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GOD'S TIME



*Ministério Seara Ágape
Estudo Bíblico Evangélico*

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This book is dedicated to all those
who are willing to relinquish
the anxiety and the self-
indulgence of their
flesh to enter the
dimension of
God's time
for their
lives and who
trust in His infinite
wisdom and His infinite
power to put an end to
a long wait and provide the
impulse for a new beginning.

Thanks to Him who is the owner
of time, the Alpha and Omega,
the beginning and end,
he Lord of all things,
who knows all the
ways of man
and that, in His
great mercy,
synchronizes each
situation and each
second of our existence as
a pleasant symphony. Thanks to
Him who with His precious blood
bought for us the right to eternity.

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace... He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end... for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work.” (Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8; 11; 17 b)

Introduction



Do you like to wait? Do you like to wait for someone with whom you've set up a meeting and he has not come yet? Do you like to wait for the end of the year to come soon? To wait for the finish of your course in college? Do you like to wait to get to know your groom or bride better so you can marry? Do you like to wait for your child to be born at the right time, without scheduling the Caesarean operation previously? To wait for your family to convert to Jesus? To wait for the holidays? Do you like to wait many years until God's promise is fulfilled?

Usually the human being is not trained to wait, especially when it comes into play some situations of his life that depend exclusively on God's control. What if the opposite happens, that is, when something seems to hinder or stop a time that has already been determined by the Lord to any circumstance in our lives?

The most important thing regarding this theme is to exercise what is written in Ecclesiastes 8: 5b: "and the wise mind will know the time and way." This condition will depend on our intimacy with God and on the action of His Spirit in our soul giving us revelation to know our time and the daring to act according to His guidance. This implies grasping the learning that He wants to give us.

Since the fall of man, the physical time has become important, and many characters in the bible experienced this apparent 'hindrance' to know what God was perfecting in their character. We can imagine a resemblance with us in every situation experienced by them, for despite living in different eras, our psychological constitution remains the same and our problems remain similar. The human being remains the same.

Since this book is a novel, creativity can flow, led by the Spirit of God, to make us reflect on what we live and so that we can see ourselves in each character, at the same time that we can also learn from them the way out for our situations of life.

In my previous book (*Come!*) I used the imagination as in a trip through time, where the crew of the Airline "*The Wings of the Spirit (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)*" led us to the time of Jesus, making us supporting characters of His ministry. Here, the same strategy will be used to transport us into an imaginary time where some biblical figures will be together in the same meeting, transcending the barriers of time, and sharing their experiences with us in order to get us out of the anguish caused by the delay of our dreams and our inner growth. The characters, situations and dialogues are 'updated', that is, they seem appropriate to our days to facilitate the understanding of the readers.

Let's imagine that King Ahasuerus and Queen Esther are inviting us to a banquet in their palace, where many important guests will be present such as: Noah, Moses, Joshua, Job and others to address a matter of great general importance among the subjects, which is the wait, God's time in the life of His children. I wish you to accept this invitation of the Holy Spirit to understand better God's motives, and to have revelation about His time in your life. He can tell you it's time for war, time to wait, to destroy, to build, a time of peace, reconciliation, time to work, to love, to separate, win or lose. Whatever your time, do what He is putting in your heart and spring up to the new.

I'll repeat the same guidance of trip that I did in the other book (*Come!*): do not forget to put good humor and sporting spirit in your luggage. Thus, the trip will be more pleasant and the learning will be more effective.

In no way the purpose of this book is to show disrespect or irreverence to the things of God, because of the jokes and situations that are placed in the book. Rather, it is a different way to preach and teach the word of God, without the burden of religiosity.

May God bless you with His truth to you: *“and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free ... So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed ... Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”*

I wish you the peace of the Lord, and a good trip!

“Whoever obeys a command will meet no harm, and the wise mind will know the time and way. For every matter has its time and way.” (Ecc. 8: 5-6 a)

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- The version used here is the New Revised Standard Version, NRSV – 1989 (1995)
- The song in the book is literally translated to English.

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Arrival in Susa



The plane landed smoothly at the airport of the citadel of Susa, in the Persian kingdom. All of us, passengers and guests to the royal banquet, we had gone together on a chartered flight, which helped us know each other during the voyage. I had sat next to Ruth and Boaz, wonderful couple, and I learned a lot about their lives and their experiences with the Lord.

The emissaries of the king Ahasuerus were waiting for us at the airport and we were led together to the royal palace. The eunuchs welcomed us with formality and respect; after all, we were also citizens of the kingdom of God. We were conducted straight to our rooms and prepared for the expected dinner at the end of the day.

We were eager to meet the king and the queen in person. By getting to the banquet hall, we waited outside until the big doors were opened.

The sovereigns were sitting on their thrones and looked at us in a so lovely and inviting way and showing some curiosity to know each of us in particular. Although subjects, we were also kings and priests. The table was low and U-shaped, and where satin cushions served as seat for the guests. By the opening at the edge of the table the servants passed with royal delicacies. Each of us was led to his place and we watched the dancers in their graceful movements around the saloon, while the musicians played joyful and catchy melodies. The king and the queen looked with curiosity at our expression of awe and excitement for being there.

Ahasuerus, well-groomed, with hair and beard anointed with perfumed oil, showed his regal position with a golden crown on his head and the famous scepter held by his right hand. His red robes were embroidered with gold, as well as the belt adjusted around his waist. He was not too young, neither old, perhaps, around forty years old. His face was calm and serene, pleasant and cheerful, showing his authority as king of Persia. His attitude was relaxed and showed interest and joy to see us. He just smiled slightly as a sign of his approval. Esther, a little younger than the king, perhaps around the thirty years was dazzling in her royal robes, with a golden crown on her head, although the format and design were simpler than her husband's. Her long black hair descended to her shoulders, and a cream-colored satin tunic involved her from the neck to feet, with long sleeves that let us see only her soft and white hands. She was adorned with fine jewelry, and a cobalt blue mantle had been put over the tunic. She also showed the loving countenance, joyful and confident of who had already had experiences of victory and growth with her God. Her dark brown eyes looked deep within each of us, seeming to know us. Beside her there was a man much older than Ahasuerus, dressed in white and blue and also with a blue turban on his head, where a purple gem, an amethyst, was placed. There was also a gold ring on his right ring finger, like the king's. A gold medallion was hanging from his neck. His face showed the same serenity and the same authority of the monarch. He was Mordecai, Esther's cousin, and the second after Ahasuerus in the government of Persia.

"Welcome to Susa, my beloved subjects! I'm the King Ahasuerus and this one beside me is my beloved Queen Esther. We are delighted that you have accepted our

invitation, for we not only want to enjoy the fine royal delicacies with you, as well as hearing your opinion on a subject that is bothering the heart both of our subjects and of all citizens of the kingdom of God in the last centuries: the wait, God's time in the lives of His children."

Esther said, "Yes, my dears. We were trying to make this meeting a long time ago, but we decided to leave it for a more propitious moment. As you know, we had some difficulties with the coup d'état of our former prime minister, Haman, who was hanged along with his ten children. Now, thanks to the good Lord, the kingdom is at peace and our current prime minister, Mordecai, here beside me, has been a real blessing for the nation. He has sought the welfare of all our brothers and worked for the prosperity of all the people of our nation; he is highly esteemed by all."

Mordecai also greeted the guests, "Nice to meet you, the Lord's chosen people! It is an honor for us being in front of you all, for you also are kings and priests of the Most High."

We bowed our heads as greeting and heard Ahasuerus clapping, giving orders to his servants:

"Let the feast begin!"

