unto Saul, "I saw gods ascending out of the earth."

And he said unto her, "What form is he of?"

And she said, "An old man comes up; and he is covered with a mantle." And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself.

And Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you troubled me, to bring me up?"

And Saul answered, "I am severe distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answers me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called you, that you may make known unto me what I shall do."

Then said Samuel, "That is why then you ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from you, and is become your enemy? And the Lord has done to him, as he spoke by me: for the Lord has tore the kingdom out of your hand, and given it to your neighbor,

even to David: Because you obeyed not the voice of the Lord, nor executed his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore has the Lord done this thing unto you this day. Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines: and **tomorrow shall you and your sons be with me:** the Lord also shall deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.” (1 Samuel 28:7-19)

If this was the deceased prophet, why would the righteous come out of the earth and not from heaven? And why would Saul, who was disobedient to God until his death, go to Samuel when he died? The purpose of the demons was to completely discourage King Saul and push him to a final suicidal decision. Unfortunately, Saul allowed them to succeed, and instead of repenting and seeking God's guidance, he went to seek information from an evil spirit inquirer.

All these explanations formed a long chain of logical sequence, where each teaching was harmonized with the other teachings of the Bible to form a complete picture of the divine plan of salvation.

Still, it was difficult for me to explain the parable of Jesus about the rich man and Lazarus, in which the former is cast into hell while the latter enjoys bliss in Abraham's womb:

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.” (Luke 16:22-24)

Adventist literature explained that this was a parable and could not be made into a doctrine, but that did not help me understand why Jesus would create such confusion for Christians on this subject through a parable that was inconsistent with biblical teaching concerning the state of the dead. I didn't realize then that years later this question would come up again with even greater force to challenge me about my understanding of my

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Creator's true character. Only then would I find complete joy and peace from the realization that He is only love and there is no darkness in Him.

I learned that there was a boy in my unit who was a member of the Adventist Church. I knew him from the beginning, but I didn't know he was an Adventist. I was embarrassed that he didn't follow the Adventist understanding of health because I sometimes saw him smoking. He entertained the others with his sense of humor, but I was tormented when I watched a young man with such a high calling fall victim to the whims of the other soldiers. His case was a warning for my own experience as a Christian. I felt that the path of compromise was very slippery and quickly ruined all the precious achievements of our Creator in our lives.

I hadn't been writing letters to my girlfriend, and I started receiving letters in which she reproached me for it. I wrote her that the testing of our relationship in the end can have a very positive result if we are faithful to each other. I used the following biblical text, which, although it belonged to a different context, I found quite appropriate in our situation:

For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that you should receive him for ever... (Philemon 1:15)

I really hoped that after the end of the military service we would continue together on the path that Christ showed us. However, her subsequent letters saddened me a lot, because in them she sounded as if she had lost hope for our relationship.

Biser once called me as I was sweeping the area around our building. He told me that he wanted to introduce me to Adventists from my town who had come to visit him. There, in the visiting room, the pastor of the church had come, along with three other people. We had a short and pleasant conversation. I told them that I would be eager to attend church when I finish my military service because I was convinced by the scriptures that they were the people of God in the last days. And so it happened.

Soon after my dismissal from the military, and to my great disappointment, I learned that my girlfriend had started another relationship. If it weren't for my relationship with my Creator, I would be deeply depressed. But He

constantly encouraged me through His Word and gave me consolation through His presence. I was also glad to be able to be at my parents' home again. When I met my ex-girlfriend years later, she told me that her beliefs tended toward Buddhism.

Almost immediately after my dismissal, I went to the Adventist church in my hometown, which had formerly been shown to me by the man who had a negative opinion of them. As it was not a Saturday, the pastor's wife met me at the door and immediately invited me inside. I realized that the building was both a house of prayer and the place where the pastor lived with his family for the time he served the local church. There was tender music in the house, and the two children in the family played softly in one of the rooms. I felt inclined to talk to these people and especially to ask many questions on the Bible, to which I received satisfactory answers.

On Sabbath I came to worship and was once again convinced that my Creator had connected me to a new family of faith that strove to follow the Scriptures in every way. I also went to visit my old friends from my grandmother's evangelical church. My young friends welcomed me warmly. More than the joy of our fellowship, I wanted to share with them my new understandings of God's Word to help them come into its fuller light. I was sad when I felt that most of them responding with much reservation. I think someone had already told them that I was attending the Adventist Church.

Once in the evangelical church there was a special participation of young people and I was invited to tell something about my faith. I had prepared texts on the subject of the significance and validity of God's law, believing that this was a question that must be better understood by my friends. Before participating, all the young people gathered for prayer and prayed for me. When the service began, first the pastor had a short speech and then it was our turn. Just then I saw one of the boys go to him, the pastor said something to him, and a little later I was told that my participation was canceled. I realized that in such an environment it would be difficult to share what one thinks, because anything other than the teachings of the church was seen as a danger, even though it may be according to Scripture.

However, these disappointments could not stop the flight of faith that my

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Creator had gifted me by clarifying many vital topics to a Christian living in the last days of human history. My new Adventist family also encouraged me on this path. My memories of the first worship service in the Adventist church are related to the pleasant impressions of the appropriate solemn style of music and the thought-provoking sermon on the subject of creationism (the biblical science of creation).

I soon received a letter from a man reminding me that he was one of the visitors that had come with the pastor to meet me in the barracks. He was from my hometown, but as a church worker he worked in another town and invited me to visit him. I spent a week at his home. He often played wonderful melodies on the piano in the church, and the rest of the time he visited the believers in their homes and I accompanied him. We met people who needed our prayers and others needed advice on various matters of life. It was an inspiring and enriching experience. In one of the homes we watched a historical video series about the lives of Ellen White and the early pioneers of Adventism. I sensed something meaningful from the glorious days of early Adventism, when these people sought the truth as hidden treasures. I was glad to be part of the descendants of this world spiritual society.

We watched presentations by a black preacher explaining the proleptic view of the Old Testament sanctuary. The discussions about the two angels in the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary⁷ turned out to be a difficult topic for me, but I still understood enough to be convinced that the topic of the sanctuary deserves special attention and I decided to explore it from Scriptures in the future.

In my friend's personal library I saw a small book on the topic of wine in the Bible. It analyzed the various words for wine in the original languages of the Bible and their use. This study strengthened my conviction that the wine that Jesus made at the wedding in Cana of Galilee was non-alcoholic, as well as the one which was consumed during the Lord's Supper. I was pleased

⁷ The speaker shared the point that those angels symbolized Christ and Lucifer, which the believers considered as erroneous because in their view it would represent Christ as a created being.

that Adventists followed the true doctrine in this regard as well. Gradually, I began to understand and master the principles of health reform. Through the truth of the Sabbath my Creator helped me see that the precepts of the Old Testament were not obsolete, and there in Leviticus 11 was also a list of "clean" and "unclean" meats.

In time, I realized that God had given the Adventist people an extension of biblical health principles through the writings of Ellen White, and I gladly began to apply them. I began to notice that people in the church had different opinions on these issues - some were quite liberal, while others tended to extremes in their diet. I decided to follow a moderate position in order to protect myself from both extremes and not give a reason for my Creator to be dishonored in my life.

While attending Evangelical Church, I still dressed like a skater and did not feel any problem with that. The pastor of the evangelical church once gave me a remark because of this, but I didn't think I needed to change anything. When I started going to the Adventist church regularly, I saw that almost everyone wore formal clothes, and this gradually influenced me to start changing my style of dress.

More than any external reform, however, the new things I learned about my Creator were important to me. I longed to share with all my friends the excitement of my new life, so when I met the skaters I often told them about the things I had learned and about Jesus' love for us. Some of them listened to me with great interest, but I saw that prejudice and skepticism fueled by the ideology of atheism still prevailing in our country and the anti-sectarian propaganda of the media made them fear and be reserved. On the other hand, I had the opportunity to see who my true friends were, who were able to accept me as I was. Well, they turned out to be really few.

I continued to visit the pastor's family. We became great friends. I enjoyed the privilege of having a very erudite person to mentor me. The pastor took me with him every time there was evangelism in one of the surrounding towns.

Sometime around this time, I became passionate about playing the guitar.

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One friend showed me the different tones and another some chords, and I started practicing regularly. I started learning to play notes. I remember how much pleasure I felt when I first played a piece by Dionisio Aguado - I immediately went to share this joyfully to my mother. When I learned to play the guitar and sing spiritual songs, I was so grateful to my Creator that I would have the opportunity to glorify Him in this way in church and when we went to evangelize with the pastor.

Once in our town a conference of the IMRO – Bulgarian National Movement⁸ was organized under the title *Against the Cults*. In accordance with the usual policy in our country, the conference officially presented the various officially recognized denominations, with their negative inclinations, and Jehovah's Witnesses were regularly referred to as a sect. For the evangelical church, the remark was about exalted emotionality, and the bad thing about Adventists was that they used too much intellect in their faith. Of course, all the characteristics and remarks were contrasted with Eastern Orthodoxy, because it is the official religion of our country.

I followed with great interest the course of events. I knew that my pastor would speak competently, and I gladly listened to his comment when he was given the floor. People respected him for his behavior and asked who this man was? The local conference organizer was a friend from my skater years. I was sad that we were now in such opposite positions. We often had to explain that we were an officially recognized and traditional Christian denomination, not a sect. There was much speculation about this term 'sect' because its definition was based on secular rather than biblical grounds.

At that time young people, including my friends and classmates, began to come to church. One of them became especially close to me and we shared everything with each other. Conferences were organized in the church itself, in which we could communicate with believers from all over the country. When attending conferences in major cities, I noticed that secular style had already entered our church through young people. On the other side of the pendulum stood older people trying to prevent this wave of Western culture, but by legal and almost coercive methods, forcing young people to

8 A patriotic political party in Bulgaria

seek their own environments in the church in order to avoid sharp rebuke. In the face of this division I tried again to maintain balance which, however, I could not defend consistently with the Scriptures.

The problem in question was manifested when we went on joint youth excursions and attended camp meetings. The focal point of the problem was music. At the camp meetings, it was performed by young people who led the singing by special youth singers. I was amazed that many of the songs they did followed the style I was familiar with in the Pentecostal church, and that bothered me. But when I heard the sharp and critical comments of some people, I saw how it provoked a counter-reaction from young people. I didn't have clear criteria for judging the right music, and some time before that I had started composing music with my own style.

There was a group of young guitarists who proved to be at the forefront of youth musical performance. Many young people listened to them, but they too were sharply criticized by older preachers and soon lost popularity. I wanted to distance myself from this confusing discussion, and because I wanted to follow my Savior, I tried to be actively involved in creative activities that would benefit the people in society and those around me. Leading such an activity in my life was colportage (canvassing) - the distribution of Christian Advent literature from door to door.

Literature evangelists from the church came to our city and I went with them. We would meet many people, try to understand their situation and sympathize with them, and pray and share our faith. After the colporteurs left, I wanted to continue participating in such activities because in that way I could reach people and share with them the joy of my faith. A friend from the local church wanted us to do this together. Soon another preacher was appointed in our church to deal with colportering, and we continued this work with his help. For a short space of time all the settlements in our city were visited; we met many people, had many different experiences, and we distributed many books. Later, I participated in similar initiatives at the national level. All these experiences gave me more confidence in my life as a believer, as well as the ability to share my faith freely.

Various prayer groups had formed in my hometown in the homes of church

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members, whom I began to visit regularly to pray, to study the Word, and to sing spiritual songs. In the church they began to give me the floor more often, and gradually the idea came that I should become a preacher. I found that preaching was something that brought me great joy and encouraged me to study the scriptures more. In time, I received an invitation to train in a preaching ministry. I was very happy, but I knew that such an important decision should not be made emotionally. I asked to be given time to reflect and presented this question in prayer to my Creator. For me, the answer came as a conviction that my possibility to preach should not be formed according to the views of the church leadership and therefore I refused politely.

The apogee of this flight of my faith in my Creator took place when I met my wife. It happened as follows. When I was in my twenties my parents began to express their concern that, as a member of a religious community, I would probably not be able to get married or, if that happened, it would be an artificial event dictated by my church, not out of true love. I understood their concerns, but I trusted that my Creator cared about this very important and future-determining issue.

One day I received a letter from the same man who had invited me to visit him after service in the military. He wrote to me that he knew a girl who might be right for me. He was then appointed a preacher and worked in a different place from where he had invited me to visit before. With friendly concern, he exhorted me to present the issue before God so that I could have His guidance. There were several scriptural texts that advised me to take such a step properly (Genesis 24; Exodus 31; 1 Thess. 4:3-5). One of them was the promise I asked in faith from my Creator:

House and riches are the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife is from the Lord. (Proverbs 19:14)

I decided to respond to my friend's invitation, thus enabling my Creator to reveal His will to me through His providence.

My friend served several churches in the countryside at that time and wanted me to accompany him on his visit, including the church of the girl in

question. He also wanted to diversify the topics presented and invited me to speak to the church on his behalf, knowing that I loved to preach. The Adventist people begin the observance of the Sabbath at sunset on Friday, following the biblical beginning of a day at sunset (Genesis 1:5; Leviticus 23:32; Nehemiah 13:19; Mark 1:32; Luke 23:54, 56). So we began the biblical Sabbath with a Friday evening Vespers service in the city where my friend and his family were staying. In the morning we had to hold a service in another city, and in the afternoon we had to finish a service in the village of the girl in question.

The first part of the service is Sabbath school - a time for discussions on certain biblical topics which are studied during the week and on Saturday are considered under the guidance of a teacher. I have always liked Sabbath school because there I learned new things about my Creator and communicated with my brothers and sisters.

Shortly after the beginning of the service, a boy and a girl entered the church. They were obviously brother and sister. When the first part was over, I took a fifteen-minute break to freshen up at the entrance to the building, a private rented house. I was glad to be able to preach and I recollected the main points of the topic. At that time, Ruzha, the girl who came with her brother, appeared at the entrance. We talked briefly and the time came for the second part of the service.

In my sermon, I spoke of the "second touch" we needed as believers in order for us to see and fulfill God's will clearly:

And he came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to him, and begged him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw anything. And he looked up, and said, "I see men as trees, walking." After that he put his hands **again** upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. (Mark 8:22-25)

I was talking about how we all needed a full-fledged continuation of our experience with Jesus in order to be completely free from blindness and sin.

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This question was much more relevant than I had imagined then, because in time I realized that the history of the Adventist people had come to a point where we desperately needed this "second touch" through the message of the angel of Revelation 18:1-4, which are a continuation and extension of the Three Angeles messages of Revelation 14:6-12. This topic I presented on September 8th, 2001, three days before the fall of the towers, an event about which God's Word says:

And there shall be upon every high mountain, and upon every high hill, rivers and streams of waters in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall. Moreover **the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord binds up the breach of his people, and heals the stroke of their wound.** (Isaiah 30:25-26)

This was also confirmed in the Spirit of Prophecy in the following words:

“How comes the word that I have declared that New York is to be swept away by a tidal wave? This I have never said. **I have said, as I looked at the great buildings going up there, story after story,** ‘What terrible scenes will take place when the Lord shall arise to shake terribly the earth! **Then the words of Revelation 18:1-3 will be fulfilled.**’ The whole of the eighteenth chapter of Revelation is a warning of what is coming on the earth. **But I have no light in particular in regard to what is coming on New York, only that I know that one day the great buildings there will be thrown down by the turning and overturning of God’s power.** {Review and Herald July 5, 1906, par. 14}

The experience of the early Adventists in the mid-nineteenth century was the beginning of an awakening to prepare people around the world for the return of Christ, but this experience was thwarted by their fall into the Laodicean state, when most of them started relying on their own energies to keep God's law:

And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know your works, that you

are neither cold nor hot: I wish you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth. Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white clothes, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness does not appear; and anoint your eyes with eyesalve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and have sat down with my Father in his throne. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Revelation 3:14-22)

As can be seen from this text, in order to get out of this state Adventists have to accept the testimony of the faithful Witness, the Lord Jesus, which is the diagnosis of their sad condition so that they would accept his medicine - to be justified⁹ by faith¹⁰ and thereby see with the eyes of faith and reflect His glory (character)¹¹. At that time, however, I did not know this story of my Adventist people, but only vaguely and intuitively felt our "Laodicean" state.