We felt at ease there to talk to those who were on our side and we couldn't help noticing the curious looks among the guests, eager to make contact with brethren from so different eras; however, with very similar problems. We introduced ourselves to each other and we felt very happy with the smile on every face, and with the peaceful and secure look that one only sees in the children of God. Our garments also caused admiration, because each one was appropriate to the customs and time of each person. I saw when they looked to me to know where I came from and what interest I could have in them. Within minutes, we could hear the laughter of men, women, youngsters and even children, for many came there with their family.

"Where are you from, dear?"

"From the twenty-first century, from a country called Brazil."

"The twenty-first century? What is this?"

"Where is really... How is the name?" another person asked.

"Brazil."

"It's a bit difficult to pronounce."

"Rachel, it doesn't matter. She is our sister in faith. Pay no heed to her, my dear. Nice to meet you, my name is Jacob and this is Leah, Rachel's sister."

"Nice to meet you. May the peace of the Lord be with you!"

We were enjoying everything, the bountiful table and the relaxed conversation, but we could hardly wait for the time of dinner to finish, in order to discuss about the matter which we were invited for.

Noah



After dinner, there was silence. The expectation involved us. Ahasuerus rose from his seat and took a parchment on which were written the names of the guests. We could hear his regal voice saying, “Noah, I’m eager to hear you. Please tell us your emotional and spiritual experience with the time. Our scribes are recording your words.”

A very old gentleman got up with great simplicity and walked to the space of the center of the table where a special cushion had been placed for the panelists. There was also a space next for a companion, in case of the spouse. Noah was not very tall; his very white beard and well combed for the event almost reached his knees. His clean garments and of khaki color did not seem from fine fabric, but they were the best for his time, I’m sure. One could not see his hair, for it was hidden beneath the turban of animal fur which he had wrapped around his head. There was a mantle slightly darker over his tunic, also of wild animal skin. His wife followed him at his side, a lady of lesser stature than he, of gentle and sweet countenance, feeling very important to be there next to her famous husband. We could notice some men and women at the other side of the table smiling confidently to them. They were his sons and daughters-in-law.

Ahasuerus began the conversation, “My beloved brother Noah, let’s leave aside the formalities and go straight to the point; here we are a big family and all expressions of opinion are allowed. Tell us about your experience with God, especially on the building of the ark and the moment of the Flood. What was going on in your mind?”

“Well, your majesty, it was a little ... How can I say?”

“Traumatic, dear!”

“My sweetheart, do not exaggerate! It was just a different experience. That’s it! The word is ‘*different*.’ Yes, your majesty! As I was saying, it was a different experience. I was walking that afternoon to meditate a little bit about what I was witnessing in those days; things that took my breath away. The people were very irreverent and perverted. Surely, God was not pleased with what He saw. The human race had become corrupted. Perhaps the wrath of God was manifest in those events of nature that we were experiencing. I had never seen so many changes of climate: winds, dust storms, extreme heat, drought and earthquakes in some places ... It is strange that it did not rain for a long time. Many there did not even know what rain was. I was five hundred years old and my children were very young yet. Maybe the last time I had seen a drop of water falling from the sky was the day I celebrated two hundred years.

“Nonie, do not stay digressing, dear. The king just wants to know what matters.”

“Calm down, honey! I’m just giving an introduction for everyone to understand. As I was saying, your majesty, the human race was too much perverted. I looked at the sky completely clear of clouds and I could barely open my eyes due to the so intense light of the sun. That’s when I heard a voice calling me by name, “*Noah!*”... I had never heard anything like this before; was I going crazy? The voice called me the second time and I could feel a presence of companionship beside me, which made me feel very special. I discovered that it was God who called me, so I opened my ears to understand better what He told me, “*Noah, the man became corrupted and I don’t have more pleasure in*

my creation. I plan to destroy not only mankind but everything that I created, for my wrath is kindled with what I have seen. I also search your heart and I found it right in my eyes; therefore, I'm willing to make a covenant with you. Through you and your family I'll populate the earth again. I'll tell you what to do: you will build an ark of cypress wood about three hundred cubits long by fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high, and caulk it with pitch. You will separate one pair of unclean animals and seven pairs of clean animals and will place them in the ark through an opening in its wall. Then you'll enter the ark, along with your wife, your sons and your sons' wives, because I will send a Flood to destroy the earth and everything that lives in it, for forty days and forty nights." God told me more: the ark would have three floors, and an opening at the top below the roof would allow light to enter. Your majesty can imagine the fright I took at first! Everyone knows the precarious conditions that I had. The iron was not used yet. It was only really used in the time of our illustrious brother David who imported the technique of forging weapons and agricultural implements from the Philistines."

"Do not even mention this name, it makes me nervous!"

"Calm down, David! Noah was just explaining things."

"Excuse me, Bathsheba; I did not want to interrupt the lecture. Excuse me, your majesty!"

Ahasuerus said, "Do not worry, sir. Noah, proceed!"

"As I was saying, it seemed an absurd what He asked me. In addition not to rain so long ago, we had no indication of rain in the coming days or weeks. As you know, cypress wood is hard and tough, and building an ark of approximately 450 feet long x 75 feet wide x 45 feet high with three floors using only the flint and substandard tools of brass as a cutting instrument would be a great challenge for the old man here; even because my children were still young and did not seem very interested in hard work; they were more interested in the girls of the neighborhood. Flint is very hard indeed, and finely grained, and when it breaks it does so in a hollow, shell-like fracture, which makes it ideal for producing a sharp cut. Brethren! I had no choice but to respond to God's commands; however, I didn't really feel qualified for the job. Thanks to my wife, I plucked up courage and began to work. I called the rest of my family, told them what I had heard of the Most High, and asked them for help. At that moment, all friends and acquaintances had moved away. Surely, they thought I was a crazy or a temperamental old man. Who in his right mind would build an ark of that size, almost with no technical conditions, to wait for a rain that probably would never come? I thought well and put my hands at work. I could hear people say, *"Hey, Grandpa! Are you building a family size coffin? I do not see any cloud in the sky. I do not even know what this rain is! Does water fall from the sky?"* "Let him alone; do not contradict him, no! After a certain age, everyone gets a bit freaky!" *"I know not! I pay to see!"* "He is there for a hundred years." *"I even think the ark got cute!"* I said, *"Shoo, Shoo, you lazybones, go away and let me work."* Majesty, I had much time to think about all the things in my life, and especially in my relationship with God, because I took a hundred years to build the ark. I caulked it with bitumen and, finally ready, I concentrated on looking for the animals. God spoke too much with me during this time. In first place, I discovered that He was not joking with me. In second place, I could feel that He really loved me and gave me a vote of confidence to put that mission in the hands. In third place, I learned not to complain about life; I had more important things to worry about. In fourth place, I learned to master my anxiety because I found out that the work was difficult and lengthy; if I did a mistake in some detail, we could drown, all of us. In fifth place, I had more time to know my family when we were together in the ark during the Flood. In the

sixth place, some kind of strength sprang up from me and comforted the discouraged, encouraged the weak and aroused the faith of those who didn't have it; my wife is proof of this and she was also a great companion for me. In the seventh place, I began to discover my prophetic ministry, because when I worked with cypress logs and the sticks of reed placed between them to close the holes in the hull, God used my mouth to proclaim repentance and His coming judgment upon those who did not change their attitude. Not only my words were a prophetic way of God using me, but my position of perseverance and faith in the impossible made them meditate, I'm sure; however, their closed spirits and their carnal actions not allowed them to go deeper into the message. Sweetheart, tell us a little about the experience of the Flood; perhaps it helps you to complete your inner healing due to the 'trauma of waters!' You know, she is a very good carpenter, but a very bad sailor! 'Poor little thing!' She got seasick with the movement of the ark, but also learned a lot in the period of one year that we were waiting for the orders from the Lord, in order to come out of our floating house."

"Nonie! How many times have I told you not to mention my foibles in public! Your majesty, forgive me, it's not pride, but the case is: all that time waiting made me a little insecure and fearful. Nevertheless, Noah is right; maybe by reporting everything, I can be healed of the trauma once and for all! My husband was already six hundred years old when the Flood came, on the seventeenth day of the second month, and lasted forty days and forty nights. The water level covered the hills for about eight yards. Have you ever thought what a horror? When the waters drained the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat, but we still stayed there for many months till the land dry up totally. On the twenty-seventh day of the second month of the following year the earth was dry and then we left the ark. Don't you give me reason? Who can stand a whole year swinging in the water, moreover to be locked in the same place with the whole family and a lot of animals dirtying and making noise? I can say that I learned one thing: patience to wait for God's moment and to step on our promised land. In addition to exercise our perseverance and determination, taking so long to build the ark, we had to wait patiently until the waters lowered completely to get out of it. Folks! When we think 'the flood' that destroyed our life is over, we must still wait a bit for God to complete the work. I learned that stepping on our promised land must be done safely. It was a time to recover from 'the trauma of floods' and to get used to life on dry land again. I'm here meditating that we really need a while to get used to the new situations, and this doesn't change from night to day. I even learned to like my daughters-in-law in this year inside the ark. Nonie! Do you remember how good it was when we ate our soup in the evening and we prayed and praised the Lord after dinner?"

"Did you see, sweetheart, that not everything was traumatic? You learned something at this time and even changed your way of being. God did this and you did not even notice!"

"Folks! Isn't it really? I think this therapy session made me very well. I spoke, meditated and am cured! Thank you, thank you for the applause. God is great!"

"I would like to complete what my wife said and speak that after we grasped the learning of God and entered into His dimension of time, after we stopped arguing with Him, we discovered one more thing: we were tested and overcame the test, we survived the Flood. Even with the destructive waters around me, I was protected by God and overcame the difficulties, as a reward for my integrity and faithfulness to Him. In this time that I was inside the ark, I had time to meditate and listen to His voice better; a time to be prepared for a new way of living; time to get to know my family better and to instruct them in the ways of the Lord; time to learn many other things. I discovered that we are protected when we are faithful to God and accept to grow with Him, even in

periods of tribulations in our lives, remembering always that He is in charge of ‘our boat.’ Finally, when we left the ark I realized that, throughout this training, He had put something in my heart that I had not before: worship and gratitude. I raised an altar to the Lord in worship and gratitude for His deliverance and His promise fulfilled. After the ‘flood’ takes away the dead things and the iniquities of our lives, we can and we must build an altar to the Lord, declaring Him *the Only One* in our hearts. He begins to occupy the center of our will and to give us a new story. I raised an altar and offered a burnt offering, and God blessed us by giving us fertility and prosperity. When the Lord becomes truly our center we can experience His reward and His blessing.”

“Very good!”

“Great!”

“We are surprised and edified!”

“Thank you, brethren, for your testimony! Afterwards we will have another panelist and then we’ll rest. Tomorrow is Sunday and we’ll have all day to talk and to proceed with our Conference. Amen?”

“Amen, glory to God!”

Abraham



*A*hasuerus stood up again from his throne and took his parchment again. The next name was called,

“Abraham, my brother, it’s your turn. Come too, Sarah; your testimony should be very interesting for sure.”

“Thank you, your majesty!”

Abraham stood up from his seat and stood in the place of the panelists along with Sarah. What a harmonious couple! They were really made for each other. Abraham did not seem to be as old as his ancestor Noah, but had a beard also white and long, reaching his chest. His posture was straight like that of a winner. His garments were also of thicker fabric, similarly clean and well cut as those of Noah. Around his waist there was a leather belt well adjusted, and a mantle of animal fur covered his back. His sandals were of thick leather, as it was suitable for a pilgrim. He did not forget his staff, a long rod of wood that we didn’t know very well be if it served to guide his flock or to support him. His bright and lively eyes gave him an air of purity and joy; for us, it seemed we were facing a young shepherd. A lady walked beside him, more or less ten years younger than him, and as enchanting as her husband. Her hair was partially hidden under the veil, and her tunic adjusted to the body gave her an air of elegance, despite the simplicity of the fabric that clothed her. She had small feet and her footsteps were soft and delicate as those of a princess. Her eyes were serene and peaceful, at the same time discerning and watchful. The two talked with the eyes, like those couples who have lived long together and understand each other simply by the look. After a curtsy before Ahasuerus and Esther, she sat beside Abraham and waited for the king to address them the word.

“Tell us, Abraham, how do you feel, being known as the father of faith? What was your learning with time?”

“It’s strange to carry this title; I did not know that my act would be an example to others, in spite of God having told me that I would beget an offspring. To talk about my learning with time, I would like first to talk a bit about my family of origin. My ancestor Noah told us about his children. Shem, one of the three, the man who sits there also with his family, he generated progeny, among it, my grandfather, Nahor, and this one, my father, Terah. My brothers were Nahor and Haran, this latter begetting my nephew Lot. I apologize, your majesty, for he could not attend such illustrious banquet, but I’m also here to represent him. We lived in Ur of the Chaldeans, and my brother Haran died there. However, his daughter Milcah married my brother Nahor. I soon found ‘my princess’, Sarai, and I fell in love. She is still very beautiful, don’t you think? She’s a little quarrelsome and temperamental sometimes, but she remains beautiful.”

Abraham got out of his reverie when Sarah gave him a slight nudge, followed by a very suggestive cough. We pretended that nothing had happened and we tried to hide our laughter. Even couples most closely united have their disagreements, sometimes.

“Abrahaaaamm, dear, go ahead. We were talking about your family.”

“Excuse me, Sary, but I lost myself in my meditations. I think that is due to my age!”

“Brother Abraham, how did you feel when God changed your name? This is a curiosity of mine. It should be weird to change the name. It seems as if one is dealing with another person, does it not?”

“Yes, your majesty! Before I know God and hear His call, my name was Abram. This was my birth name. Throughout the story I will tell you how I became Abraham. Ur was an idolatrous land, as well as Haran. I do not remember how I had knowledge about the true God for the first time; I think it was by divine action itself. When I realized, my heart began to want a personal encounter with Him. I was walking around the city of Haran when it seemed that the sky became different. It was a cloud that covered the sun, and the rays through it gave it a supernatural appearance. I heard a strong and commanding voice of a man calling me, at the same time gentle and loving, as if He already knew me. I realized that it was the well-known *El-Shaddai, the God Almighty, the God who is more than sufficient, the God who holds all the power*. The voice seemed to come from within the cloud, while I had the impression that it spoke from within me. He called me twice, “*Abram, Abram!*” I replied, “*What do you want with me?*” He just told me, “*Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation.*” Few words, but unmistakable, and they remained echoing in my mind for many hours. At the time, I was seventy-five years old. I could not go back home; I wanted to be alone to put my thoughts in order before reporting to my father and my relatives what had happened to me. Had I stayed too long under the sun and that experience had been a hallucination? Why exactly I, Abram, an ‘illustrious unknown’, insecure man, born of an idolatrous family and fearful to act, had been chosen to generate a great nation? What did He see in me? I plucked up courage and told my family what had happened. My brother rejected the proposal at first, but my father fell silent and I knew he was pondering all things in the heart. Shortly after, he died at two hundred and five years old; so I decided to follow God’s advice and leave that land. I went out along with Sarai, Lot and his wife. Nahor and his wife and the wife of Haran and my other nephews remained there. Finally, we were coming out of that place so well known to us, and going to Canaan. After a time of travel we reached the land. I began to wander through it and headed for the south to get to the Negev, and thence to Egypt because in the place where we were a period of famine began.”