After the sermon, everyone was invited to lunch and my conversation with Ruzha continued. It struck me that she was decent, and the more we talked, the more I found that we had a similar worldviews and common spiritual interests. I began to wonder if she was the person I had prayed for when I was in my hometown. At the same time I felt awkward because I was about to have my appointment with the other girl. My friend tried to intervene to show that we had another goal, but I made it clear that I did not agree

9 The garment symbolizes Christ's righteousness – Isaiah 61:10; Rev. 19:8

10 This is the gold tried in the fire – 1 Peter 1:7

11 The eyesalve is oil, which is a symbol the illuminating influence of God's Spirit – Eph 1:17; Zach 4:1-6; Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 1:23; Matt 25:1-3; 2 Cor 4:18; 3:18; Hebrew 11:27

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with him. In the form of a joke, he said that we did not come looking for a girl from the capital (Ruzha has her roots in the countryside where we met, but in fact she lived in Sofia. After some hesitation, because of her health condition, she finally decided to come to the countryside where her grandparents were. After time we both appreciated the providence of our Creator in this fact). Up to that moment, I was reluctant to look for a marriage partner from such a place, because I thought that the social environment of the big cities was characterized by declining morals and dubious spirituality. Like the Jews in Christ's day, I said to myself, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46) Yet my Creator helped me not to judge anyone by his place of living, but to search for "a woman that fears the Lord..." (Proverbs 31:30)

In those years I worked for my mother's lingerie company. I traveled all over the country, but most of our clients were in Sofia. I mentioned to Ruzha that I periodically travel to Sofia. She suggested we meet sometime at the church she attends. I remembered her words and this gave me courage to look for her on my next business visit to Sofia.

It was time to travel to the village where the other girl was. We were traveling in my friend's car, which I later learned he had received as a gift from a man that attended the same church in Sofia as Ruzha – a curious detail that eventually assured me of the tender care of my Creator. My friend asked me how I was doing and I admitted to him that I felt attracted to Ruzha. This seemed to bother him, but we both agreed that the meeting with the girl in the other church should not be canceled.

He asked me to preach there as well. I did not feel prepared for another sermon, so I presented the same message. But somehow it seemed to me that it was not accepted or understood as well as in the previous church. The girl was there and it turned out that I had met her before. She didn't seem to intent with trying to get to know me, and that solved the problem on its own.

I returned home happy and began to look forward to the time when I would go on business to Sofia. My uncle lived in Sofia, and that allowed for the opportunity to stay with him until Friday night to attend Ruzha's church.

Again I asked my Creator to make me able to understand correctly whether this was His woman for me, not allowing my feelings to be the deciding factor in this process. I understood that the person I would connect with, in such intimate relationship, would have a huge impact on my future. I also needed to know if I could be a blessing to her. I felt that such a decision required love, which I did not possess by myself, and this made me increasingly lean in prayer to my Creator.

It was time for me to go to Sofia. After meeting all my clients in their lingerie shops I prepared to go to church. I didn't have any contact with Ruzha at the time, so it all depended on whether I would find her there. I relied on my Creator that He would take care of us if we were to be together. It happened, despite the small probability. I later learned that she generally did not go to church on Friday nights but only on Saturday mornings. This time, however, she got off work earlier, and thus she was able to come. I was grateful that my Creator had made sure that our meeting could take place.

On my second visit during the Christmas holidays I suggested we write letters to each other, but she was embarrassed and did not answer. It made me feel like an intruder. Since I had left my phone number with her mother, I decided not to bother her anymore. If she wanted to communicate with me, she could call me. I didn't feel good about having to wait an indefinite period of time without any certainty of whether I would be sought at all. Again, I decided to leave this in the hands of my Creator.

Weeks passed, but she didn't call. I was tempted to think she wouldn't look for me. During this time, I continued to colportage with the new pastor and some other friends from our church. In the evenings I sometimes met people from the skateboarding circles, other times I met friends from the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, and I would share with both groups about my new faith, which I considered the closest to the biblical truth. It was joyful, and it somewhat distracted me from the growing frustration that Ruzha wasn't calling me.

According to my personal diary entry, on January 14, 2002, my mother said she was feeling very ill. Based on the symptoms, she expressed concern that she may have cancer. We talked about God's plan of salvation, and she

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asked me questions about what I had learned from the Bible. She informed me that during the night a voice told her that she had cancer and that she was going to die. To me this was a satanic deed, and I tried to encourage her.

My mother had never expressed faith in God before, but a little while after the incident she told me she had always been aware of Him and had somehow called on Him for help in difficult times. Now my mother's deteriorating health seemed to make her seek God much more consciously. Despite her prejudice against my unconventional faith, our Creator has given her confidence in the power of His Word.

She told me that just before my grandmother died, she asked her to promise not to stop me from going to church. My mum kept the promise. Then I realized that my Creator had been taking care of me at a time when my faith was still too fragile to endure stronger opposition from my family.

After that conversation Mom felt much better, and while we were still talking our home phone rang. It was Ruzha. She told me she agreed to the idea of writing to each other and gave me her address. My mother understood this and rejoiced with me. It was as if she had completely forgotten that I was attending a church which she considered a sect.

The writing of letters lasted about half a year. This means of communication gave us an opportunity to get to know each other before allowing the feelings experienced in direct communication to take precedence in our decisions. We would also see each other every time I went to work in Sofia. The memory of a meeting in the center, near the so-called bridge of lovers, is deeply imprinted in myself. We were sitting on a bench and decided to read something from the Bible and meditate upon it together. We read from the first chapter of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, and our attention was drawn to the following passage:

“Having made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he has purposed in himself [my Creator]: That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might **gather together in one all things in Christ, both which**

are in heaven, and which are on earth; (Ephesians 1:9-10)

The text in bold amazed us with how vast our Savior's plan of salvation was and how He longed to unite His creatures in heaven and earth, overcoming the abyss created by sin, through the transforming power of His love. In those special few minutes of reverence to this love, Ruzha and I enjoyed the opportunity to reflect together on a topic that will inspire all God's children throughout eternity.

Over time our relationship deepened. One day my mother offered me to go and live in Sofia to be with my girlfriend and to continue my on-the-spot distribution work. I liked the idea, but I asked my Creator to show me if He approved it, because in my hometown and its surroundings I had established relationships with many people who I believed needed me. I realized that my work in Dimitrovgrad and the surrounding areas had already reached some completion and that it was time for a new stage in my life.

When Ruzha found out that I had decided to move to Sofia, she was happy. We were glad that we would both have an opportunity to open a new page in our lives, entrusting the unknown into the hands of our Creator.

We rented a small shop in a neighborhood near the flat where Ruzha lived with her parents. I wanted to follow the principle of decency in our relationship and therefore I stayed in her home only for the time I was looking for a place to live. I called ads offering rooms for rent in the area where our store was, but I couldn't find anything suitable. Several times I came across an intermediary who offered me a room in the neighborhood where Ruzha lived, but I thought that, at this stage of our relationship, it was better for me to be close to my working place.

One day I came across the same intermediary again, through another ad. I was told again that they had a room in Ruzha's district. This time I agreed to go for an inspection. To my great surprise, the offer of accommodation turned out to be at the next entrance of the block where Ruzha lived. I realized that my Creator wanted me to be closer to my girlfriend than to my place of work, and this turned out to be another joyful confirmation of our relationship.

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The store needed repairs, and Ruzha would come to help me after she finished her work. I was 23 then, and I knew it was time for me not to rely so much on my parents' care. After a few months it became clear that the income from the store was not enough to cover the monthly rent, and I decided to continue offering the goods directly to the stores as I had done before. I regularly supplied several serious clients in the center of Sofia. My mother was pleased, and I began to feel more confident seeing that my Creator supported me in all this.

It was so nice to share my life with my beloved one. During the week we talked about what we had experienced at work, and on Sabbaths we would go to church together. We read the scriptures together and sang favorite songs to my guitar. One day we went to the pastor of the church and asked him to lead our engagement.

On December 15, 2002, in her parents' apartment, in the presence of our closest people, we got engaged; and on March 23, 2003 we shared our wedding celebration with relatives and friends.

Ruzha is a wonderful person, the greatest gift I have on earth from my Creator. We spent the first three years of our life together in the home of the Stamatovis - Ruzha's parents. In this home I found the warmth of family relationships shared and passed on between different generations. My parents loved me very much, but for one reason or another our family environment was not characterized by such cohesion. As an only child, I had grown up to be an individualist, which was why, at first, Ruzha's home seemed too social. But over time I realized that relationships of sharing, mutual understanding, and help given by sacrificial hearts create an environment which reflects more the heavenly kingdom of my Creator.

I have realized that over the years the pleasant Stamatovis home has been a joyful abode for many of their relatives and friends. I also felt free to invite my friends there, knowing that they would always be welcomed. Education was highly esteemed in this home. At the time we lived there Ruzha's cousin, who had come from the countryside and was finishing his studies, lived with all of us. I began to wonder if it was good for me to continue my education. Until then I had been looking at education as a predominantly

secular activity that could only distance man from his sense of dependence on God. Although for many people this can happen, I had rather adopted this thinking as a teenager when I preferred skateboarding and the culture that accompanied it, which distrusted authorities and institutions. But since coming to my Creator I have been studying the scriptures regularly, and this has piqued my research interest in many areas of science.

I remember one day when I was still in the rented room up late thinking about these issues, asking my Creator to reveal to me what His will was. I had a high school education at the time, and my specialty was refrigeration, a profession I had almost never practiced, except when I was helping my father, who had been repairing refrigerators for a period of our lives. My (then future) wife had a degree in library science and worked at the National Library. She had never required me to continue my education and did not treat me as an inferior because I had no higher education. However, I myself was increasingly beginning to see meaning in such an endeavor. The problem was that due to the neglect of education during my teenage years, my success was too weak to hope that it was worth applying to university.

When Ruzha's father, who was a professor of the history of philosophy saw that I was willing to try, he encouraged me not to worry about the ball assessment, and to make an effort in self-preparation. Many people still imagine that he "brought me in" to university and I can understand such thinking, but the truth is that my Creator blessed my efforts. Now I was personally motivated to study. For me, it was a way to broaden my horizons and increase my professional opportunities. I believed that our Creator would bless our new family with children, and that meant using more opportunities for professional fulfillment on my part.

I decided to apply to study History. My preparation consisted of reading huge textbooks on the history of Bulgaria, taking notes on key events, and subsequently writing a development of each topic in the syllabus. It was almost round-the-clock work for about three months. The summer of 2003 came and I took the entrance exam. The score was "Fair 3". I was sure that I would fall out of all the charts. The day we went to the "cry wall," as the leaderboard was called, I did cry, but it was a cry of joy – I had been

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accepted to Sofia University to get a degree in social pedagogy! I knew that for many young people in Sofia, this was not something special, but for me it meant a lot.

When my mother went to the college where I finished high school to ask for a duplicate of my diploma (I was so uninterested in my education that I had lost my diploma) to present at the university, the teachers there could not believe that Deyan the "skater" would study pedagogy.

In my personal diary, under the date November 3rd 2003, are found the following words:

My first grade at the university - Excellent 6

At the time, I was only slightly aware that even though I had left the competitive circles of skateboarding, I was still functioning in a world where values were based on achievement and performance. I did not understand that it was through this philosophy that the powers of darkness ruled the entire world, keeping people away from their wonderful Creator. This new stage in my life, with a new family living in Sofia, studying at Sofia University (in Greek *Sofia* means *wisdom*, this was human wisdom) and being a member of one of Sofia's Advent churches (some friends from the church in my hometown were not happy with my decision) would turn out to be the beginning of an increased revelation of my sinfulness and my even greater need for my Creator.

VI. THE BEAST INSIDE ME

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle, and creeping things, and animals of the earth after their kind:" and it was so. And God made the animal of the earth after its kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creeps upon the earth after its kind: and God saw that it was good.

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Genesis 1:24-27)

The academic community offered me open doors to various areas of human knowledge. I was wary of any philosophy that might tarnish my faith or distort the knowledge I had concerning my Creator through His Word, but on the other hand it helped to broaden my worldview.

After I transferred my membership to the Sofia Adventist Church, I gradually entered church life. Because my Creator had drawn me to His remnant people through the prophecies found in the books of Daniel and Revelation, I would continue researching these books and presenting what I had learned during the Sabbath evening services. In the beginning, the exact fulfillment of these prophecies had strengthened my convictions in the truth of the scriptures, but another purpose of theirs was to show us the times in which we live so that we might be spiritually awake and long for the transforming power of God in Jesus Christ:

Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keeps the law, happy is he. (Proverbs 29:18)

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We have also a more sure word of prophecy; to which you do well that you take care, as to a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the day star arise in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:19)

The dawn that Peter speaks of in this verse is Jesus Christ (Rev. 22:16). His "dawn" in my heart was to be the result of *communication* and *connection* with My Creator, on a heart level. But because of my ignorance of the nature of God's kingdom, Satan led me to try to define my worth through the knowledge I gained. Thus, I gradually sank into the general Laodicean state of my church as I imagined that I was advancing in the spiritual life:

... Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. (1 Corinthians 8:1)

Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: (Revelation 3:17)

Today, as I am writing these lines, I know that the kind of delusions I fought against then were not the real danger to me, because until I understood the nature of my Creator's kingdom I could not be freed from the bondage of this world as I was still reading the Bible with the world's glasses. My Creator had never wanted the knowledge I gained from science or even His Word to determine my value. To think that someone is more valuable than another based on one's knowledge, abilities, talents, income, or accomplishments was the principle of this world, but not the teaching of Scripture. I was about to learn what the value system of my Creator's kingdom was based on, but before that I would see how bitter the fruits of my own Laodicean thinking were.

It had been almost half a year since our wedding, but there was still no prospect of a new member of our family. My wife has always dreamed of having many children when she gets married. This was not something that I had taken the time to think about. Now, however, when I saw her suffering from the fact that she might not have children, I began to appreciate her dream more and more. When one day we saw the positive sign in the pregnancy test I wondered to myself, because the experience of my joy was no less than Ruzha's.

Although I hadn't thought about children in my future marriage, as a child I really wanted to have a brother (I hadn't thought of a little sister option at all). My mother used to tell me that this could not happen, and I thought that this was because of the restless environment of our family. Now that I realized we were going to have a child, it restored my hope of my childhood dream. But the difference between having a brother or a sister and having a child of my own included the increased need for a selfless love that I could only bestow when I drew abundantly from my Creator.

He longed to give me this love in order to take full care of my family, but I unknowingly blocked, albeit partially, the channel through which it flowed to me. In both university and church life I continued to seek value through performance and achievement, just as I did in the years when I skateboarded. Gradually I descended the spiral characterized at certain moments with pride, then with depression; all from the cooling love and joy that I found in relationship with my Creator. But all this time He did not stop to present to me the essence of His kingdom, giving me the opportunity to experience something of what He is experiencing with all His children.

Our daughter Neda was born on July 7th, a year and a half after the beginning of our marriage. My wife expected the baby to be brought to her immediately after the initial manipulations, but this did not happen. She was watching everyone in her room getting their dear beings, but our baby still didn't come. Finally, she dared to ask what was happening to our baby, and then she was told that she had been placed in an incubator due to problems with adaptation. In the evening the baby was shown to her briefly, and then she had to wait again. When she told me this on the phone I could feel the pain in her voice.

Five agonizing days of uncertainty passed without the child being given to her. On the morning of July 12th she managed to peek through the door of the incubator compartment, only to see that the phototherapy lamp for the physiological jaundice was not lit and the baby was not there. Although I tried to trust my Creator completely, the tension in me grew tremendously. Around 3:30 pm I entered our room in Ruzha's parents' apartment to pray. I knelt down and the first word I said in my prayer was "Father" and then I

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heard my phone ring. It was Ruzha. She was breastfeeding our dear Neda. My heart was filled with joy and gratitude to my caring Creator.

Ruzha and the baby were discharged while I was still trying to realize the great miracle in being given a child. Taking Neda from her mom's arms to her bed was the beginning of a whole new dimension in my life, giving me the opportunity to experience some of my Creator's feelings for me. I felt that this experience was too great for me to embrace. It would take me a while to gradually comprehend what it was like to be a father. The thought that something might happen to my child filled me with unimaginable fear, and it made me ask my Creator to teach me how to take care of the baby so as to provide it with an environment of safety and well-being.