“Honey, would not be good to make a parenthesis here to tell what happened there for others to understand?”

“What happened there, sister Sarah?”

“Abram was afraid of being killed by the Egyptians and said them that I was his sister; thus, I was taken into Pharaoh’s house. But after, they discovered the deceit because God had smitten him and all his people with plagues. In fact, we were expelled. However, as my husband had prospered greatly, increasing the number of livestock and people with us, we departed without any problems, taking everything. I wanted to make this comment because it is important to describe our feelings and behaviors, and even our weaknesses of character, before the Lord begin to truly work with us and give us the promise. What I mean is the time that we are discussing at this conference was already at work in our lives. It had been years since Abram had heard the voice of *El-Shaddai*, talking to him about an offspring.”

“Sarah is right. During this time the Lord was already giving me experiences to firm my self-esteem and my ability to make decisions so that, later, I could be a true leader. My insecurity was a foible that should be changed. When we returned to Negev

there was a little family problem, since Lot and I had become rich and we had a lot of cattle. So that there would be no quarrel between our shepherds, I proposed to Lot that we separated; so he chose the plains of the Jordan River and I headed for the west, dry and arid land, Canaan. In that land, He confirmed His promise for the second time. It was strange! He took me on a high mount which gave me full view of that place, and then told me that what I could walk on foot would be mine. Gosh! I thought He had already given me all that. How did I even have to walk through the land to have it? I was already old, I was tired, and now would I have to walk as a pilgrim to conquer what was already mine? I did not understand anything! What method He was using with me?"

"The method to get rid of laziness."

"Sary, what is it?! Just because I made that joke with you, about be quarrelsome, do you want to take revenge?"

"No, dear, it's to edify our brothers. God gives no land for lazy, folks! Abram was feeling old and tired, and with laziness of having to conquer, really, what the Lord was giving him. The Almighty was making my husband exercise his faith."

"Okay, Sarah! Let's move on. I went to dwell, my brothers, near the oaks of Mamre, near Hebron, to the south of Canaan. I can say that I could feel myself stronger there. I pitched my tent, and in the afternoon I meditated on the things that God had already told me. I heard that there was a war of kings in the region, four against five; they came to the east, where my nephew Lot lived, and took him captive. I think this also stirred with my courage. Kidnapping my own family was too much! I took all servants I had and brought Lot and all the spoil back. How many years had passed since I heard the voice of the Lord for the first time! Now I could look back and see that He had not remained inactive all this time. I realized that I was not the same indecisive Abram of before. I had a reaction against that injustice and this was good. I discovered that God was transforming me into a conqueror. That victory lifted up my self-esteem, you can believe it. Even the king of Sodom came to pay homage, is it possible? My ego felt very well. Imagine! Even the priest Melchizedek blessed me. All this should lift me up, but after a while, it seems that I had a crisis of depression, do you know how it is? I began to think again about child and saw that the only heir of my house was Eliezer, a servant who had been born in our midst. I was almost afraid to lose faith. The night was clear and starry. The desert was very quiet; I didn't even listen to the bleating of the sheep. It seemed that everyone was asleep. Only I couldn't sleep that night. The tent of Sarah was quiet, and I could imagine that she slept peacefully too. I was sitting and thinking about God and that's when I heard His voice, *"Abraham! Get out of the tent."* Did I hear right? Get out? What for? But I obeyed and looked to the sky. I was surprised with the darkness, as well as the multitude of the heavenly bodies that gleamed like little diamonds. He spoke again, *"Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them. So shall your descendants be."* This was an injection of faith in my disheartened and unbelieving spirit. I believed with all my strength and I know that my act pleased Him. I could feel His comforting presence with me and I was sure that in all those years, He had not forgotten me; He continued to work with me. I had to risk my life, my material safety, my reputation, my future and even the son who had not yet come, based on the divine promise. I did not see Him, but I heard Him and trusted in Him. He told me that my reward would be exceedingly great. Finally, I could sleep. It seems that I slept in His lap like a baby. Sary, why are you crying?"

"It was so touching, folks, that I could not resist the tears. In the morning, Abby seemed to have been born again. He told me everything. I was scared indeed. I did not know God as Abraham and I still did not understand very well. Had He spoken of son?

Speaking of land was one thing, but of son? Whose? Abby was about eighty-five years old; I was close to seventy-five. What now? I remembered that I was barren; I had always been, since from Ur of the Chaldeans. Then I had a brilliant idea. Maybe God needed some help of ours to fulfill the promise! There was an Egyptian maidservant called Hagar among us. Everyone knows that if a maidservant gives birth to a son on the knees of her mistress, the child is as if it was her mistress' son. Is it or not?"

"Yes, Sarah is right," said the king.

"Of course, your majesty! Then I got the idea to 'lend' Hagar for Abby and, if she conceived, we all would have a son. What do you think? My idea was not great? I spoke to my husband and he agreed with the proposal; Hagar too. But then there came another little problem in family. Can you imagine that the unfortunate woman began to humiliate me for being barren? Women of God! What a shame! She walked around with that big belly in front of me just to make me jealous. I could not let all that without answer. I banished her from the camp. After a few days she came back humble, apologizing. She said that an angel appeared to her in the desert and asked her to come back and be my maid again. Sassy! She said that the Almighty had also blessed the son of her womb and given him the name Ishmael (*God hears, God helps*). Well! I had nothing else to say; the important thing is that we would have 'our son.' Abram was all 'puffed up' with pride; after all, being a father at eighty-six years old is not for everyone. Ishmael grew up and we got used to his presence among us. But one day, I looked at Abby and I noticed that he was too quiet, from my point of view. What was wrong with him?"

"This speech is mine, Sarah. Brethren, what do you think that an old man of ninety-nine years begins to think, so long after the first promise of God? I liked Ishmael, after all he was my son, but it seemed that God had not approved our idea. It had been a long time since He first spoke to me in the tent! I felt myself another person now, twenty-four years later. I felt like a conqueror, a responsible father, a most devoted husband, a more competent leader, a more secure man and a servant of God with more faith and trust in Him. Then, what was missing? That afternoon, I left my tent to walk around in the desert. The so remote memory of sun rays in the clouds became present again, and then He finally spoke, "*Abram, I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*" He said more, "*This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old*"... "*As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, for she will no longer be your princess, the quarrelsome woman, but Sarah shall be her name, princess, because from now she'll be the princess of the Almighty, the mother of my chosen nation.*" What an impact! I was actually another person. I had positioned myself as a king and God was confirming that. If this was not enough, three angels appeared a few days later saying that within one year Sarah would embrace a child who would be called Isaac, *laughter*. In fact, Sarah and I laughed when we heard the good tidings. Was it really true? A man of a hundred years could be a father? And a woman of ninety years of age could have a child? Only by God! What was one year for those who had hoped twenty-four years? Nothing! Just wait and see. Of course I had to do my part, do you understand? After that, the angels destroyed Gomorrah and Sodom, where Lot my nephew lived, because of the sins of their citizens. My relatives managed

to escape, but Lot's wife, poor thing! She disobeyed God and looked back while she fled, and was turned into a pillar of salt."

"Let me talk just a little. My dears, you can not imagine how happy I was when I realized that the word of the angels was true! Now I could pass before the women with my son in the womb. They laughed along with me and helped me in everything. Even Hagar smiled. After nine months, Isaac was born. On the day he was weaned, I noticed that Ishmael mocked the boy and I asked Abraham to dismiss Hagar and her son and rejected them. They went into the desert and almost fainted from thirst until God made them see a well of water. They quenched their thirst and the boy dwelt in the wilderness, became an archer and married an Egyptian girl. And God blessed him as He had promised, giving him twelve sons who became rulers of the Arab nations, as you know well. What a pity, Isaac did not come to the feast too! He and Rebekah had another appointment, so they could not attend this banquet."

"In fact, Sary, I think he was afraid to talk about the test that we had to pass together on Mount Moriah. Anyway, we both overcame it, because I know that God would not put me to such a test unless He was sure of my faith. It was a hard trial to have to offer my own son in sacrifice, but it was worthwhile; Isaac is still alive and in very good health. The test was worthwhile not only for my family, of course, but for all humanity. Everyone knows why. Let the name of the Son of God be exalted."

"Glory to God! Glory to Jesus!"

"Was this way, then, that you became known as *the father of faith*? Impressive! We can learn from all this, my beloved brother, that you had to believe against the evidence. And during the time the Lord worked in your life, great changes occurred in your personality, right? From insecurity, you achieved full confidence in Him, and in all trials your faith was active. We can see that you were not only prepared to have a child, but to be the patriarch of a great nation. I can imagine that you, brother, have made a great effort to 'get out of yourself' to live the vision and the impossible of the Almighty. In short: in the whole process that we all go through, we are being prepared to receive His blessing. Do you not agree, Esther?"

"Yes, and I see something beyond faith: surrender, detachment and submission to the will of God, which are also features that were developed over time in the life of Abraham and Sarah. They did not let anything took His place in their hearts."

"Do you know what I find interesting as well, and that can seem even ironic in the case of Abraham?"

"Speak, Mordecai."

"They found out, in this process apparently long in matter of time, that there is no age to be happy. On the contrary, it is always time to receive with joy the blessing of God, and it is no use rushing the divine rhythm, creating our own blessing prematurely. I think it was important to find out something else: when you walk in synchrony with God's time, He Himself takes charge of our supply. I am referring especially to the lamb that was provided to be offered in sacrifice instead of Isaac."

"My dear guests! Let's applaud with enthusiasm, firstly to God for His sovereign will in the lives of His servants and, secondly, to Abraham and Sarah for the immense courage they had. It's late, so we will discontinue our conference so that we can sleep. Tomorrow, we will continue our learning."

It seemed incredible that the hours passed without we have noticed, because the topic and the testimonies were so interesting that they took all our attention. There seemed to have no signs of fatigue in anyone, but we obeyed the royal orders and we retired to our rooms.

Jacob



*I*t was a pleasant and restful night, which made me wake up with a feeling of well-being and the will to get together again with this brave group. A eunuch was instructed to call each guest in his own room, when breakfast was ready to be served. Today, the meeting would be in the palace garden, because the weather was pleasant and the flowers were a point of honor to Esther, who loved gardening. Actually, the place was splendid and prepared with a wonderful breakfast table. It looked more like a lunch. After we ate and the trays were removed, we sat comfortably on the cushions that have been offered to us, placed again in U-shape to hear the panelists better.

This time was Queen Esther who took the parchment with the name of the guests and called in a clear and inviting voice,

“Jacob. You can also bring Rachel and Leah with you, but please, leave the kids with our handmaids so they can play more freely at the other side of the garden with the children of other guests.”

An old gentleman came up, followed by two women younger than him. He did not appear to show his real age, perhaps by his determined spirit and his agile body, although we could note that he limped on one leg. His mind seemed to be alert to everything that happened around him. His attitudes were those of a gentleman. He cared that the two wives were comfortable, before sitting on his own place. The turban wrapped around his head also had a gem and we could see a gold chain around his neck, ending in a medallion that apparently showed a sort of family emblem. He seemed to be a wealthy man. His wives were also there, adorned with jewels, and showed great pleasure to have accompanied him to the seat of the panelists. One of the women, the elder, Leah, had lovely eyes, pale skin and seemed to be quieter. The younger, Rachel, was more handsome and had captivating eyes. Perhaps she had been more spoiled way than her sister. Rachel was pregnant and Jacob was very careful with her. They were a big family. They all came with two maidservants, one of Rachel, one of Leah, who took care of the grandchildren of Jacob, among children and adolescents. There was also a daughter – Dinah – besides the men.

King Ahasuerus spoke to Jacob, “My friend, what a pleasure to see you again! What is this I see; the twelfth child?”

“It is the child of my old age, the second of Rachel. The older one may be out there with his friends.”

“Dear friend, we are very interested in your experience with time. How many years did you work for your father-in-law? Twenty, if memory serves me right.”

“Exactly, your majesty! I served seven years for Leah, seven for Rachel and six years for the flock and the cattle.”

“Tell us a little about your life, Jacob, especially on your growth and learning with God, having to wait for His promise also given to your ancestors.”

“If Queen Esther allows me, I’ll start talking quickly about my birth. As everyone knows, I am twin of Esau the firstborn. My mother tells us that we already fought in the womb. Our struggles caused her great pain. I was born holding the heel of my brother.

We grew up and he became an expert hunter and man of the field, while I dwelt in tents, preferring a quiet life as a shepherd of flocks. I was always eager for blessings, I ran after any blessing, especially after my mom told me about God's promise to me, made when I was yet to be born. When I knew that it was I the chosen by God to inherit the blessing of my grandfather Abraham, I tried everything to take the birthright from Esau's hands. I remember the day he returned hungry from the field. I was astonished by the rudeness of his manners. He seemed not to worry about the rules of etiquette. He ate with unwashed hands, dressed the way he came from hunting, with that mantle of sheep wool, sweaty, exuding that horrible smell."

"Honey, you don't need to tell the details, beyond what is disrespectful to talk about someone who is not present to defend himself."

"Rachel, have I not made peace with Esau? It's all right. The truth must be told."

"From both sides!"

"What are you insinuating, Leah?"

"I'll wait until you get to that part of the narrative about the episode of our marriage; you lost all the etiquette, when you realized the lie of my father."

"Trickster! Impostor! Where did I stop? Ah! I was talking about the 'day of lentils.'"

Ahasuerus asked, "Day of lentils?"

"Have you not heard, your majesty? Esau came hungry, more than a forest wolf and I was waiting for days to talk to him about the birthright. I had prepared a delicious lentil stew. Besides, cooking is one of my skills; I learned from my mother, Rebekah. The stew had a delicious smell, and was very tasty too. I had barely taken off the pot from fire when that starving thing sat at the table, almost howling of hunger, and asked me to taste my food. I thought, "*Jake, it's your opportunity.*" So I proposed a 'fair' exchange: I would give him the lentil stew and he would pass to me the birthright. I've never seen an easier deal. Actually, I think he did not want even to think very well about it. He answered immediately that he accepted the deal and I gave him the pan."

"Did you see what I said? A beautiful hunter of blessings!"

"Leah, whose side are you on? You would not be here if I had not acted so quickly."

"Sure, honey, I'm sorry."

"This is what happens when we let the wife talking too much. Poor of me!"

Queen Esther said, "Go ahead, Jacob."