Over the next two years I lived my routine of business activities and studying at university. At that time, the widespread use of computers and the Internet was becoming a reality in my country, and I spent a lot of time exploring the possibilities of the new technology, using what I learned for my studies. The downside was that the Internet captivated my mind and imagination for hours. Combined with the other changes in my life at that time, it took my time attention away from my personal communication with my Creator.

My participation in church activities also became a routine and gradually formalized into a mere ritual. The initial love and zeal cooled. My only more serious study of Scriptures, besides Daniel and Revelation, was on the subject of biblical chronology, which did not possess the capacity to draw my heart to my Creator. The realization that my church had formulated the basic teachings that summarized the theological knowledge of the entire Advent people also helped to lower my motivation to study the scriptures. Instead, I was inclined to feed my soul with someone else's research. The more I read, the more my false sense of being rich and needless of anything was nurtured, when in reality my soul became more and more miserable and my spiritual vision more and more blurred (Rev. 3:17).

I soon became aware of my misery when I saw how the shortcomings of my character, many of which had been unsuspected to me until now, became more and more apparent in my dealings with Ruzha and her parents. I was jealous that they cared for Neda, and my irritability made me behave

terribly. Then came guilt and feelings of inferiority. I began to realize that no religious claims could replace the righteousness of Christ in me. I needed a renewal of my spiritual life, but I didn't know how that could happen.

At that time, a Bulgarian Advent pastor became popular with his invigorating sermons, which I listened to with great joy. I shared them with Ruzha and we asked our Creator to revive us spiritually. These sermons really made me look for my Creator more, but the enthusiasm for them had a short-lived effect and could not lead me to a deeper relationship with God. Once a week our friends would come to our apartment to study the Bible together and pray. I am so grateful to my Creator for these meetings, because they were like an oasis in the desert for my desolate spiritual condition.

The time came when Ruzha and I began to consider a plan for a more independent life, outside the urban environment. Even before we met, I had read counsels in the Spirit of Prophecy about the right environment for the young family. Here are some of them:

In choosing a home, God would have us consider, first of all, the moral and religious influences that will surround us and our families. We should choose the society most favorable to our spiritual advancement, and avail ourselves of every help within our reach; for Satan will oppose many hindrances to make our progress toward heaven as difficult as possible. We may be placed in trying positions, for many cannot have their surroundings what they would; but we should not voluntarily expose ourselves to influences that are unfavorable to the formation of Christian character. When duty calls us to do this, we should be doubly watchful and prayerful, that, through the grace of Christ, we may stand uncorrupted. The gospel ... teaches us to estimate things at their true value, and to give the most effort to the things of greatest worth—the things that will endure. This lesson is needed by those upon whom rests the responsibility of selecting a home. They should not allow themselves to be diverted from the highest aim.... As the location for a home is sought, let this purpose direct the choice. Be not controlled by the desire for wealth, the dictates of fashion, or the customs of society. Consider what will tend most to simplicity,

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purity, health, and real worth.... Instead of dwelling where only the works of men can be seen, where the sights and sounds frequently suggest thoughts of evil, where turmoil and confusion bring weariness and disquietude, go where you can look upon the works of God. Find rest of spirit in the beauty and quietude and peace of nature. Let the eye rest on the green fields, the groves, and the hills. Look up to the blue sky, unobscured by the city's dust and smoke, and breathe the invigorating air of heaven. {Adventist Home, page 131, Paragraph 1-5}

Advice like this motivated me to look for an opportunity to live in a more appropriate place. We stayed in Sofia for the first two years because I didn't want to interrupt my studies and Ruzha's work. She wasn't ready to leave yet, and I didn't want to stress her out. When Neda was a year and a half old and we saw the negative effects of the urban lifestyle on our family, we decided to start looking for another home. Property prices in the deep countryside were affordable, but because these places were far from the cities, job opportunities were greatly reduced. The properties around Sofia were very expensive. The professions of both of us were not lucrative, and our parents did not have such funds. At this point my desire to live outside the city seemed unrealistic. If we started saving money for such a home, many years would pass and this would make the idea completely meaningless. But knowing that the moral and spiritual condition of my family depended on it, I decided to hold on to the promises of our Creator:

But seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:33)

What man is he that fears the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way that he shall choose. His soul shall live at ease; and his seed shall inherit the earth. (Psalms 25:12-13)

I began following the ads for plots around Sofia as if we already had funds, and my Creator responded generously to my faith. One day while I was standing at the computer looking at the ads, I received a call from my mother. She told me that my father had checked the prices of the agricultural land he had inherited from his father and saw that they were high at the moment. She also said that if he managed to sell them at a good price,

she could add to the amount for buying a country house. At that time my mother's lingerie business was in its most successful phase, so she was able to add about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the amount. This is exactly how things turned out, and I am infinitely grateful to my parents for not closing their hearts to the love of my Creator when He wanted to give a new home to my family.

It took us about six months to find the right village to have a school in. I remember one day kneeling with Ruzha and asking our Creator to guide us, because during all this time we did not find anything that met the criteria for a good environment and corresponded to the means at our disposal. The first ad we came across after the prayer was an old two-room village house. When our parents saw it, they were much more inclined to agree for us to live there, comparing it to the previous options. It needed structural repairs and sanitation, but I was so happy that what seemed unrealistic to many would soon be a fact.

There was a school in the village and not so regular transport to Sofia. Initially, I would travel every day to prepare the home. My inspiration grew when we realized we were expecting a second child. I knew that the best opportunity would be to find a job in the village itself. Again, I asked my Creator to guide me. Since I was studying pedagogy, I decided to try out at school. One day I entered the yard and asked the first person I met if they were looking for a teacher. I was told that they needed a tutor for the afternoon classes. I was also told that I would start working at a fairly low salary because I had not yet completed my education. I was glad to work with children in such a beautiful, natural environment. When I walked around the village, I felt as if being in heaven.

After several months of hard work the house was ready to live in, and I invited my wife and daughter there. They quickly got used to the place, and Neda would spend her most of her time in the sandstone of the yard every day. We were sad that we had to leave Ruzha's parents, but we still lived near Sofia and could visit each other often. Our Creator taught us to be more independent, as this was essential for the development of a responsible Christ-like character.

On April 23rd, 2007, our dear son, Svetlin, was born. When Neda was born, I

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was in the library of the Faculty of Primary and Preschool Education. There I found a collection of Czech songs and adapted the lyrics of one of them to celebrate our incredible joy together. Now that our son was born, I added a second verse to the song.

(23) Pod našim okýnkem

Lietamente Česká

Pod na - šim o - kýn - kem, ros - nou tam dvě rů - že.
И-ма-ме у до-ма цве-тен-це Ру-же-две,
 pod 'na - šim o - kýn - kem, ros - se tam dvě štěp -
а-ро-мат ты бо-гат, пы-ска на-вред.

Jsou na něm jab - líc - ka, tr - há je An - ti - ška.
Ско-ро то се-мен-ца ро-не-ше в 'до-чва-та

Jsou dob - ra, jsou slad - ká, jsou ja - ko med.
и се-га и-ма-ме цве-тен-ца две.

We've got at home
a flower, Ruzha
(hollyhock)

It sheds fragrance so
rich

Everywhere around.

Very soon it shelled
seeds in the soil, and
now we have flowers
two.

We've got at home
a flower, Ruzha
(hollyhock)

Time passed and
Ruzha gave birth again
and now we have
flowers three.



Living in a village with my extended family and working with children at school was a great blessing from my Creator. However, even this failed to stop the inertia of my spiritual decline in my Laodicean state. My condition began to resemble what I had been in 10 years before, at the end of my "skater" period, when I had had no desire to live and saw no meaning. Although I had now been blessed with a wonderful family and a dream job, the gradually moving away from my Creator had once again made me feel empty and without purpose.

I started listening to music from my past again, and to that I added watching movies full of all sorts of disgusting and immoral things. Worst of all, what I did affected our children as well. I ran away from the city to leave the "Babylonian culture," and now I greeted it again through my computer screen. When my father visited us, he insisted on having a TV in our house so that he would have something to watch. At first we opposed the idea, but soon Ruzha and I started watching some shows that nurtured the spirit of competition and demonstrated in an attractive way the system of value through achievement. During the commercials we read our Sabbath-school lessons, trying to calm our troubled consciences. It seemed easy to feed little Svetlin while his attention was occupied with the ever-changing images on the screen.

Maintaining such a lifestyle, for which I was largely responsible as the head of my family, was the sad result of my full decline in the Laodicean state. Going to church on the Sabbath, behaving as if everything was wonderful, actively participating in the Sabbath school and other church activities while leading an almost secular life during the week, proved to be the perfect environment for shaping this Laodicean I had become.

In church I had a close friend with whom we enjoyed sharing our experiences and Bible studies. Like me, he believed in the special mission of the Adventist people, and together we tried to understand what reform was needed to restore our people in order to carry out this mission. He had tried some things like a prayer seminar and a general study of Daniel and Revelation, but he didn't seem to find much help from the others. I was enthusiastic when I saw that he was making an effort to revive the church, and I wanted to partner with him in every way possible.

On his idea, we translated a book about organizing small groups for prayer, study, and sharing in the church. This had to be in accordance with the counsels in the Spirit of prophecy, such as the one contained in the following passage:

We are laborers together with God. Spiritual workers are needed not only to labor in the pulpit but to do personal work among the people. Too much time is devoted to the churches in preaching.

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This is not attended with the best results. The work of the Lord's ambassadors is to organize companies of workers to hunt for the souls who need help. Hours are spent in preaching that might better be devoted to house-to-house labor. In the spirit of Christ, with a heart all aglow with His love, seek to win the hearts of those in the families you visit. Give faithful admonitions and instruction from the Word of God. There are appropriate and applicable lessons from the Scripture that need to be presented in the spirit of Christ and in love for the souls for whom He has died. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" [2 Timothy 3:16, 17]. {Manuscript Release, Vol. 12, Page 240, Paragraph 2}

It was said that these counsels were so important that even non-Adventist Christian societies had taken advantage of them. We organized training in the church for the composition and proper leadership of small groups with different purposes in the church. We invited the leaders of the church and the pastor, but the initiative did not receive the necessary support, as everyone pointed out a different reason why it should not happen. The time had come for the spiritual rebirth of our church, but there was no power to give birth (Isa. 37: 3). This, combined with my personal miserable condition, completely discouraged me. I saw that although my friend still liked to share various things from the Bible with me, he began to gradually retire from church services. However, he demanded that I should read a book on prayer. I didn't see the point, but in the end I agreed. The book was nothing special, but it turned out to be an occasion for restoring the close relationship with my Creator, such as the one I had with Him when I turned to the faith in my youth.

The author suggested keeping a personal diary in which to record all experiences with God, such as problems and answers to prayer, biblical studies, meetings with people and more. This would create a memory archive in which spiritual experiences are not scattered and lost, but accumulated and developed in a complete history to be remembered easily for times of difficulty and crisis. Intuitively, I did something similar in the past, but now

the focus on my Creator would be more intentional and deliberate.

I started writing in my diary on September 9th, 2008. Later I realized that the date was not accidental, because it was exactly seven years after I met Ruzha, when I was talking about the "second touch" we needed as the Advent people of God. After some time, I realized that the date had not only individual but also collective significance, because 2008 was the seventh or Sabbatical year in the Bible, and the previous one was the famous 2001, when the towers fell.

Initially in that diary I would write down mostly the problems related to me and other people. I prayed for them, and below I would write down the answers to the prayers. For example, at that time I had already defended my bachelor's degree in pedagogy and I wanted to continue my studies, but I did not want to study the same things and therefore this problem was one of those recorded in my diary.

Another benefit I drew from the book about prayer was the advice to strive for a living and real relationship with God in prayer. The purpose was not to give long "lectures" to my Creator, but to rather open my heart before Him with all the pain and joy in it. Towards the end of the prayer, I would stop talking and wait in silence to feel if my Creator had to say something to me. At first it was difficult to set myself up to pray this way because I had already developed long-standing habits. But over time, this practice became a real and exciting communication with my Creator that I longed for. Although I tried all day to focus my thoughts on Him, three times a day I knelt in a secluded place, following the examples in Scripture:

Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud:
and he shall hear my voice. (Psalms 55:17)

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did before. (Daniel 6:10)

To this deepening prayer experience with my Creator, I added another

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element:

It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross. {Desire of Ages, page 83, Paragraph 4}

For this purpose I would choose a text from the Scriptures and meditate on it in connection with the life and death of Christ; a practice which for many years has repeatedly refreshed my spiritual condition, drawing heart and mind to my wonderful Savior. It was a time of peace, when my soul was feeding on the life of my Creator. That is why I called this element of my prayer life "bread." Over time, this approach has helped me read the Bible in a more Christocentric way and see depths in it.

As I also wrote in my diary some tasks from my daily life of a more routine nature, this not only helped me to be more organized, but also connected my prayer life with all the activities of the day. In this way I invited my Creator to be with me in the most ordinary activities of my life and my relationship with Him became stronger.

On the advice of my father-in-law, I had already passed three levels of English language studies, and when I prayed to find out what my master's degree would be, I was convinced that it would be good to continue my studies at the University. This gave me access to a lot of information resources and energized my intellect.

I wanted to lead my children on the path of Scripture from an early age. A friend of mine from church once showed me Sabbath school lessons in English for children of all ages. The lessons contained appropriate illustrations, basic verses to memorize and practical tasks for each day. When I saw that Neda perceived them well, I started teaching Svetlin as well. His lessons included large pictures, short Bible messages, and more

non-verbal assignments. Ruzha and I decided to benefit the children in the church with these lessons, so I started translating them.

The revival of my prayer life gave my Creator greater access to me, and over time I began to feel more of His re-creating power in my life. He began to breathe new life into my old biblical studies. But this was only the beginning of my "resurrection from the dead" and my coming out of the Laodicean state.

On Saturday, October 4th, 2008, a friend of mine delivered an impromptu sermon in the church on Genesis 1. He showed how those doubles which God had created during the six days of creation were struck by sin and no longer express the original unity, but rather opposition:

Heaven - Earth

Day – Night

Land - Sea

Man – Woman

Man's sin has made night, sea, and woman burdened with negativity. Then my friend pointed out that the solution to this problem was for us to be recreated (redeemed) by our Creator, which would give us new hearts, removing sin from us. This ultimately leads to a kind of *monism* that eliminates the oppositional nature of those doubles:

Heaven descends to Earth (Rev. 21: 1-3)

Night disappears (Rev. 21:23-25; 22:5)

There is no more sea (Rev. 21:1)

There is no gender (Matt. 22:30)

The biblical monism suggested by my friend made me think a lot, although I was a little disturbed by its philosophical tenor. It reminded me of one of my studies from the time I studied biblical chronology. This happened around the time Neda was born. In the evenings I would open the Bible and

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keep notes of all the times. I realized that the Scriptures are given in such a way that they allow for a consistent summation of years, from creation to the end of the world. Although there are some controversial points for chronologists, in general, sinful human history fit into a 6,000-year period, followed by 1,000 years of desolation on the earth, that is, a Sabbatical (rest) Millennium from sin:

And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more [it is because the wicked are dead and the righteous are in heaven and he is bound by the chains of circumstance], until the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be released for a short time. (Revelation 20:1-3)

Scripture showed that such projection of the creative week on human history was in harmony with the divine scale where 1000 years = 1 day and 1 day = of 1000 years:

For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. (Psalms 90:4)

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (2 Peter 3:8)

This allowed the events of the 6 days of creation, plus the seventh day of rest, to be seen as a model for the re-creation (redemption) that our Creator is accomplishing in our sinful human history.

My father-in-law was interested in Bulgarian history and had done his own research, which he published in a small book. Since it examined the connection between the history of the Bulgarians and biblical history, in its bibliography I could find the names of some chronologists whose research was related to my study. One of them offered an interesting look at human history as a projection of the events of creation. He showed that the four

thousand years covering the time from creation to the coming of Christ can be considered as a projection of the first four days of creation.