"Esau made the exchange and I got very happy. After my mother gave me a little help to deceive my father and I was blessed with the blessing of the firstborn, then, yes, I say that I began to be known and worked by God. As everyone knows, I ran away from home to escape the threat of death from my brother, who discovered the trickery and became the 'second son'. My mother had warned me to return to the land of my kindred in Paddan Aram, and there, to get a wife. So I went out from Beersheba to Haran, the land of my ancestors. After much walking, I reached a place to spend the night. I lay down and put my head on a stone as a pillow. I had walked all day and was too tired. I had a dream of a ladder that went up to heaven and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. Then I saw the Lord close to me confirming the blessing of Abraham and Isaac on that land and on my offspring. He promised me His protection until I get back there. When I woke up from sleep, I took the stone I had placed under my head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. I named that place *Bethel (The House of God)*, for the Lord appeared to me there. To be honest, that experience left me horrified. I knew that I was not so innocent in this whole story, but after all, if God had already determined the blessing for me, what I had to do was just move on. I walked a few days by deserted places, saving the supply that I had taken

not to faint on the way. Then I remembered the blessing that God had given me in Bethel, about protecting me till my return, and I could walk. I've never worried about the question of time; rarely young people care about it, isn't it really? But that endless walk in that heat, under the scorching sun, made me think that time was real. God was starting my training, teaching me that being a hunter of blessings is not the way He does things. We must have experiences with Him and be wrought in our character. My cleverness would have to be treated. However, at that time what I really wanted was to get to Haran. I just worried about what would happen to me if I failed when I saw some shepherds in the distance, talking while watched their sheep. There was a girl with them. I approached and learned that her name was Rachel and she was shepherding the flock of her father along with her fellows; she was by a well, waiting all shepherds come to give water to the animals. I loved Rachel soon as I saw her. She ran home and told her father that she had known her cousin. I stayed with Laban, Rachel's father, for one month. Then, for my service, he wanted to pay me a salary. As I loved Rachel and she was all beautiful, I told her father that for her sake I would serve him for seven years. However, Rachel was the youngest. Leah was the oldest. For seven years I served Laban for Rachel. At the end of the term stipulated by Laban, I asked for her hand in marriage. On the wedding day, this old trickster, as I said, he used of deceit and gave me Leah."

"Now let me tell what happened. When Jacob found out what my father had done, he got very angry, but the old man promised my sister Rachel after a week, and Jacob would have to work another seven years for her."

"Hah, hah, hah" (general laughter). The king commented, "Jacob, the clever boy, was fooled too, wasn't he?"

"Unfortunately it is true, your majesty. But I was not willing to give up Rachel, much less to lose this battle for Laban."

Queen Esther asked Leah, "Leah, from woman to woman, how did you feel being neglected by Jacob because of your sister?"

"Well, Queen Esther! It was not easy at first. It's so sad to see the husband being drawn to our rival; finally, God filled me with love and patience to understand Jacob. At least it was all in the family. In fact, I felt blessed by Him when I gave birth to four sons, one after another: Reuben (1st), Simeon (2nd), Levi (3rd) and Judah (4th). Issachar was the 9th and Zebulun, the 10th son of Jacob. I also gave birth to a daughter called Dinah."

"It is true that your maidservants also participated in the competition?"

"Well, your majesty, in a way, yes. From Bilhah (Rachel's handmaid) two sons were born: Dan, the 5th son of Jacob, and Naphtali, the 6th. From Zilpah (my handmaid) two others were born: Gad, the 7th and Asher, the 8th."

"Rachel, were you barren like Sarah?"

"Yes, Queen Esther, until Jacob interceded for me and God made me fertile. My first son is called Joseph, 'the spoiled baby', that beautiful teenager there."

"Booooooooooooo! Doting mother!"

"What manners, Jacob! It seems that you are not proud of the twelfth child that is coming!"

"Jacob, what happened after your marriage to Rachel?"

"Sir, I served my father-in-law for other seven years and I was getting ready to return to the land of my kindred when the old man realized that he had been blessed by God because of me. Then he did not want to let me come back. Gosh! What a time of suffering! While I worked thinking on my prize, which was Rachel, I did not even cared about the difficulties or with what God was forging within me. The love for her

compensated me for everything. But by the time Laban began to trick me not to let me get out, then the time began to have weight. Blackmail by blackmail, the old man would know who he was dealing with. He asked me what I wanted. So, since I could only leave after six years, at least I would go out rich, that's what I thought. I told him that the lambs, sheep and goats, black, speckled and spotted would be mine and those without blemish would be his."

"I felt sorry for the poor little Jacob."

"Why, Rachel?"

"Ouch! He'll shout again ..."

"Liar! Trickster!"

"Don't you need a sedative, my brother? Do you want the court physician to make an appointment for you?"

"No thanks, your majesty! Just as the wife of Noah who was healed right here at the conference from her 'trauma of floods', I know that I also be able to forgive him until the end of this lecture. I thought God had already treated everything with me! But He still left me this! But, back to the subject, Laban separated the striped and spotted male goats and all the speckled and spotted female goats that very day and the black lambs, and gave them to his sons to put them at a distance of three days' journey from me. Without the striped males of the herd, my chances were slim. I always had little hair and a lot of beard. I almost pulled the last hair off my head thinking of a solution, but I decided that maybe the beard was better; then I agreed that pulling out my beard, my honor and my reputation would also go down the drain. I talked to myself, *"Jake, my boy, stop being dumb and proud! You have a God, do you remember? He promised to bless you in everything. Leave laziness, make a fast and seek His direction."* What I needed was a divine solution indeed. The time was 'sharpening' me in the spiritual things and taking away my wishes, my childishness and tricks. I really needed to mature. I was no longer a boy. I was walking among the flock, when God gave me a strategy. I started to remove the bark of green rods of poplar, almond and plane trees and placed them in front of the sheep. When sheep conceived before the rods, they bore streaked, speckled and spotted offspring. I put the sticks when the strong animals were going to conceive. When was the weak, I did not put them. So the weak ones were Laban's and the strong were mine. Thus, I enriched and also had servants, camels and donkeys."

"Thank God the six years passed! At least during this time, we both became friends and we stopped competing because of children, was it not so, Leah?"

"Yes, the time was not only benefiting Jacob, but also us. And we are proud of our kids; so cute! Too bad they still continued quarreling. Child has some silly problems!"

"Women, let me finish; let the gossips for later."

"Who is gossiping? We are lecturing."

"That's right."

"Brethren, when the six years came to an end, and I already had my own flock, stronger and bigger than that of Laban, I communicated him my decision to leave. Do you believe that I had to depart on the sly with all that was mine so that trickster could not retain me anymore? We almost managed it, but he reached me after a few days and still wanted to negotiate. Only by God's hand we made the agreement and he released me. Alone, at last! Glory to God! I ended up missing him as I walked toward Canaan. Do you remember, Leah, how he felt 'doting' with his grandchildren on his lap? He got puffed up with pride! He was not so bad when he played with the children. And do you remember, Rachel, how much we laughed together when we sheared the sheep in the farm of the neighbors? He always hid the most stubborn for the end. Poor neighbor!

When he was tired of shearing sheep, he still had to fight with the critters. Laban and I laughed a lot. Good old times! I miss the old man. Is he okay?"

"Hallelujah! Another cure! Forgiveness came to Jacob's heart!"

"Yeah, Mordecai! Did I not say that I would be miraculously healed and set free? You're forgiven, papa-in-law!"