1st day: God separates light from darkness by naming the light “good” (Genesis 1:3-5)

2nd day: God divides water above the atmosphere from the water beneath the atmosphere

3rd day: God makes water withdraw so that the land might be revealed and to cause vegetation and fruit yielding trees to grow out of it (Genesis 1:9-13)

4th day: God creates heavenly bodies to illuminate the Earth (Genesis 1:14-18)

1st millennium: Adam eats from the fruit of the tree for knowing good (light) and evil (darkness) (Genesis 3:6)

2nd millennium: Human wickedness results in the Flood, which is the consequence of sin on the earth, pouring down water which was above the atmosphere and the eruption of water that was under the atmosphere (Genesis 7:11-12)

3rd millennium: God divides the waters of the Red Sea for His people to pass and settles them in the Promised Land so that they might yield the fruit of righteousness (Psalms 80:8-9; Isaiah 5:1-7)

4th millennium: Christ comes to Earth as the “Sun of Righteousness” and His apostles are symbolized as the 12 stars on the woman’s (Church) crown (Malachi 4:2; Revelation 12:1-4)

The author of this research did not suggest any continuance of this projection after the fourth day, yet for me as an Adventist it was no difficult to continue in the light of my studies of history and prophecy:

5th day: God fills air and water with living creatures; water “brings forth” “sea whales” [monsters] | (Genesis 1:20-23)

5th millennium: Papacy’s rise and dominion which is represented as a beast, which emerges from the sea (Revelation 13:1-10)

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6th day: God commands the Earth to produce “animals (beasts) of the earth”, and then He creates Man in His own image “breathing into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 1:24-27; 2:7)

6th millennium: Protestant America is presented as "a beast coming out of the land", so that he might make "the people on the Earth to make an image of the (earthly) beast and to "give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast would even start to speak..." (Rev 13:11, 14, 15)

7th day: “And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.” (Genesis 2:2)

7th millennium: After Christ's Second coming, the Earth remains desolate for 1000 years, resting from the sins of humanity (2 Chronicles 36:20, 21; Revelation 20:1-8)

It became clear that, because of sin, human history would reflect not only God's good works of re-creation, but also the degradation of man to the level of "beasts." These studies broadened my understanding of my Creator's plan of salvation, showing me that He works tirelessly to make us new creations in Christ:

Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

My renewed prayer connection stimulated me more and more to study the Scriptures with interest. Such a study would place me in a closer relationship with my wonderful Creator, and approaching Him would inevitably expose more and more the beast in myself:

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. ... And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the

Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. ... Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. (Isaiah 6:1, 3, 5)

For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. (Romans 7:9-11)

Knowing my Creator more meant the increased entering of His law in to my conscience, with a higher rebuking power to unveil my miserable, Laodicean state of moral nakedness and spiritual blindness. Since I would not be able to bear the full revelation of this misery of mine, my Creator would reveal it to me gradually, offering me the cure of His righteousness to every sin uncovered. I realized that I needed to invest time into this relationship with Him even when other enterprises seemed very urgent:

But seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for tomorrow: for tomorrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is its evil. (Matthew 6:33-34)

For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if you will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: (Psalms 95:7-8)

Therefore (as the Holy Spirit says, To day if you will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: (Hebrews 3:7-8)

Go to now, you that say, Today or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas you know not what shall be tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away. For you ought to say, If the Lord wills, we shall live, and do this, or that. (James 4:13-15)

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I didn't have to wait for Christ to come in the clouds to then commune with Him. Even now I could experience eternity with my Creator by communicating with Him. In fact, if I didn't do this, I wouldn't be able to participate in eternity anyway:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If [when] they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God again, and put him to an open shame. (Hebrews 6:4-6)

On October 12th, 2008, as I was praying and studying, my attention was drawn to the book of Joel. About a month later I noticed that this had happened ten days before October 22nd, the date when the Investigative Judgement started in 1844. Ten days before that was the Feast of Trumpets which announces the approaching of the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:24-28). In the first of Joel his message presented Israel's miserable spiritual condition and the coming day of the Lord. Chapter two contained a warning appeal to all the people with a trumpet signal:

Blow you the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord comes, for it is near at hand... (Joel 2:1)

This showed me that the messages of this book are especially relevant to God's people of the last days, living in the time of judgment after 1844. In my diary I wrote down briefly the contents of the book:

Joel 1:1-3 Preparing for extraordinary news

Joel 1:4-13 Crisis in the nation

Joel 1:14 Fasting and repentance to see their true condition

Joel 1:15-20 The crisis is full

Joel 2:1-11 God's army of horsemen

Joel 2:12-17 State of emergency; an appeal for repentance

Joel 2:18-32 A great blessing as opposed to the "northern plague" (Babylon)

Joel 3:1-16 The valley of Jehoshaphat (of judgement), signs in the sun, moon, and stars, harvest of crops and harvest of vine clusters

Joel 3:17-21 The new world

The more I thought about Joel's message, the more I became convinced that my Creator had timely messages for our Advent people, and that I would take part in their proclamation. Soon after, I learned that this same year (2008) marked the 120th anniversary of the preaching of Righteousness by Faith by A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner, yet I had no idea what it all meant. On November 1st, 2008, I wrote down in my diary two thoughts as a result of my communication with my Creator. I would not understand the fuller significance of their meaning until seven years later:

The Son of God and our identity

You have to learn how to walk with Me

And on November 8th, 2008, I recorded my following prayer:

Heavenly Father, show me Jesus.

There are so many thoughts in my head,

I want You to rule in my mind, heart and soul!

My Creator gave me the confidence that I had His guidance, even though I did not understand what might follow. A few days later He also told me that I lacked an understanding of what had happened at Golgotha, of how "mercy and truth met" there (Psalm 85:10), and what His "still and small voice" meant (1 Kings 19:12).

I knew that the message of justification by faith given to our Adventist people in 1888 through Jones and Waggoner was the most important message, but until then I had only read some of the historical material

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written in cyclostyle that was given to me by one of the women in my home town (Dimitrovgrad) church. On November 19th, 2008, I began reading the book *Christ is Our Righteousness* by Arthur Daniels, President of the Adventist General Conference after the messages were given. I did this at the insistence of my friend from the church in Sofia. I did not learn anything from this book that I hadn't known before about justification by faith, but as I read it, I was left with the impression that our people had not accepted the message. My determination to accept Scripture as the highest authority on matters of faith increased significantly during this period because I felt that being an Adventist did not guarantee that I had knowledge of the truth.

On December 3rd, 2008, I wrote the following letter to God regarding the cross:

My Father,

Glory to You for what You are!!!

By sacrificing Your Son, You have paid a great price for my all of my moral debts. You gave Him as a ransom for my soul, paying the price for my wickedness and iniquities. I deserved punishment and eternal death, but instead You offered me an abundant and meaningful life. Lord, You revealed Your salvation to me by showing me Jesus in His true image - as fully reflecting the glorious radiance of Your majesty and nobility.

You gave me Jesus to be my wisdom, meaning, justice and daily life. You have made Him my way, truth and life!

Thank you, my Father!

I am still troubled by my insensitivity to Your influence and guidance through the Holy Spirit. I try to look at Jesus all the time, but somehow I lose sight of Him imperceptibly and almost unconsciously. This worries me, but I pass this problem on to You, knowing that there is no difficult problem for You. Thank you for everything.

Amen

Now, as I am writing these lines (May 28th, 2020), I understand why I had lost sight of Jesus imperceptibly. Ignorance of the early history and teachings of the Adventist people hid the full beauty of my Creator from my view, because although I studied the Bible every day, I still read it largely with the sight which this world and the present Laodicean state of the church gave me. I had sensed something of this problem back then, on March 2nd, 2008, as I pondered Jesus' words that "every scribe that hath taught the kingdom of heaven is like a householder, that bringeth forth out of his treasure **things new and old**" (Matthew 13:52). In 2009, I memorized the following from the Spirit of Prophecy:

There is no danger for us as a nation but to forget the path that God has led us.

That was the Bulgarian translation. The actual passage includes something another important element:

We have nothing to fear for the future unless we forget the path the Lord is leading us and **His teaching in our past history**. {Life Sketches, p. 196}

It is no coincidence that this phrase was missing from my memory. I did not know the teachings of the early Adventists, and this prevented me from knowing my Creator as I should have known Him in the time in which I lived. That year I felt I needed to better understand the meaning of the so-called *Three Angels Message* recorded in Revelation 14:6-12, because I was taught that this was the message the Adventist people were to proclaim to the world. However, before I began to study it in detail, my Creator would turn my attention to the study of more topics so that on the one hand it could broaden my horizons and on the other to help me realize my need for a sure guide to "His teaching in our past history. "

The first entries in my diary for an expanding biblical study on the concept of the sanctuary I find in the last months of 2008. I reflected in detail on the importance of organizing the tribes of Israel around the sanctuary of Moses, the way out of Egyptian bondage to full sanctification. I looked at various aspects of the sanctuary: how was worship was done, the making, materials and color symbolism of its furniture, the meaning of its various objects and

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their systematic interrelation, as well as the purpose of the Levitical-priestly institution and its role. I was amazed at the compact, illustrative function of the sanctuary, which in such a small volume held the significance of the whole plan of salvation, in all its aspects.

In the first half of 2010, my research continued in the direction of analyzing the commemorative and prophetic function of the biblical calendar. Once a friend of mine from the church had come to the village where I lived to help me with some technical tasks. We talked about the biblical calendar, and he expressed the idea that the change of times brought about by Roman Catholicism in the Middle Ages (Dan. 7:25) was not limited to the Sabbath. This encouraged me to continue studying the concept of all biblical times to determine the damage caused by their change.

When I had to prepare my master's thesis, I chose to make a conceptual comparison between Dan Brown's then-acclaimed book, *The Lost Symbol*, and Genesis. Because of the special nature of the symbolism found in Brown's book, a friend from the church recommended that I watch Walter Veith's series on secret societies. Through this series, which I watched for months, I was introduced to an expanding study of the history of secret societies and the meaning of the many symbols and trade logos. The result was a paranoid sense of danger from all sides, in society and in the church. I soon realized that I should not live with such an idea of reality, because these thoughts and their accompanying fears prevented me from placing Christ at the center of my life.

Gradually, I began to see connections between the various topics I studied and connected them together in my own system. My memories of previous studies piqued my interest in more topics and I had to find a way to harmonize them. I decided that the most fundamental realities of life are time, space and events. I began to arrange the topics in them, trying to keep track of their relationship to the person of Jesus so that my research would not lose its central focus. This led to what I called JeTiSpaHiPro, taking the first syllable of the English words for Jesus, Time, Space, History and Prophecy. In this way the purpose of this program was formed - to study the person of Christ from the point of view of these 4 areas.

From the second half of 2010 to 2012, when there was a lot of noise around the Mayan calendar, I received many confirmations of my personal research from various Adventist preachers around the world. A friend of mine from the church referred me to the testimony of Ivor Myers, a former hip-hopper who became an Advent pastor. His experience was similar to mine because I was a kind of a former skater who had delved into the Bible. In his sermons Myers shared inspiring ideas, many of which confirmed my personal research. His central idea was that of the sanctuary as a universal model. At the time, I believed that the awakening of the Adventist people could be accomplished through their preaching.

Little did I realize that the emotional excitement of biblical revelations and individual aspects of truth was still only superficially revealing my condition, not allowing me to see the profound misery of my Laodicean condition in a way that would permanently push me into the arms of my Creator.

I suggested to the Church in Slatina that I should start presenting the JeTiSpaHiPro program on Sabbath-evenings, in order to arouse interest to the Scriptures, which eventually might lead to a spiritual awakening and reformation. At the beginning I started by clarifying the purpose of the program. I shared my conviction that God is preparing us to expand our understanding of biblical issues in order to be spiritually awakened and ready to appreciate His teaching:

No man puts a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up takes from the garment, and the tore is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved. (Matthew 9:16-17)

I argued that our hearts must become "new bottles" in order to appreciate God's teaching, but I did not imagine that this appeal would be so pertinent in light of subsequent events in our church. As I continued to present the series for several months, I realized that for my brothers and sisters in the church this process of deepening into the Word was difficult. Yet there were also some of them who came to me with undisguised interest after the

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presentation to continue the discussion. Some rejected my approach of interpretation, saying they had not seen the General Conference support such views. However, I saw all of these reactions as a good opportunity for feedback to see weaknesses in my ideas and the way they were presented.

As I presented the concept of the heavenly sanctuary, culminating in its cleansing after October 22nd, 1844, I became more excited than ever, realizing the importance of the times in which we live. I called on people to realize that the cleansing of this sanctuary has to do with our faith and whether we have paid attention to what is happening there at the moment. It is a process that should attract our full attention, because the case of each of us for eternity depended on it.

And he said unto me, “Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.” (Daniel 8:14)

I watched as thrones were set, and the Old Man sat for days, his garment white as snow, and the hairs of his head like pure wool, His throne flames of fire, and His wheels flaming fire. A river of fire came out and flowed before Him; a million servants served Him, and billions upon billions stood before Him; the court was opened, and the books were opened. (Daniel 7: 9-10)

I knew that the heavenly sanctuary doctrine was extremely important, and I longed to realize better the great value of that experience in which believers follow Christ with faith in the Holy of Holies in the heavenly sanctuary to engage in its cleansing from sin.

When I reached somewhere in the middle of the series, the pastor, who seemed unable to accept some interpretations of my understanding of biblical typology, came to talk to me. He asked me about my methodology of interpretation and how I understood that there was a typology in a biblical text or story. In the process of presentation, I had already shown that biblical typology allows many events and stories in the Bible to be understood as a pattern or model for events in our time. I have often quoted the following text in this regard:

Now these things were our **examples** [Greek: Typos], to the

intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be you idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents. Neither murmur, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

Now all these things happened unto them for **examples** [Greek: Typos]; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world have come. (1 Corinthians 10:6-11)

This text shows us that many of the events and experiences of God's ancient people Israel are a model (this is one of the meanings of the word typos) for us today. I was not prepared to answer the pastor any more than that. I just intuitively followed the approaches I knew. The pastor told me that there was an allegorization of events in my approach, which could be dangerous. He gave me a book on hermeneutics (the science of interpretation) by an Adventist scholar, whom I knew in part, but now I started reading again. Because I did not know the teachings and methods of interpretation of early Adventists at the time, I could not draw clear boundaries between the literal and metaphorical approach at the interpretation of Scriptures. Unfortunately, I did not find such in the book that was proposed to me. Soon after, I no longer insisted on presenting my series, seeing that it was beginning to irritate the leaders of my church. Only 2-3 years later the pastor and I would find ourselves in exchanged roles in regard to the approach of interpretation, but for now I had to move on to the next stage of my personal research.

I felt I had to focus on the heart of Adventist teachings, which was in the Three Angels Message:

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to them that live on the earth, and to every nation, and relatives, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour

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of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.”

And there followed another angel, saying, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”

And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If any man worship the animal and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascends up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the animal and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” (Revelation 14:6-12)

I knew this was the heart of the Advent message, but I reduced its significance to the exposition of the Papacy’s false Sabbath, and this only fueled my Laodicean spirit of self-righteousness, self-confidence, and condemnation. I began researching all the key words in this message to find out what the Bible teaches on these topics. For example, when the message of the first angel began with the words "Fear God," I researched everything I could find in the Bible on the subject of fear, as well as everything I found on the subject of God.

The result of this research was a book that I sent to the relevant person in charge for review and approval in the hope that it would be published by the Adventist publishing house in Bulgaria. I believed that if this happened many Adventists in our country would begin to explore these topics, resulting in the awakening of the people to their true identity and mission.

At that time, a man came to our local church who transferred his membership because he had experienced disappointments in another church in Sofia. He was interested in topics related to the principles of God’s kingdom and

freedom. He soon joined our discussions with my friend, and the three of us heatedly discussed our research. After all the discussions, the importance of the everlasting gospel as the context of the Three Angels Messages came to the fore:

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the **everlasting gospel** to preach to them that live on the earth, and to every nation, and relatives, and tongue, and people, (Revelation 14:6)

We wondered why only in this place in Scripture the gospel is presented as everlasting, and how did this relate to the Old and New Testaments and justification by faith. A little later, I and the newcomer to the church continued our research, in which we made a connection between Psalm 2 and the everlasting covenant made between the Father and the Son in eternity.

A few days later I found a wonderful confirmation of this idea in the Spirit of prophecy:

Before the foundations of the earth were laid, the Father and the Son had united in a covenant to redeem man if he should be overcome by Satan. They had clasped Their hands in a solemn pledge that Christ should become the surety for the human race. This pledge Christ has fulfilled. When upon the cross He cried out, "It is finished," He addressed the Father. The compact had been fully carried out. Now He declares: Father, it is finished. I have done Thy will, O My God. I have completed the work of redemption. If Thy justice is satisfied, "I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am." John 19:30; 17:24. (Desire of Ages, page 834, Paragraph 2)

It made an impression on us that this event is described as real and consisting of two tangible personalities. We came to the conclusion that the everlasting gospel carried by the first angel in Revelation 14 is a proclamation of this everlasting covenant, and that the realization of the meaning of this everlasting covenant would shed light on many important issues in the last days in which we live.

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For a long time I did not receive any response to the email in which I had sent the book on the Three Angels Message. One day the same person in charge came to our local church. When I asked him about the book, he told me that the procedure was quite long and that such a book could rarely be printed.

I wanted to share my research with someone, so I formed a Skype study group on the Three Angels Messages. In the group, I invited the pastor ministering the Slatina Church, my closest friend from the church, and some other people who I thought had a strong interest in what we called the "present truth." I began to present the topics sequentially, looking forward to seeing what the feedback would be. Despite my request that new people should not be included in the group so as to not dilute the discussion because they lacked context of what we were researching, some of the members added more people I did not know. It was some of these new people that would spark a revolution of thought in my mind and lead me in a new direction in life.

New Chapter here, something like (Diving into the Godhead and Meeting Maranatha Media)

In the beginning, people didn't take much part. To my great regret, my church friend dropped out of the group. The pastor joined in at first, but then said he was busy and would only follow our comments. When we came to the subject of the identity of God, two people I did not know at the time and later learned were from the Adventist Reformed society (a branch of Adventism that refused to bear arms during the war) began to ask me questions about John 3:16. This so-called "golden verse" of the Bible says:

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)

I was asked what we should understand by "the only begotten Son." I

told them what I had learned: that the Greek word for only begotten (*monogenesis*) means unique and one of a kind. I decided that these people were inclined to the teachings of denominations such as the Jehovah's Witnesses who claim that Christ is a created being. The term Arianism came to mind, and I wrote in the group chat that as Adventists, we do not need such teachings that undermine our faith in God. I then quoted texts that I thought represented each of the three members of the Deity as God, and stated that this was our faith, from which I did not intend to deviate in the least. I also expressed my desire not to deviate with side questions from the topic of the Three Angels Messages, which was the purpose of our study.

Later that day, I remembered that after one of his sermons on Advent history delivered a few weeks earlier, our pastor offered a written paper on the history of the Trinity doctrine in Advent circles. I hadn't thought that I needed such materials, because I deemed this question as too obvious to me. Now, however, I wanted to have this material to show the people in the group that we have always supported the doctrine of the Trinity in our history.

I wrote to the pastor via Skype, but he was not online to answer me immediately. Then I decided to look for information on the Internet, in English. I searched with the keywords "SDA", "history", "Trinity". I came across the site of an Adventist who I later learned had died and whose site was maintained by a friend of his. His research on the subject of the Trinity began with a historical introduction that contained the keywords I was looking for. This introduction tells how the early Adventists were non-Trinitarians and how a gradual change in our teaching later took place, led by Adventist pastor, historian and administrator Lee Roy Edwin Froom (1890-1974).

Just by itself the possibility of our spiritual ancestors not accepting the Trinity put me in an emergency mode, and I already knew that from now on I would not be able to sleep until I had clarity on this doctrine. The author of these studies went on to present his personal views of the Godhead, based on the Bible and the Spirit of prophecy. I downloaded these materials in PDF format and started reading them. The more I read, the more I felt what I had

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considered before as a sure foundation beneath my feet disappear, leaving me floating in the air. Reading the main statements of the materials on this site, I did not find a synchrony between the position of the author and the inspired statements. His views on the Deity were quite confusing.

I decided to share this with my best friend from the church. He told me that this issue had not been resolved for millennia, so I should not expect to resolve it. It seemed to me that he was probably right, but I wondered how I would live with such a contradiction from now on regarding the God I worshiped. As I researched these materials, I prayed that I would not be deceived. The idea that I could begin to believe something different from what my church believed filled me with indescribable horror. I was afraid that my Creator Himself might be angry with me for daring to study this subject. So at this point I decided to leave the Godhead topic and focus on something else.

Several months earlier I and Ruzha had been reading a book in English¹², which we liked very much because of its in-depth study on the principles of God's kingdom contrasted to those of spiritual Babylon. I had discovered this book by chance while searching for some materials in regard to a study of mine on Christ's identity, a fruitful study leading me to something much bigger. This book offered revolutionary insight into how our value is formed in the kingdom of God. The idea that this value did not come from our achievements, but from our relationship with God through Christ, was a beautiful confirmation of the doctrine of justification by faith, as opposed to humans trying to justify themselves before God by their works. In this regard, two of the biblical texts quoted in the book made a deep impression on me:

And behold a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17)

To the praise of the glory of his grace, where he has made us accepted in the beloved. (Ephesians 1:6)

12 This is the book Identity Wars which you can download free at <https://fatheroflove.info/book/view/identity-wars>

When Ruzha and I read the book, I began to realize that the salvational significance of the doctrine of Righteousness by faith, which I had previously thought I understood, was something I had yet to explore. I began to understand that for a long time I had used Adventist soteriological (salvation) terminology as clichés which for me had become empty of their content. When I wanted to learn the basic message of my Creator's remnant people (the Three Angels Messages), He graciously allowed me to find out how blind I was, realizing how little I knew Him and to strive to get rid of my Laodicean misery.

I was proud to be one of the few in the Bulgarian Adventist Church who did not abandon the preaching of the Three Angels Messages, through which I exposed the papacy and the fall of Adventism for their abandonment of these messages. My best man and I, who attended the same church in Sofia, had prepared an evangelistic series based on the text in Revelation. 14:6-12, calling on people in a church, for which the Slatina Church had a responsibility, to return to true Adventism. There was a lot of condemnation in my speech. Today, remembering this, I consider it a real miracle to have several people baptized among the others who attended the meetings. My Creator respected my sincerity, but he was to show me that in this process of announcing the investigative judgment which had begun in 1844, I had to see the beast within myself:

And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there. I said in my heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work. I said in my heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are **animals** [H929]. (Ecclesiastes 3:16-18)

These are the different meanings in Strong's Concordance for the term translated in English as animal in this text:

בְּהֵמָה b^hêmâh, be-hay-maw'; from an unused root (probably meaning to be mute); properly, a dumb **beast**; especially any **large quadruped** or animal (often collective):—**beast**, cattle.

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That is why it is translated beast in the YLT:

I said in my heart concerning the matter of the sons of man that God might cleanse them, so as to see that they themselves [are] beasts. (Ecclesiastes 3:18)

My condemning people not only could not expose the beasts described in Revelation (for the key characteristic of the beasts is their condemnatory spirit), but it actually supported them, for in my blindness I was led by the same proud and predatory spirit. Now that I was trying to turn my back on the subject of the Godhead and wanted to continue studying the topics of the Three Angels Messages, I searched the Internet for what else the author of the book Ruzha and I had liked had written. I saw that he had written a few larger books, so I had to choose, by title, the one that came closest to the topics I considered most important at that time. I focused on *The Return of Elijah*¹³, because the message of the typological "third"¹⁴ Elijah was another way to talk about the Three Angels Messages.

I already knew that because of the apostasy of our Adventist people, they themselves needed a movement in their midst to expose their wickedness, just as Adventism was Elijah to the rest of Christendom in the 19th century. In the process, however, I did not expect the spirit of Elijah to rebuke me, turning my heart to my spiritual ancestors whose doctrine of the Godhead I did not know at all:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. (Malachi 4:5-6)

13 You can download the book *The Return of Elijah* here: <https://maranathamedia.com/book/view/the-return-of-elijah>

14 In the typology, the first Elijah is the Old Testament prophet himself (1 Kings 17-19), the second is John the Baptist (Matt. 11:13, 14; Luke 1:17), and the third is the Advent movement, which in the spirit of Elijah and John the Baptist must prepare a people for the Second Coming of the Lord (Mal. 4: 5, 6). The second and third Elijah are not Elijah in person but only in the power and spirit (Luke 1:17; John 1:21).

The author of *The Return of Elijah* began with William Miller's dream¹⁵, in which God revealed to him rules for interpreting the Bible; these rules were represented as a key that opens a casket with gems of truth. The scattering of these diamonds was the result of the apostasy of our Adventist people by adopting a spiritualistic approach for the interpretation of Scripture¹⁶, but their restoration and newfound appreciation would lead them to shine in an even greater glory than they had done originally.

Later in the book, the nature of God's kingdom was clarified by recalling the principles of how one gains value in the kingdom of God, through relationships, as opposed to Satan's kingdom, where value is gained through fulfillment and achievement. It was clearly shown that depending on which kingdom you live in, you will read the Bible differently. Examples were given about the Sabbath doctrine, with "support" from the Bible, first to prove that the keeping of the Sabbath is legalism, and then that the keeping of the Sabbath is not a legalism. It became clear that the carnal mind was guided by invisible layers of thought, which in an unconscious way sustained what it craves for, causing us to read the Bible in the light of our own selfish desires.

Then I realized that my Creator guided me in finding this book to reveal to me the unconscious layers of my thinking where I betrayed Him and replaced Him with another god – the god of power that corresponded to my carnal aspirations. After all, Israel did just that with their God; why was I so arrogant as to consider myself and the Adventist people insured against such danger when it was clear that we were in a Laodicean state? In fact, although I knew until then that there was an apostasy in Adventism, I did not assume that it could be related to the replacement of the very fundamental teachings given to this people, the replacement of their own God.

15 See *Early Writings*, pages 81-83

16 This approach has its source in the lie of the serpent (Satan) in Eden, where Satan told the woman that she and Adam would not die if they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, even though God had told them just the opposite (Gen. 3:1-6; 2:17). In order for Adam and Eve not to die after eating this fruit, their source of life must be independent of God, that is, a spirit of immortality. In this way, Satan's interpretation of God's words creates a spiritualistic approach to interpreting God's Word.

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At this stage I still did not know that the author has devoted the rest of his book to the study of the subject of the Godhead as it was understood in Adventism. When I first saw this in the content, this time I was convinced that I should give my Creator a chance to speak to my heart on this painful issue. I was pleased that the author did not use a confusing approach to interpret the Bible, but simply wanted to follow William Miller's rules, which were supported by the Spirit of Prophecy through the following passage:

Those who are engaged in proclaiming the third angel's message are searching the Scriptures upon the same plan that Father Miller adopted. In the little book entitled "Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology," Father Miller gives the following simple but intelligent and important rules for Bible study and interpretation: [The first four rules are quoted] The above is a portion of these rules; and in our study of the Bible we shall all do well to heed the principles set forth. {Review and Herald, November 25, 1884, par. 23-25}

Two of these rules provided essential guidance on how the biblical teaching of the Godhead was to be approached:

RULE IV

To understand doctrine, bring all the scriptures together on the subject you wish to know; then let every word have its proper influence, and if you can form your theory without a contradiction, you cannot be in an error.

PROOF: Isa 28:7-29; Isa 25:8; Pro 19:27; Luk 24:27, 44-45; Rom 16:26; Jam 5:19; 2Peter 1:19, 20

RULE XI

How to know when a word is used figuratively. If it makes good sense as it stands, and does no violence to the simple laws of nature, then it must be understood literally, if not, figuratively.

PROOFS: Rev 12:1-2; Rev 17:3-7.¹⁷

¹⁷ You can find all Miller's rules here: <https://maranathamedia.com/downloads/pdf/The-Father-and-His-Son/History/Millerites/MillersRulesOfInterpretation.pdf>

Thus my Creator showed me that when the Adventist pioneers clarified the teachings contained in the Three Angels Messages, of which the Godhead is a fundamental part, they harmonized the whole Bible and accepted literally everything in it that did not contradict the "simple laws of nature."

The author of *The Return of Elijah* then showed how the collection of all the texts on the subject of the Godhead, in the context of the value system set by the very relationship of God and His Son, harmonized, in a beautiful way, all apparent contradictions. This was an astonishing confirmation of the culmination of my biblical study in regard to the fundamental role of the eternal covenant between the Father and His Son, as was shown to me in Psalm 2:7, 8, and in the final chapter of the *Desire of Ages*.¹⁸ The incredible treasure I found in this everlasting covenant I described in the book *The Legacy*.¹⁹ The *Return of Elijah* put me under the influence of the spirit of Elijah, who turned my heart to the teachings of my spiritual ancestors so that I may appreciate the treasure in the relationship between God and His Son as a literal Father and Son. Their real relationship offered me a restoration of a sense of belonging and sonship, through the Spirit of God's literal Son, and restored my faith in my participation in the inheritance of Christ given to Him by His Father:

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, **God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts**, crying, 'Abba, Father'. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Galatians 4:3-7)

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; **heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ**; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. (Romans 8:16-17)

18 <https://fatheroflove.info/book/view/desire-of-ages>

19 <https://maranathamedia.com/book/view/the-legacy>

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What joy was contained in the thought that God has a true Son, in the person of Christ. A Son Who He bore in eternity and to Whom in His amazing love He gave EVERYTHING:

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: (Colossians 1:15-16)

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell; (Colossians 1:19)

Now the truth clearly appeared before me that God created everything through His Son, and in this Son of His I could clearly hear His words that He was pleased with Him as referring to me personally. I was able to truly grasp God as a Father who loved me unconditionally, independent of my achievements and failures, which brought me freedom from ten years of enslavement in the value system based on achievements (failures), according to which I had lived both in the world and in the church.

Now I was at a fateful crossroads in my life. If I wanted to follow the true Son of God, it would put me and my family in painful conflict with my beloved church. Besides, a fierce struggle between mind and feelings raged within me. Because I had sought my worth through achievement for many years, my feelings were still confused and could not accept what my mind saw quite clearly in the scriptures.

This fierce struggle in me was intensified by the grief we experienced from my wife's miscarriage, losing what was supposed to be our third child. I can't forget Ruzha's sad look the day my father took her to the hospital so that she would have the dead fetus removed. Satan was oppressing me with the feeling that I was suffering the wrath of God because I had embraced what was considered by His church as "heresy". Again and again I knelt to receive assurance from my Creator of what I should believe and how to proceed. Every time I did this, He would give me strong confirmations through His Word and the writings of the Spirit of prophecy.

At that time, I started reading on my phone an electronic version of the book *My Beloved*.²⁰ It described the personal struggles and joys of Pastor Adrian Ebens when the wonderful truth about the only-begotten Son reached him. He was the author of the books *Identity Wars* and *The Return of Elijah*. Many times my Creator gave me timely consolation of His only begotten Son through the book *My Beloved* as I went through my personal doubts and struggles. I wanted to contact Adrian to thank him for what my Creator had given me through His ministry. I found his name on Skype and that same day we had a wonderful, fraternal conversation.

In those days, believers from different parts of Bulgaria began to contact me, showing interest to my book "The Legacy". Soon after we started a Skype group for regular meetings in which we shared our beliefs, studied together, and prayed for each other and for our brothers and sisters in the Adventist church. We longed to share with them the joy we found in the only begotten Son of God, but I still carried the judgmental spirit of a man who wants to preach the Three Angels Messages by exposing the fallacies of the church. After all, now, more than anyone in the Adventist Church in Bulgaria, I had reason to show what exactly our apostasy from the teachings of the founders of Adventism consisted of: accepting false worship in the doctrine of the Trinity, denying the sonship of Christ and turning the Holy Spirit into another being.

I still did not understand that the very truth about the only begotten Son contained the spirit of Christ's filial obedience to His Father, which is in complete contradiction to my beastly, judgmental spirit. My Creator would graciously allow me to manifest this spirit to my brothers and sisters, and especially to the leaders of our local church, so that I may see its bitter fruits and experience repentance. How grateful I am to Him that He has shown so much patience to me and that He has forgiven me all this. When I presented the truth about His Son in the church, no one was really able to dispute it, because it was according to the Scriptures. But then some leaders said, "Do you see what kind of spirit this man is leading by?" thus implying that what I presented could not be true since I am so passionate.

20 <https://fatheroflove.info/book/view/my-beloved>

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I was so anxious that through my unrestrained conduct I insulted the teachings of God before His church, and I begged for forgiveness several times, but the spirit of condemnation did not leave me. I just saw no other way to share this precious truth with our church. In time, I began to realize that God was revealing His only begotten Son to me so that He might make me free of my own judgmental spirit. This is something which took time because it meant a complete transformation of thinking. Ruzha, who witnessed my anxieties, encouraged me to contact Adrian and share with him what I was going through while I was trying to share my faith with the church.