"There's more; the story is not over yet, folks! I, Rachel, tell the rest. When Jacob was arriving to the promised land, God sent angels who went forth to meet him and assured him not only protection but confirmed His promise to him and His chosen people. That place was called *Mahanaim*, which means *two camps* or *two armies* (because of the angels). He needed to feel safe, because he would meet Esau. Other reconciliation needed to be done. Jacob gave him a rich present of his flock in order to appease his anger; he was still afraid of him. That night he stayed in the camp. Getting up at night, he took us and we crossed the ford of the Jabbok, taking with us all that belonged to us. When he was alone he saw himself face to face with an unknown man, and he fought with him until the morning. The stranger, unable to resist him, touched his thigh joint, moving it. Jacob did not want to let him go without being blessed. That's when the stranger said, "*You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.*" And the man blessed him there. Jacob called the place *Peniel*, which means *the face of God, encounter with God, place of struggle with God*, for he said, "*For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.*" He achieved the blessing he wanted, which was to reconcile with Esau. When his brother saw him, he kissed him and the two wept. After this they separated, going Esau to Seir, and Jacob to the land of Canaan. We're very well there, where we wait until our baby to be born."

"Thank you, Rachel. Can anyone summarize the influence of time on the life of Jacob?"

"I can, your majesty. In fact, as his grandfather I know him very well."

"Well then speak, Abraham."

"My grandson, now *Israel*, no more *Jacob*, fought for his blessings, fought for them even using wrong methods, but he did not give them up; he fought as many of us, in the strength of the arm, to discover and know, truly, the God whom he served and to trust Him completely, knowing that He would always be by his side. Thus, God worked the character of Jacob, teaching him the proper way to achieve his blessings, at the same time that He made Himself known by him, revealing His character and His good intentions toward him. This shows us that the true encounter with the Lord brings real change. I can also say that the faith of my grandson was increased in his life trajectory. Also his fickleness, cowardice and other faults of character, as deceit and cunning were worked by the Almighty to make him a patriarch as his grandfather and father; this means that there was maturation. So, walking with God is learning and self-knowledge, improvement and sanctification."

"As his grandmother may I complete?"

"Of course, Sarah, be at ease."

"Your majesty, I say that my grandson knew how to resist the enemy, he did not give in to his blackmail and did not give up his blessing; moreover, he left vengeance in God's hands. When his father-in-law tried to hold him on the way back, Jacob said, "*May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor – the God of their father – judge between us.*" He himself confirmed here the forgiveness for his father-in-law and his trust in God to heal him and deliver him from all—"

"Trouble, my princess, he got into."

"—I think there's a prettier word, Abby, don't you think?"

“Pretty words or not, he was always a spoiled child who caused too much trouble for everyone.”

“Grandpa, what is this?”

“Just a joke, to see if you changed in fact!”

“Oh, good!”

“Fantastic! Don’t you think? Another great testimony in favor of our God and His way of dealing with time in the lives of His children. Dear subjects, let’s give an applause to the Lord again. We learned important lessons from Jacob. I would like a brother to praise the Lord aloud. David, can you help us?”

“Holy and glorious God and Father, we magnify your name for the wisdom with which you have acted in our lives and for the individuality with which you treat us, making us feel special and unique for you. The honor and the glory and the praise will always be yours. Our soul delights in you and we want, more and more, the communion with you. Stay with us now and forever. Amen.”

“Dear guests! After lunch, we will continue our lecture. Have fun and enjoy our cuisine.”

Moses



*H*ow pleasant it was to participate in the fellowship with God's children present there! Each one had an interesting story to tell. Talking to men and women who had gone through difficult tests, but had won and learned from the Lord, was an incentive to remain firm in our calling. People so different were there with something in common: the love and communion with the *Only God*.

Esther passed from table to table, talking to each one of the guests and showing her grace and beauty. His presence captivated everyone. Ahasuerus did not take his eyes off her, seeming a young man in love. Despite the happy and relaxed moment of lunch, our attention, as usual, was turned to the main topic of our congress: the time in the lives of the children of the kingdom.

As we finished lunch, we had ten minutes of rest in the garden; most of the guests headed for our 'round table'. The next panelist was already positioning himself, for the king and the queen had taken a seat.

Who was being prepared to tell us his story was Moses, the one with whom God had spoken mouth to mouth, face to face. Despite his importance as the lawgiver of the chosen people, he behaved with humility and simplicity, also putting us comfortable for asking questions and be transported to his tremendous experience with *YHWH*, the *I AM, the Lord*, name by which the children of Israel came to know Him.

Moses appeared before us dressed as nomad, with leather belt around his waist and holding a huge staff that seemed to confirm the authority of a leader that God had placed on his shoulders. He sat in the seat of the panelists along with his wife Zipporah, while his siblings Aaron and Miriam waved to him from the other side of the table, confirming their support. His beard and hair was somewhat disheveled, as if they were naturally so, accustomed to the desert winds.

"Dear Moses, it is an honor for us to be in front of such an illustrious guest!"

"The honor is mine, your majesty!"

"Tell us, Moses, how did you feel being prepared by God for so long?"

"Wait a minute, Ahasuerus! I want to hear firsthand the story of his birth. I think exciting when people tell us about it, but hearing it directly from its main character must be very different!"

"Sure, beloved Esther! Moreover, it must be unusual to find someone who remembers his own birth, isn't it so? Hah, hah, hah!"

"Well, well! Let the jokes, dear. My dear Moses, tell us about you."

"As everyone knows, my name Moses means '*taken from the waters*', because I was taken from the river Nile. In fact, I think the report of Miriam, my sister, could be of great interest if the king and the queen allow it."

"With pleasure! Come, Miriam, and tell us about your baby brother."

"Brethren! It was a very difficult time for our people, when my brother was born. We were slaves of Pharaoh, as everyone knows, and his rage against the Hebrews had been kindled to the point of giving orders throughout the kingdom to kill the newborn boys, throwing them into the Nile. I was about ten years old then, and my brother Aaron

was also little. Our mother gave birth to Moses in a very pleasant night, with the aid of the Hebrew midwives who dwelt among us. Oh! How beautiful he was! He was born beautiful. We were all amazed at his appearance. It seems that he knew of the orders of Pharaoh because he didn't weep too much like the newborns do. His crying was delicate and looked more like a cat meow. He was received by all of us with great love. My father, Amram, soon presented him to God and consecrated him. My mother, Jochebed, despite the efforts of childbirth, felt happy and proud of her youngest child and prayed with my father. Aaron was too small to understand what was happening, but I was also very happy for my new baby brother. How funny! He already seemed a little man, a warrior! My mother hid him for three months, but seeing that she could no longer hide him, she took a basket of reeds, caulked it with bitumen and pitch, and putting the boy in it, left it among the reeds along the banks of the Nile. I stayed afar to observe what would succeed to him. When Pharaoh's daughter was bathing in the river she saw the basket, and opening it, she realized it was a Hebrew boy who was crying; she had compassion on the boy and looked around as if asking for suggestions. Quickly, I ran to her and suggested that a Hebrew woman looked after him in her place. Our own mother cared for him and breastfed him. When he was about two years old, she returned him to Pharaoh's daughter, of whom he became son and she called him *Moses*, which means '*taken from the waters*', because from the Nile he was taken. Moses grew up and became a man. He was prepared to be a prince of Egypt."

"Thank you, Miriam. Yes, your majesty, that's how it all happened. I was raised in the Egyptian court. My stepbrother, the son of Pharaoh's daughter, was my childhood friend. We played together. I was very well educated, not only in the language and customs of the Egyptians, as well as in science and the arts of war. So it was until I was about forty years; I was prepared to be a prince. Although I was not the crown prince, I was the second after Pharaoh, my brother by adoption."