Pastor Ebens had gone through a very difficult process with the church and had learned valuable lessons on how to have such relationships with the church which reflect the obedience of the Son of God to His Father, especially when the church leadership was in apostasy. These precious lessons are recorded and described in the book *The Divine Pattern*²¹, and they have been of great importance to me. Through these lessons I was helped to follow Christ's approach in appealing to leaders, and they protected me both from the spirit of rebellion and the spirit of compromise.

With the peace God gave me, I was able to more patiently able to appeal to the leadership of my church to show me what my delusion was. The pastor agreed to come to my home and examine my beliefs in the light of the Bible. It was an important and humbling experience for me during which the beast within me was rising again and again, wanting to tear everything around me because of the wickedness involved in rejecting the only begotten Son. About two years passed, in which I repeatedly begged God to make me free from the condemning spirit of my fallen nature.

A young family who had converted to the Advent faith and accepted the message of the only begotten Son went to the local pastor asking him to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. They were denied this, so they contacted me to ask me if Pastor Ebens could baptize them. This was Adrian's first visit to Bulgaria. We had wonderful meetings and great blessings in the Spirit of God in sharing the message and conversing with each other. The

21 <https://maranathamedia.com/book/view/the-divine-pattern-in-the-church>

young family wished to be baptized in the quite cold waters of Pancharevo Lake, while the woman was in advanced stage of pregnancy. The joy of the begotten Son of God raised her above all inconveniences.

On the significant date of October 22nd, 2016, after I presented to the church of Slatina my faith in the only begotten Son, my disfellowship was voted with 21 vs 20 votes. My wife and I didn't vote. We didn't want to agitate anyone, nor did we want to use all available means to maintain my membership in the church.

I felt intense suffering of the soul because of this rejection of the begotten Son of God by my brothers and sisters, and although over the years this feeling gradually diminished, I would experience it again and again, especially when I attended my beloved church. God assured me that this was not against me, but against His Son, but the judgmental spirit still held me strong, making me feel wronged and full of self-pity. God did not leave me, but encouraged me to continue appreciating the truth about His Son, by Whom I was accepted, independently from all my successes or failures.

By the grace of God, I chose to view my experience as the rejection of Joseph by his brethren. Although "sold" to Egypt, I could assist for their repentance by loving them with the love of the begotten Son and preparing "food" for them for the years to come.

In the years after my expulsion from Slatina Church, I saw many people who could not continue to follow the only begotten Son because they did not accept the lessons of His relation to the Father as they apply to family, church, and community structures. God blessed me richly, as a result of my efforts to follow His principles, for the right attitude toward the leaders of His church. In the years after 2014, many people with anti-Trinitarian views appeared in our country who did not see a problem with having a condemning spirit, which affirmed them even more in the Laodicean state to consider themselves "richer" than the "apostates" in the church.

I enjoyed the spiritual heritage that came to me through the only begotten Son, and I did not want to be identified with the anti-Trinitarian movement in our Advent circles. I am so grateful to the Father who opened my eyes to

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see the principle of genuine obedience found in His only begotten Son as it should be applied to the relationship between church members and their leaders. His patience with me assured me that He had chosen me to present these truths, despite the condemnation in my character, because He would transform me into the image of His Son to demonstrate the transforming power of His truth in my life.

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And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made. (Genesis 2:2-3)

Even at the time when I first read the book *Identity Wars*, I wanted this light to reach other people, so I started translating it. But other commitments took my time, and I paused the translation at the beginning of the first chapter. Later, when I accepted the message of God's only begotten Son and contacted the author of the book, he was glad that I wanted to share these precious truths with my countrymen. We created the Bulgarian version of the website *Maranatha Media* and I started translating articles and books from the original version of the website. I am so grateful to God because, in this way, He helped me every day to study and follow the growing light coming from His only begotten Son.

It was around this time that I learned that the message of our true identity in the Son of God had been preached for the first time two weeks after the fall of the towers in New York - shortly after I had spoken in the Adventist church of Peshtera town about the "second touch" which was of vital importance for our Advent people. At that time, I still did not know about the divinely inspired texts which foretold the beginning of the 4th angel's light in 2001 (Rev 18:1-3). Realizing the importance of this work, in the years after 2014 I devoted more and more time studying, sharing and experiencing the growing light. The blessings that have come to me and my family as a result of receiving and living in the light of these messages are innumerable.

In 2012, after seven years working as an English teacher at the local school, I was forced to leave to give my nervous system a break. I continued to give private lessons at home. I continued my studies at the University for a Doctoral Degree, returning to the Faculty of Primary and Preschool Pedagogy. At the

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beginning of 2015 I defended my dissertation on "Contemporary models of social education and work with the family." I started preparing myself for a contest which was important to getting the job I wanted as an assistant position at the university.

By then I was already intensively translating Maranatha Media materials. I became more and more aware of the fateful significance of this world movement, which was initiated by our heavenly Father and His Son our Lord Jesus Christ. I soon faced the dilemma of whether I would work at the university or dedicate myself entirely to the present truth. On the day I traveled to the Faculty of Primary and Preschool Pedagogy to clarify some final details with my supervisor regarding the contest, I felt the importance of the long reaching consequences of this decision. I prayed to God with tears because I felt the need of assurance from Him concerning which way to go. I knew I would need strength to follow the right decision as well.

As part of my doctoral practice, I had already given several lectures to students in the place of my supervisor. The pleasant feeling of sharing my views on upbringing and family in an academic environment was mingled with the tension of knowing that I was presenting those ideas in a secular institution. I decided that I could not go on like this. In the conversation with the supervisor, I fully revealed my identity and my desire to serve the students with my spiritual experience and knowledge. I knew it meant being rejected by these circles, which is what happened, but only in this way could I be at peace with myself. It was hard for Ruzha and our parents, but I have never regretted the results of this decision.

The truth about the begotten Son connected me with many people around the world. One day a friend of mine from South Africa, who had learned from us about the only begotten Son, sent me a book about the Bible holidays. I had highly valued the symbolic and prophetic significance of biblical feasts, but my understanding as an Adventist, with a Protestant heritage, did not allow me to see their observance as anything other than Old Testament obsolescence.

The book contained enough references to the Scriptures, the Spirit of Prophecy, and history to make me imagine what it would be like if the biblical

feasts, which I had hitherto considered limited to the Jews, could contain blessings for us today. The problem was that the framework in which this issue was presented in the book launched the feasts as a continuation of my legalistic experience as an Adventist, from which I wanted to distance myself in every possible way. If somehow these feasts could be seen in the light of the everlasting covenant that God revealed to me, then I could gladly embrace them.

Drawing my attention to the subject of the feasts reminded me that in those days I had listened to an audio recording of Adrian's address to his friends from the *Father and Son* movement. In it he expressed his regret that they did not see the blessing in the feasts that he had recently discovered. Later, books began to be published in Maranatha Media²² which showed how the light of justification by faith that came to the Adventist people in 1888-1895 allowed the biblical feasts to be seen in a framework in which the believer enters these God-ordained times, not to prove his worth to God, but to receive a greater blessing from the Spirit of the Son of God. In the context of justification by faith, the Sabbath itself was a gift of the Spirit of Christ. This gave me clarity on an issue that had been troubling me: how the Sabbath can be the "mother" of all feast days and yet not to be itself "nailed to the cross" because of its "ceremonial" nature:

And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, concerning the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts. Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, a holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings. These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons. (Leviticus 23:1-4)

The framework of the doctrine of justification by faith, as given to the Adventist people in 1888, created an opportunity for a beautiful arrangement of the pieces of truth, with the feasts being an extension of the Sabbath

22 This is the literature in the section „Everlasting covenant, statutes and judgements“ https://maranathamedia.com/book_theme/view/everlasting-covenant-statutes-and-judgments

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principle,²³ to bestow the long-awaited refreshment from the presence of the Lord:

Repent therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: (Acts 3:19-20)

The only begotten Son appeared before me as the cornerstone of the temple of truth, which was quite different from my previous ideas. Since all the value of the Son of God comes from His Father, this showed that the foundation of God's kingdom was not power, but that which was determined by relationships. To be justified by faith, we were expected to look to the Son of God as the author of faith and trust in our heavenly Father, fully receiving the inheritance from the Son of God that He had received from God:

I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, 'Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.' (Psalms 2:7)

...looking to **the author** and perfecter **of faith** -- **Jesus**, who, over-against the joy set before him -- did endure a cross, shame having despised, on the right hand also of the throne of God did sit down; (Hebrews 12:2, YLT)

Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. (Revelation 14:12)

In this context, I could see through faith how my Savior himself leans on His Father's bosom every Sabbath day and during all the appointed times, to receive and diffuse His Spirit which contains peace and enjoyment of the awareness that I am a child of God in which He delights, regardless of my successes or failures, regardless of my sinful nature:

And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God

23 More on this subject you can find in the literature of *Sabbath Fountain* section - https://maranathamedia.com/book_theme/view/sabbath-fountain

created and made. (Genesis 2:2-3)

Who has ascended up into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name, if you can tell? (Proverbs 30:4)

I wisdom [The Son of God – 1 Cor. 1:24] live with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions. ... By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth. ... I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, **I was brought forth**; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was **I brought forth**: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a circle upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as **one brought up** with him: and **I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him**; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and **my delights were with the sons of men**. (Proverbs 8:12,16,23-31)

Why the sons of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the sons of Israel for ever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed [H5314, נָפַח nâphash, ... to be breathed upon] (Exodus 31:16-17)

And they that shall be of you shall build the old waste places: you shall raise up the foundations of many generations [the true temple of God with the begotten Son for its foundation – Matt 16:15-18; Eph 2:20-22; 1 Peter 2:4-8]; and you shall be called, the repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to live in. If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, **from doing your**

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pleasure on my holy day [an attempt to recommend ourselves to the Lord]; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shall honor him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: **Then shall you delight yourself in the Lord**; and I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. (Isaiah 58:12-14)

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hid these things from the wise and prudent [in this world], and have revealed them unto **babes** [spiritually new-born]. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in your sight. **All things are delivered unto me of my Father** [because He was begotten by Him in eternity]: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whom soever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavily loaded, and I will give you **rest**. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart: and you shall find **rest** unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:25-30)

Let us therefore fear, lest, **a promise being left behind by us of entering into his rest**, any of you should seem to come short of it. For to us was the gospel preached, as well as to them: but the word preached did not profit them, **not being mixed with faith** [the begotten Son's faith in His Father] in them that heard it. (Hebrews 4:1-2)

Now I could really see the Sabbath as the message of sealing, because the beast in me could not be transformed by external and "cosmetic" corrections, but only by the regenerating power of the Spirit of God and through the Son of God – **my Creator**, which poured out in increasing quantity on the Sabbath and in His appointed times.²⁴ With this wonderful news, God showed me HOW He would give me strength for my transformation. However, I had

24 More on this you can study in the book *Living Bread from Heaven* accessible at <https://maranathamedia.com/book/view/living-bread-from-heaven>

yet to learn exactly what His image was, according to which I should be modeled. This is where the beast in me would be exposed to such an extent that it would come out with all its fury to tear me apart, because it saw that its power was about to be ultimately taken.

Once, while we were talking on Skype, Adrian told me that he had a very difficult research task ahead of himself. He needed God's wisdom to harmonize many biblical texts in relation to God's character. The book *Calvary in Egypt*²⁵ was soon published on Maranatha Media website. As I was translating this little book, I began to see how the light we have from the Adventist pioneers concerning the only begotten Son of God was extending through the perpetual cross of Christ, which was presented in the message of justification by faith given in 1888-1895, to reveal an incredibly beautiful picture of God's non-violent nature that was completely unknown to me.

I realized that I had limited the light that flowed from Golgotha where my Savior suffered 2,000 years ago. Through applying the divine pattern in the relationship of the Father (source) and the Son (channel) to the cross, it became clear that Christ's sufferings 2,000 years ago were only an outward expression of His suffering throughout history since the inception of sin. He stood on the cross for six hours, revealing the fact that our sins had been piercing Him for 6,000 years.

In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bore them, and carried them all the days of old. (Isaiah 63:9)

... seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God again, and put him to an open shame. (Hebrews 6:6)

Always carrying in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. (2 Corinthians 4:10)

Now while I was translating Pastor Ebens' first book on the nonviolent nature of our heavenly Father, the light of the cross began to rise in my mind with the realization of the sufferings of Christ in His Egyptian children:

25 <https://maranathamedia.com/book/view/calvary-in-egypt>

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And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and **Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.** (Revelation 11:8)

From then until today this precious light is growing, as reflected in the Character of God section at maranathamedia.com²⁶ and at the website fatheroflove.info, which we have created for the general public not familiar with the specifics of Advent history.

We Adventists have always warned people not to accept the "mark of the beast" in the face of Sunday. I have been doing this myself for more than 16 years. However, the mark is placed on those who worship the beast and its image.

And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God..." (Revelation 14:9-11)

It is not difficult to see in the quoted text that the forgery of the worship of the true God and His Son is associated with a worship of the beast and its image. In this imitation the beast is in the place of the Father, and His Son is forged through the image of the beast.

... Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

... Who [Christ] being the brightness of his [the Father] glory, and the express image of his person, (Евреи 1:3)

As the begotten Son of God from eternity and perfectly expressing the image of the Father, Christ is an exact copy of His Father, both outwardly and in character. This means that His whole life on earth has revealed, in every detail, what God is like.

I have glorified you on the earth: I have finished the work which you gave me to do. (John 17:4)

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it suffices us."

26 www.maranathamedia.com

Jesus said to him, "Have I been such a long time with you, and yet have you not known me, Philip? He that has seen me has seen the Father; so why do you say then, show us the Father?" (John 14:8-9)

The whole life of Christ is filled with works of unparalleled mercy, kindness, and love. Then why does the message that the Adventist people are to present to the world contain the "the most fearful threatening ever"²⁷, in which my Creator is presented as driven by dizzying rage, threatening to torment for all eternity all those who worship the beast and have not accepted His Son? And the Son of God, in this message, is presented as the slaughtered Lamb, as if he has taken all the impact of this anger on Himself?

And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the animal and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, **The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God**, which is poured out without mixture into **the cup of his indignation**; and **he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone** in the presence of the holy angels, and **in the presence of the Lamb**: And the smoke of **their torment ascends up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night**, who worship the animal and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name. (Revelation 14:9-11)

In the results of our research, which came in response to earnest prayer and a desire to reconcile the testimony of the life and character of Christ with the whole Bible, it became unequivocally clear that God's Word was written in a way that was meeting man in His sinful thinking.²⁸ It was simply another

27 The Great Controversy, page 449, Paragraph 2
<https://fatheroflove.info/book/view/great-controversy>

28 "The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words. Thus is shown God's condescension. He meets fallen human beings where they are. The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought. Instead of the expressions of the Bible being exaggerated, as many people suppose, the strong expressions break down before the magnificence of the thought, though the penman selected the most expressive language through which to convey the truths of

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application of the incarnation principle where the Son of God takes upon Himself our fallen nature in order to reach us with His divine nature²⁹. He had to do this so we could endure the beauty of God's character without being consumed by our own guilt when we enter His presence:

And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the middle of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. (Exodus 3:2)

The Scriptures follow the same principle where the perfection of God's character is revealed through the imperfect language of man. Human communication systems bear the imprint of our fallen state. God's word in the human language of the Bible connects us to God's thoughts through imperfect human expression. Thus Christ, being the real Son of God and the real Son of Man, is indeed the way to the Father - the only way to the perfect knowledge of His character:

And he [Jacob] dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. (Genesis 28:12)

And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." (John 1:51)

Jesus said to him, "Have I been such a long time with you, and yet have you not known me, Philip? He that has seen me has seen the Father; so why do you say then, Show us the Father?" (John 14:9)

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man

higher education. Sinful beings can only bear to look upon a shadow of the brightness of heaven's glory." White, E. G., Letter 121, 1901. {1 Selected Messages, page 22, Paragraph 31}

29 "The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. **Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity.** The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes." {Ibid, Page 20, Paragraph 2}

comes to the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6)

This way is reflected in the Sanctuary:

Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary: (Psalms 77:13)

The reason for having the courtyard, Holy Place, and Most Holy Place, was not because God becomes holier when He moves to the innermost part, but because our understanding of Him is purified and perfected as a result of our following of God’s Son. Purification from sin enables us to perfect our perceptions and ability to understand God’s thoughts and His character as they are revealed by His Son on the Earth.

I began to understand how the variety of metals, in the compartments of the sanctuary, reflected the stages of this journey to God’s character. The objects in the courtyard are made of brass, in the Holy Place of silver and gold, and in the Most Holy of pure gold.

Courtyard

And you shall make an altar [for sacrifices] of acacia wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be foursquare: and the height thereof shall be three cubits. And you shall make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof: his horns shall be of the same: and you shall **overlay it with brass**. (Exodus 27:1-2)

You shall also make a **basin of brass**, and his **foot also of brass**, to wash with: and you shall put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and you shall put water in it (Exodus 30:18)

Holy Place

And you shall make the boards for the tabernacle, twenty boards on the south side southward. And you shall make **forty sockets of silver under the twenty boards**; two sockets under one board for his two tenons, and two sockets under another board for his two tenons. (Exodus 26:18-19)

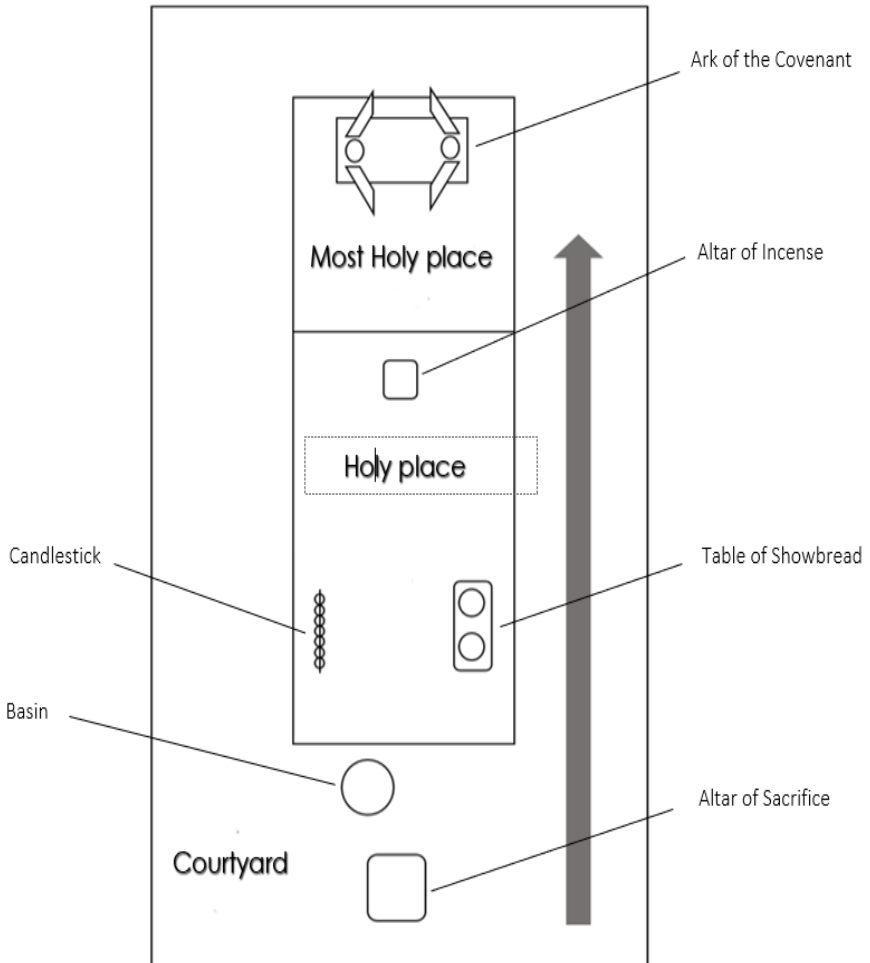
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And you shall make a **lampstand of pure gold**: of beaten work shall the lampstand be made: his shaft, and his branches, his bowls, his buds, and his flowers, shall be of the same. (Exodus 25:31)

You shall also make a table of acacia wood: two cubits shall be the length thereof and a cubit the breadth thereof and a cubit



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and a half the height thereof, and you shall **overlay it with pure gold**, and make thereto a **crown of gold round about**. (Exodus 25:23-24)

And you shall make an altar to burn incense upon: of acacia wood shall you make it. A cubit shall be the length thereof and a cubit the breadth thereof; foursquare shall it be: and two cubits shall be the height thereof: the horns thereof shall be of the same. And you shall overlay it with pure gold, the top thereof and the sides thereof round about, and the horns there and you shall make unto it a crown of gold round about. (Exodus 30:1-3)

The Most Holy Place

And they shall make an ark of acacia wood: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof and a cubit and a half the height thereof. And you shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside shall you overlay it, and shall make upon it a crown of gold round about... And you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof. And you shall make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shall you make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat. (Exodus 25:10-18)

The gradation in metals spoke of an ascending journey to an increasingly correct understanding of God's character, and its contrast to that of humanity. On an individual level, this journey takes place within a single human life, while in the collective experience of God's people, it took about 6,000 years. Since, unfortunately, the majority of humanity has chosen the return path to that in the sanctuary, this degradation is reflected in the image whose head is Babylon:

You, O king [Nebuchadnezzar], saw, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before you; and the form there was terrible. This image's **head** was of **fine gold**, his breast and his arms of **silver**, his belly and his thighs of **brass**, His legs of **iron**, his feet part of iron and part of **clay**. You saw until that **a stone was cut out** [the kingdom

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of the only begotten Son of God, cut off from the bosom of the Father (the mountain from verse 45), which is incompatible with the kingdom of Babylon] without hands, which struck the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and broke them to pieces. (Daniel 2:31-34)

Later, pride, self-oblivion, and a refusal to acknowledge that power and wisdom belong to God led Nebuchadnezzar to build a similar image, but all of gold, to illustrate the immortality of his kingdom.

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits, and the breadth there six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. (Daniel 3:1)

The measures of this image are according to the base 60 Babylonian math system, which symbolizes the reliance on human potential independent of God because it lacks the 7th divine element (it has common factors from 1-6), which is presented in the Sabbath rest of our heavenly Father. It was this pride, fueled by the false philosophy that he (we) possessed value of his (our) own, that prompted Lucifer to reject the authority of, and worship to, the Son of God. As the begotten Son Christ had received everything from God, and since Lucifer would not worship a being that received anything he aspired for the throne of the Most High Himself:

That you shall take up this proverb against **the king of Babylon** [thus Lucifer is revealed as the original king of Babylon], and say, How has the oppressor ceased! The golden city ceased! ... How are you fallen [the inevitable moral degradation that comes from rejecting God's character] from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How are you cut down to the ground, which did weaken 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 sit also upon the mountain of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. (Isaiah 14:4,12-14)

By the multitude of your merchandise they have filled the midst of you with **violence** [the opposite of the divine character], and you have sinned: therefore I will cast you as profane out of the

mountain of God: and I will destroy you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. **Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty** [the search for value in his own potential cuts him off from the Source and makes him proud], **you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness** [his depraved wisdom gives birth to the philosophy of gaining value through achievements [manifested potential]: I will cast you to the ground, I will lay you before kings, that they may behold you. You have defiled your sanctuaries [this is how he walked back the way of the sanctuary] by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your traffic; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of you, it shall devour you, and I will bring you **to ashes** [this is a natural process and not God actively doing it] upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold you. (Ezekiel 28:16-18)

Thus the Bible shows us that Babylon reflects the kingdom of fallen Lucifer, which he imposes on mankind through its sin. This fall, as well as the fall of humanity with its peoples and empires, is the natural consequence of the rejection of God's law, which are the eternal principles of well-being of the universe as well as being the transcript of God's character. When Nebuchadnezzar's grandson followed the same path, his degradation was again expressed in descending order of metals:

Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the **gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.** (Daniel 5:3-4)

I realized that this is the degradation from which our Creator saves us by re-creating us through His Son, the radiance of His glory (image, character). The scriptures speak of this degradation using the symbol of beasts. Therefore, the empires of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream were presented as predatory and cruel animals (Daniel 7). As a direct result of his megalomania, Nebuchadnezzar himself also degraded to the level of animals, as an example to all subsequent generations who would be lured by the philosophy of Babylon:

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I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and a holy one came down from heaven; He cried aloud, and said thus, “Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the animals get away from under it, and the birds from his branches: Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of **iron** and **brass**, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the animals in the grass of the earth: **Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a animals heart be given unto him**; and let seven times pass over him. This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he will, and sets up over it the basest of men...”

...At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spoke, and said, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?”

While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, “O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken; the kingdom is departed from you. **And they shall drive you from men, and your living shall be with the animals of the field: they shall make you to eat grass as oxen**, and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he will.” The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, until his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up my eyes unto heaven, and my understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored him that lives for ever, whose dominion is a everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are regarded as nothing: and he does

according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What do you?

At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and brightness returned unto me; and my counselors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase. (Daniel 4:13-17, 29-37)

Many believe that this calamity befell Nebuchadnezzar as a direct intervention of God. Such people do not realize the natural consequences of rejecting God's character.³⁰ Now I could see the real meaning in the third angel's warning:

And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “**If any man worship the beast and his image**, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, **The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God**, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and **he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone** in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:” (Revelation 14:9-10)

Our merciful Father has spoken in our imperfect language to reach us in our incorrect thinking about Him. The Adventist pioneers realized that it would not be in accordance with God's just character for Him to torment the wicked endlessly, thus taking the first step toward purifying sinful human notions about our heavenly Father. They were able to take this step thanks to the light that shone upon them as they dwelt in faith in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. But as long as the judgment was still perceived as coming directly from God, there could be no people that reflect the true

30 For example Catherine Clark Krueger wrote that several parts of the Bible tell about king Nebuchadnezzar's behavior in Daniel 4 as a manifestation of a clinical disease like lycanthropy (Evans, Mary J. (2009). *The Women's Study Bible New Living Translation*, Oxford Press.

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nonviolent nature of our heavenly Father.³¹

And I looked, and, behold, a Lamb stood on the mountain Zion, and with him a hundred forty and four thousand, **having his Father's name written in their foreheads.** (Revelation 14:1)

As part of the human family living at the end of the 6,000-year period of our sinful history, I had inherited this judgmental and condemning spirit from our earthly parent Adam and his ancestors, adding my own share to it.

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ...

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree that I commanded you that you should not eat?”

And the man said, “The **woman** whom **you gave to be with me**, **she** gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” (Genesis 3:8, 11-12)

I perceived God as being angry at me and ready to hurt me, so in order to alleviate my fears I threatened others with the fear I myself felt. My way of avoiding God’s judgment, which I perceived as condemning me, was by directing it at others and preaching to them the message of the first angel:

Saying with a loud voice, “Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” (Revelation 14:7)

However, this was not the right type of fear that I was preaching for it was lacking a true understanding of God’s ways and character – it was not in “spirit and in truth” for it. It was corrupted by the understanding, partly subconscious, that God was condemning me for my imperfect performance that I was generating from myself. Yet it was my own system of value that was causing me to think this way, and my preaching of it was not bringing

31 More about the final destiny of the wicked in the context of the increased light of the nonviolent character of our heavenly Father can be found in the book *Consuming fire* accessible at fatheroflove.info

healing to people. I needed a deeper understanding of where this need to disapprove others, due to my feeling disapproved of, came from.

In order to realize that this condemnation did not come from God, I first had to be converted by Elijah's vehement spirit to the true teaching of the remnant people about God and His Son. Only by perceiving Christ as the true Son of God could I gain enough confidence that He was a true image of His Father's character and hence be assured, on the basis of His earthly life, that there was no manifestation of violence and condemnation described in the Bible (and the Spirit of prophecy) that could be interpreted as coming directly from God.³² And oh! What happiness and what joy flowed from the deep realization of the truth that there is no darkness in our heavenly Father!

In 2017, through our personal experience God, my merciful Father, gave to my family and I additional confidence that He not only does not cause death under any circumstances because He keeps His own commandments (including "Thou shall not kill"), but that His works for people are entirely restorative and rescue. When I read *The Return of Elijah* in 2014 I saw its biblical logic, but because of my perception that the teachings of my church could not be wrong I felt like a heretic. Satan added to this feeling the horror of the death of the child we were expecting. In fact we later remembered that on the night the fetus' life ceased, Ruzha spoke terrified in her sleep, telling Satan to leave. The next day, the gynecologist we went to informed us that the fetus had no heart activity.

I can't forget how we felt then. My wife has always wanted us to be a big family. I, too, had joined her dream; after all, as a child I never got a brother. In the months that followed, Satan constantly tormented us with the thought that we had been forsaken by God because we had adopted a new teaching that was alien to the church. It was as if at the most inopportune moment it happened that Ruzha saw a mother with a baby and her grief intensified

32 The book *Agape* on the website fatheroflove.info is one such comprehensive study of certain cases of violence in the Bible, usually considered as direct divine judgements. Examining these stories in the light of Christ's life on earth, and taking into account all their circumstances, they become various revelations of the true and merciful nature of our heavenly Father.

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again.

I knew that the doctrine of the only begotten Son of God was true because the Word clearly stated it, and it was not a new doctrine both for early Christianity and for early Adventism. Satan manipulated my feelings in regard to my desire to be loyal to the church. My choice in this situation was to follow the writings of my Creator and leave the consequences to Him.

Although the doctors had told Ruzha that she might have another pregnancy, we decided not to try again. My wife accepted the current situation and we left everything in the hands of God. I also prayed in private whether it would really be good for my wife to be blessed with a third child. Time passed and Ruzha was approaching the age of 40, and we realized that this also mattered.

One night I woke up to a noise in our room. Ruzha was looking anxiously at a pregnancy test. She told me it was showing a positive result. At that moment great joy came over me. I was convinced that our Father had blessed us with a third or rather a fourth child, because Ruzha and I believe that in the resurrection God will restore what we lost. I began to encourage Ruzha. I told her about my intention to be present at this birth.

The pregnancy was soon confirmed, but bleeding sent my wife into despair again. Poor Ruzha, she thought she lost this child too. I encouraged her again. Now, with the precious light of my Father's nonviolent nature, I had a stronger faith that He would save the child's life. I realized that in the past, my Creator's protection over us was limited because of my worship to a false god. Now, however, our dear heavenly Father could embrace us more fully and thus more protect us, preserve us, and give us more of His comforting joyful presence.

The doctors told us that Ruzha's condition required her to lie down in bed for almost the entire pregnancy. Later, other challenges arose, but we met them with already increased trust in our Father. The most exciting moment of the pregnancy, for me, was when we went for the four-dimensional ultrasound examination recommended by the doctor. There we had the opportunity to observe not only the movements of the child, but even to

see the very face of our daughter. As I watched the screen, the words of Psalm 139 excited me in a new and even deeper way:

For you have possessed my minds: you have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise you; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are your works; and that my soul knows right well. My substance was not hid from you, when I was made in secret, and curiously done in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in your book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with you. (Psalms 139:13-18)

Ruzha gave birth at an appropriate and healthy time. I was happy to be with her there all the time. While she was recovering, the nurses gave me our daughter Athanasiya (Greek, immortality). When our eyes met, I felt the smile of my heavenly Father assuring me, in an intimate and inmost way, of the beauty of His character as it was faithfully revealed by His only begotten Son.

The freshness of God's Word has returned to unsuspected dimensions, and the apparent contradictions of many texts, which were completely inexplicable to me before, now combined into one perfect and incredibly beautiful picture.

Therefore when in the beginning of 2019 I was asked to write a book about the Three Angels Messages,³³ my thoughts flowed smoothly and clearly like a mountain stream. I finally understood why my Creator allowed me to be asked about His only begotten Son in that Skype group set up for the study on the Three Angels Messages, when I thought it was a digression from the topic. In order to be free from my own condemnation, I had to not only accept that Christ really came from God and that as such, He is the Faithful Witness to the nonviolent nature of His Father, but also following the full

33 It comes into question about the book Key to Empowering the Third Angel's Message

<https://maranathamedia.com/book/view/key-to-empower-the-third-angels-message>

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conclusions from that light, to understand what is the true nature of the judgment carried out before the Second Coming of Christ which is called by the Adventist people the Investigative Judgement.

"Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the **hour of his judgment is come**: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." (Revelation 14:7)

"I looked until the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened." (Daniel 7:9-10)

Gradually I began to realize that when I insisted that such texts should be understood in the light of my earthly notions of judgment, I was only reinforcing my own sinful thinking and ensuring their apparent contradiction with other passages in the Word of my Creator:

"For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son:" (John 5:22)

"You judge after the flesh; I judge no man." (John 8:15)

"And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejects me, and receives not my words, has one that judges him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." (John 12:47-48)

I had already known well from William Miller's rules that no teaching of Scripture could be truly supported by even 90% of the texts related to that teaching – it had to be *all* the related texts, a level of perfect harmonization extremely difficult to achieve. The true harmony of all the texts could happen only by synchronizing them with the life of Christ on earth.

And the Father himself, which has sent me, has borne witness

of me. You have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And you have not his word abiding in you: for whom he has sent, him you believe not. **Search the scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And you will not come to me, that you might have life.** (John 5:37-40)

I understood that harmony is restored only when the testimony of Christ, which He gave of His Father, is allowed to have full weight in the revelation of God's character. We really needed the wisdom of our heavenly Father to explain all of this, and He answered our prayers generously. In the days I was writing this last chapter of my book, Pastor Ebens' book on the Investigative Judgement was published.³⁴ Along with the end of my story, I am translating this book about the judgment so that everyone who reads it can be blessed as I was.

Scripture tells us that the spirit of condemnation entered mankind through Adam:

And not as it was by one [Adam] that sinned, so is the gift: for **the judgment was by** [G1537, *ek*, a primary preposition denoting *origin*] **one** [Adam] **to condemnation**, but the free gift is of many offenses unto justification. (Romans 5:16)

This happened through Adam's acceptance of the idea that God did not really want the good of mankind:

Now the serpent [Satan] was more subtle than any animal of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, "Yes, has God really said, you shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

34 The book *As You Judge* reveals the true meaning of the judgment before the Second Coming of Christ in the light of God's nonviolent nature, as revealed by His Son on earth. It is available at fatheroflove.info.

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And the serpent said to the woman, “You shall not surely die: For God does know that in the day you eat it, then your eyes shall be opened, and you will be as gods, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:1-5)

By eating the fruit, Adam and his wife showed that they had fully embraced this worldview in which our heavenly Father is seen as a selfish tyrant who keeps the best for himself and condemns to death those who dare to take away his personal possessions.

And when the woman **saw that the tree was good** for food, and that it was **pleasant to the eyes**, and a **tree to be desired to make one wise**, she took of the fruit of it, and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her; and **he did eat**. And **the eyes of them both were opened**, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. (Genesis 3:6-7)

The text does not say that the woman thought the tree was good and that Adam and Eve thought their eyes were open. The way in which the fall of our first parents was recorded registers the entry of a false reality into their consciousness as experienced by themselves, not as it is in reality. This shows what the approach of God and His Son to man would be after he had accepted, irreversibly, the lies about Their character. This explains why God seems to agree with what the serpent said would happen if they ate the forbidden fruit:

For God does know that in the day you eat it, then your eyes shall be opened, and you will be as gods, knowing good and evil. (Genesis 3:5)

And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: (Genesis 3:22)

God and His Son never knew evil as Adam knew it, because They never sinned. This was simply the only truly effective way to reach man from now on after he had accepted the lies concerning his Lord. Satan had portrayed God as someone who kept his true treasures to himself. This explains why the following words of God to His Son and Their actions toward Adam have

the same taste:

And the Lord God said, “Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever”:

Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way of the tree of life. (Genesis 3:22-24)

God behaved exactly as described by Satan, because only in this way could He allow Adam to truly appreciate the fruits of His rebellion as they developed without God trying to persuade Adam, which in His condition would could only seem like manipulation. **The whole Scripture is a work of God and man which reflects this approach of God in reaching, showing, and teaching us and the peoples of all ages. I realized that my Creator does not impose the truth but allows it to become self evident. This means that every time we encounter in the Bible a case which seems contrary to the Son`s life on the earth, for example when God is portrayed as Someone who kills or condemns people, this reflects sinful human notions of His character.** We have tried to explain these things in detail in the books on the subject of God's character that you can find on our websites, but here I will present some emblematic examples of the use of this approach:

Then Jesus went there, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, you Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.” **But he answered her not a word.**

And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “**Send her away; for she cries after us.**”

But he answered and said, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

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Then came she and worshiped him, saying, "Lord, help me."

But he answered and said, "It is not proper to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs."

And she said, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

Then Jesus answered and said unto her, "O woman, great is your faith: be it unto you even as you will." And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. (Matthew 15:21-28)

Here, the conduct of the Son of God reflects the sinful discriminatory thinking of His disciples so that they think He agrees with it and thus feel safe to let their discriminatory thinking expand and run free. The pride of the Jews and their hatred of the Gentiles made the Gentiles look upon themselves as dogs. Their fear of God condemning them was reinforced by Jewish behavior towards them. All this was for sin to abound that grace could much more abound (Romans 5:20).

Therefore in this way the disciples established themselves in the judgmental spirit of Adam and presented God as One Who looked with indifference or even contempt on those who were not part of His people. However, the Son of God knew that this woman's faith would be able to pierce the darkness of this thinking by clinging to His true character, even though she still perceived herself as a "dog." This approach of Jesus enabled His disciples to realize their wrong thinking as nothing else could. It would also encourage the gentiles that God was not against them as they had assumed.

This story is also written for us so that we might know how God reaches people in their fallen notions, to rid them of these wrong ideas and beliefs, and to raise them to the next level in the journey of revealing and accepting God's character. Even the prodigal son did not believe that his father would forgive him and accept him back into his home as a son:

And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me." And he divided to them his living. And not many days later the younger son gathered all together, and took

his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in need. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he would gladly have filled his belly with the husks that the pigs ate: and no man gave to him.

And when he came to himself, he said, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before you, **and am no more worthy to be called your son**: make me as one of your hired servants.'" "

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said to him, "**Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your son.**" (Luke 15:11-21)

I realized that our return to God was only the beginning of the adoption process. Humanity needs an encounter with its judgmental thinking about God, which we inherited from Adam. This is the Investigative Judgment, held in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, where God is seen by us as One who keeps a record of our sins to judge and condemn us. And fascinatingly, this chapter is written in Aramaic:

I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another **little horn**, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, **in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.**

I looked until the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto

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him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. (Daniel 7:8-10)

The papacy, presented here as the "little horn," is not just a representative of apostate Christianity, as many believe. It is representative of all mankind and is therefore called "the man of sin" (2 Thess. 2:3). This has shown me that judgment in the Most Holy Place is a reflection of our judgmental thinking, and our heavenly Father allows us to be judged by that same thinking to realize that seeing God's glory or His character as consuming fire is only in our perception, but not reality:

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you again. (Matthew 7:1-2)

And the sight of the glory of the Lord was **like devouring fire** on the top of the mountain **in the eyes of the sons of Israel**. (Exodus 24:17)

This explains why Daniel 7, which contains the vision of the judgment, was written in Aramaic, a language considered by the Jews to be the language of evil.³⁵ It is in Aramaic that my Savior expressed His suffering with the words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The guilt of our sins made Him perceive Himself as being completely rejected by His Father whom He calls here "My God" – one of the only instances in the New Testament when Jesus addresses His dear Father by that title:

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani," **which is, being interpreted**, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34)

For he hath **made him** to be **sin for us**, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

God permits His Son to be delivered up for our offenses. He Himself assumes toward the Sin Bearer the character of a

35 More on this subject you can find in the book *The Common Language: Jesus, Hebrew and Aramaic* available at maranathamedia.com

judge, divesting Himself of the endearing qualities of a father.
{*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, EGW, page 245,
Paragraph 2}

Yet the same Psalm that foretells these words of Jesus on the cross reveals that the Father did not hide His face from His Son:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? ... For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; **neither hath he hid his face from him**; but when he cried unto him, he heard. (Psalms 22:1, 11, 24)

Pressed by the terrible weight of the condemning spirit in our sins, the Son of God could not see His Father's merciful face, because our sins themselves created this impenetrable darkness:

Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and **your sins have hid his face from you**, that he will not hear. (Isaiah 59:1-2)

Jesus experienced what we would have experienced if the guilt coming from the condemning spirit of sin had been allowed to fall with all its might upon us. But in the eyes of all mankind, Christ seems to have been struck by God himself:

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: **yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God**, and afflicted. (Isaiah 53:4)

Because the judgmental thinking has not yet left us that God created laws whose violation caused Him to explode with fierce anger against us, the Bible continues to speak in the New Testament of God's wrath and the Day of Judgment as something that comes from the very character of God:

And the nations were angry, and **thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged**, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to

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the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; **and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.** (Revelation 11:18)

However, the Apostle Paul clearly states that this must be understood from a human point of view:

But if our unrighteousness commendeth the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous **who visiteth with wrath? (I speak after the manner of men.)** (Romans 3:5)

That is why the event of the Investigative Judgement described in Aramaic in Daniel 7, which began in 1844 and will continue until Jesus comes again, is described again in the next chapter (Daniel 8) in Hebrew as the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. This sanctuary does not contain judicial books and records of atrocities, because in reality, our heavenly Father does not keep such records:

... for **God is love** [Greek, Agape]. (1 John 4:8)

[Love – Agape] doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, **taketh not account of evil;** (1 Corinthians 13:5, ASV)

The purpose of this judgment, then, is to expose us of our own condemnation, which still prevents us from having the filial Spirit of Christ and keeps us in the condition of being God's servants instead of being His sons and daughters.

And the bondservant abideth not in the house for ever: the son abideth forever. (John 8:35, ASV)

Now I say, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differs nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were sons, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that

were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, 'Abba, Father'. Therefore you are no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Galatians 4:1-7)

I realized that as long as I considered God to be a condemner and a recorder of our sins, I was asserting myself in the condemnation of my earthly father, Adam, and that would prevent me from entering my heavenly Father's rest and allow the Spirit of His Son to rid me of the beast inside me. Our sins are indeed recorded, but not in the books of judgment in heaven, but on the tablets of our hearts and in the heart of Christ:

The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is engraved **upon the table of their heart**, and upon the horns of your altars; (Jeremiah 17:1)

And you shall make **the breastplate of judgment** with cunning work; after the work of the ephod you shall make it; of gold, of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine twined linen, shall you make it. ... And the stones shall be with the names of the sons of Israel, twelve, according to their names, like the engravings of a signet; every one with his name shall they be according to the twelve tribes. ... And Aaron [the type of Christ] **shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goes in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually.** (Exodus 28:15, 21, 29)

The judgment scene in Daniel 7 with the judicial books reflects the false system of justice that we have adopted from Satan through Adam.³⁶ The following are some texts from the Spirit of Prophecy that show how, through the Investigative Judgement, man's false *legal* system is revealed that does not reflect the *relationship*-based kingdom of our heavenly Father. Remember, God does this to allow us to see our judgment of Him and of

36 A detailed discussion of this issue can be found in the aforementioned book *As You Judge*.

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ourselves.

Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with you, which **frames mischief by a law?** (Psalms 94:20)

In the opening of the great controversy, Satan had declared that the law of God could not be obeyed, **that justice was inconsistent with mercy**, and that, should the law be broken, **it would be impossible for the sinner to be pardoned. Every sin must meet its punishment, urged Satan**; and if God should remit the punishment of sin, **He would not be a God of truth and justice.** [The Desire of Ages, page 761, Paragraph 4]

The **condemning** power of Satan would lead him to **institute a theory of justice inconsistent with mercy.** He claims to be officiating as the voice and power of God, claims that his decisions are justice, are pure and without fault. **Thus he takes his position on the judgment seat** and declares that his counsels are infallible. Here his **merciless justice** comes in, **a counterfeit of justice, abhorrent to God.** {Christ Triumphant, Page 11, Paragraph 4}

“I beheld,” says the prophet Daniel, “till thrones were placed, and One that was Ancient of Days did sit: His raiment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool; His throne was fiery flames, and the wheels thereof burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him: thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.” Daniel 7:9, 10, R.V.

Thus was presented to the prophet’s vision the great and solemn day when the characters and the lives of men should pass in review before the Judge of all the earth, and to every man should be rendered “according to his works.” (The Great Controversy, page 479, Paragraphs 1, 2)

The purpose of the Investigative Judgement doctrine was to meet our condemnation in order for us to realize that in our flesh we are like beasts:

And moreover I saw under the sun, in the place of justice, that wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, that wickedness was there. I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work. I said in my heart, **it is because of the sons of men, that God may prove them, and that they may see that they themselves are but as beasts.** (Ecclesiastes 3:16-18)

Our heavenly Father allows this process of reflection into His Word to let us see where damnation is coming from, so that when we realize its true source we can confess it and enter His rest, leaning fully in the bosom of His only begotten Son who is the exact image of His merciful and pure character. It is the acceptance of this rebuke of His that frees us from the judgment of Satan's ruthless system of justice that we had inherited through Adam:

Truly, truly, I say to you, He that hears my word, and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death to life. (John 5:24)

I realized that the very death of Christ on the cross was not something required by His Father to appease His wrath against us, as most of Christendom thinks. Through the cross, my Creator has reached me where I was in my foolish belief that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness so that I can realize that He is ready to forgive my sins³⁷:

"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. ... For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God **by the foolishness of preaching** to save them that believe." (1 Corinthians 1:17, 21)

But this great sacrifice **was not made in order to create in the Father's heart a love for man**, not to make Him willing to save. No, no! "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son." John 3:16. The Father loves us, **not because of the great propitiation**, but He provided the propitiation because He loves

37 More on this topic you can read in the books *Cross Examined and Cross Encountered* and *Atonement* on the website fatheroflove.info

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us. (Steps to Christ page 13, par. 2)

When the message of justification by faith given to the Adventist people in the period 1888-1895 through A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner was at its climax, the light of the non-violent character of God began to dawn together with a correct understanding of the meaning of the cross:

“But,” someone will say, “You have made the reconciliation all on the part of men; I have always been taught that the death of Christ reconciled God to man; that Christ died to satisfy God’s justice, and to appease Him.” Well, we have left the matter of reconciliation just where the Scriptures have put it; and while they have much to say about the necessity for man to be reconciled to God, they never once hint of such a thing as the necessity for God to be reconciled to man. To intimate the necessity for such a thing is to bring a grave charge against the character of God. The idea has come into the Christian Church from the Papacy, which in turn brought it from Paganism, in which the only idea of God was of a being whose wrath must be appeased by a sacrifice. (E.J. Waggoner, Present Truth UK, September 21, 1893, page 386.7)

The idea of a propitiation or sacrifice is that there is wrath to be appeased. But take particular notice that it is we who require the sacrifice, and not God. He provides the sacrifice. The idea that God’s wrath has to be propitiated in order that we may have forgiveness finds no warrant in the Bible. It is the height of absurdity to say that God is so angry with men that He will not forgive them unless something is provided to appease His wrath, and that therefore He Himself offers the gift to Himself, by which He is appeased. (E.J. Waggoner, Present Truth UK, August 30, 1894, page 550)

The rejection of the messages of Jones and Waggoner closed the way and the light of the precious character of God and His Son. But in His amazing mercy, my Creator reveals this light again today to all who are willing to receive it. And accepting it guarantees that the Spirit of Christ in us will completely cast out the judgmental spirit and thus bring us into God's rest. On Sabbaths, new moons, and feasts, this Spirit comes in even greater

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measure, that he may write the name of our heavenly Father upon our foreheads so that we might be prepared for translation.

EPILOGUE

I know that in the short volume of this book I have not been able to share all the biblical grounds for the precious truths that are such a joy to my life and culminate in the truth about the nonviolent nature of our heavenly Father. Here I simply share my personal experience because of the value of personal testimony and in the hope that it will encourage you, the readers, to fully study out, for yourself, these vital issues.

Isaiah 43:7

“Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; Yes, I have made him.”

The question that often excites us when we first pick up a book is: What lies between the two covers? Here is what lies between these two covers: the amazing journey of one person to get to know our Creator. Moreover, a journey with the clear awareness that the One who created us promised to also recreate us because of the disastrous consequences of sin.

This story is about a man with whom each of us can identify in our own way with and be blessed. It awakens not only the emotions but also the thoughts of the reader, inspiring with longing the eternity promised to us by our dear Father through the Lord Jesus Christ - His Only Begotten Son.

In the most concise form possible this book aims to trace the reasons why, despite the years we have lived as Christians, we have been unable to achieve the biblical ideal of righteous character. For the serious and sincere believer it shines a path of understanding forward into the glorious light of the Third Angels Message.

Valentina Astakova