"Do you mean that, even without knowing, God's time was already present in your life, right?"

"Yes, your majesty. I can say that this was the first half of God's game in my life. This first part of my training gave me a lot of instruction to be a warrior and a military leader, so to speak. I could say that the second part of the training, my 'second half of the game' was more difficult, because it trained me to be a spiritual leader and this required of me more responsibility, however much incredible it may seem."

"Tell us, Moses."

"Lately, I was feeling something a little strange in my heart, like a longing for something that I had never seen or experienced; it was strange, but my interest had begun to turn to the Hebrew people who worked for us; I used to walk near the place where they worked making bricks for Pharaoh. One afternoon I was walking by the neighborhood where they lived and I found a woman, not much older than I, and that looked me straight in the eye as if calling me for a chat. I could not see her face hidden behind the veil, only her eyes. However, her expressive look and with certain air of mystery made me stop and hear her voice telling me, "*Prince of Egypt, don't find strange or ignore what you are feeling in your heart; it is the calling of God for your life. Soon you'll discover your true identity and will find your place among these people, your people.*" How strange! She looked like a prophetess, and seemed to know me more intimately than I could imagine. I had never seen her. Who was she? She was Miriam, but only later I was formally introduced to her. Her voice was still echoing in my ears, even when she was no longer in front of me. She seemed to have disappeared without I had noticed, perhaps at the time of my reveries. I kept walking. Witnessing an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, and seeing no one around, I killed the Egyptian and hid him

in the sand. I went back quietly to the palace and lay down on my bed with my eyes open and fixed on the ceiling. In my mind, remote impressions began to come, as those that we have of our first moments of life without, however, having a real awareness of the events. It seemed to me to be hearing a familiar voice singing a lullaby. Like a little child, I started crying and fell asleep. I dreamed strange dreams and seemingly without connection or any sense; I only woke up with a voice telling me, *"We are your people; we are your true family."* Who was my real family? Had not I been raised in Pharaoh's court? And was not my mother a Princess of Egypt? I went out slowly through the streets, and I heard when someone of the people told someone else, *"He is Hebrew too."* I continued to walk by those streets with the words 'hammering' in my ears, bringing some anxiety to my soul. I saw two Hebrews fighting and I reprimanded the guilty, who asked me about the Egyptian killed the day before. Then I realized that Pharaoh was aware of everything and tried to kill me. I quickly fled from there and ran aimlessly across the desert; only later I realized that I was heading for the land of Midian."

"What did you do, Moses?"

Zipporah intervened, "May I speak a little bit? I think women have a special way to talk about romantic encounters. My father, as you know, is a priest and we are seven sisters. That morning we were going to the well to draw water for the flocks of our father when we saw some shepherds in the place. I do not know what was going on with them that day; they began to drive us away of there, as if water was not enough for anyone else. Suddenly, a man appeared and stood between us and the shepherds. We didn't have time to talk; we only ran close to the rocks while he, like a true warrior, fought against all of them to defend us. When two or three of them were already fainted on the ground, the other companions ran away, carrying the wounded. They didn't even remember the sheep, which waited quietly for them. Thus, we could draw the water we needed. We left the man standing there and ran to tell our father. He was surprised that we had come back so soon. He asked us, *"Why did you come back so soon today?"* We answered, *"An Egyptian defended us from the Amalekite shepherds and even drew water for us and watered the flock."* My father looked at us with that face of amazement; probably he found our lack of good manners strange, *"Where is he? Why did you leave him there? Invite him to eat with us. Daughters, daughters, this was not the education that I gave you, was it? Well, well, Zipporah; is it not you who normally responds for your sisters? Run up there and call the man."* I ran back and called him to come to our camp. He asked me along the way, *"Who are you?"* I answered, *"We are Midianites, our father is called Reuel (others called him Jethro); we are shepherds and live in tents. And who are you?"* He looked at me like someone who had some fear of revealing himself. As he looked at me, I started to notice better he who stood before me. He was of medium height, but strong bones and trained muscles. His clothes were Egyptian, and his polite manners showed to me that he was an important man at court. His eyes captivated me; they were sincere, showing a mixture of gentleness, strength and sorrow. What went through his mind now? Although he had defended us from the shepherds, something inside him seemed to be afraid. Oh, majesty! I think I fell in love with him at that moment—"

"Zipporah, allow me to interrupt you for a moment. I want to know what Moses felt when he saw you too."

"Queen Esther, when I found myself before Zipporah I felt temporarily relieved of my fears. I forgot I was an Egyptian fugitive and realized that I was just a man tired of a long travel and standing before a foreign woman. I could not see even the color of her hair or her face, only her black eyes, because the garments covered her entirely to

protect her from the scorching sun of the desert. However, she seemed very attractive; gentle and sweet, at the same time strong and determined, emanating authority. I felt comforted, as if that moment it was I who needed shelter and protection. Quickly I accepted her invitation and prepared myself to meet her father, the priest. I think I fell in love with her too, as soon as I saw her. We walked to her camp and I was soon greeted by Jethro.”

“How beautiful! What a so moving love story, don’t you think?”

“Esther, my queen, what’s going on? We were planning a lecture about a subject so important to us, not a romantic theatre play.”

“I do wonder what is going on with you, Ahasuerus! Don’t you remember the passion of a first encounter?”

“Hem, hem (Clearing the throat)! Let’s continue, continue!”

“Sir, I met Jethro and I felt a great affinity with him too. It’s strange! Would that man have the mission to teach me something, some trade? What a priest would know that an Egyptian prince would not? I decided to stay with them and felt free to tell them about me. I was not reprimanded or criticized; on the contrary, I felt welcomed, which dispelled my fears. In a few weeks I married Zipporah and soon I received the news that I would be father of my first son Gershom, because I was a pilgrim in a strange land (this is the meaning of his name: *pilgrim or foreigner*). God’s time passed and I barely realized that I was being trained in these forty years that I lived in Midian. I did not know, but His people, who remained captive in Egypt, cried to the Lord and He heard their cry. One day I decided to go further to the south of Sinai, west of Midian, with Jethro’s flock. I arrived at Mount Horeb, the Mount of God. While the sheep rested from the journey I started to walk, because it seemed I have heard a different noise coming from behind the rocks. I was amazed when I came across a bush that was burning, however, was not consumed with the fire. Something drew me to it. Suddenly, from within it He called me, “*Moses! Moses!*” I was motionless until I heard His voice again, “*Moses! Moses! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.*” I approached and I bowed down and then we had a long conversation where He told me that He had heard the cry of His people in Egypt and was sending me as a deliverer. This was only the beginning, but it took some time for Him to convince me that His will was sovereign and that no argument I could give Him would make Him give up His project using my life. Then He revealed me the name by which His children would know Him: *YHWH*, ‘the Lord’, ‘*I Am who I Am*’. The patriarchs had known Him as *El-Shaddai* (‘The Almighty’, ‘the God who is more than sufficient’ or ‘The God who holds all the power’). Then, He explained to me the whole project for the release of His chosen from the hands of Pharaoh. He mentioned the name of my brother Aaron and told me how to find him right there at Horeb; but first I needed to go back to Midian and talk with Zipporah and Jethro. As I had been trained to be a prince of Egypt, I knew their military power very well, and I found it impossible that a people of that size (the Hebrew people) could be delivered from Pharaoh. However, I believed in the promise of the Lord. Thus, I took my wife and two children, for another was born in Midian (*Eliezer, God’s help, my God is helper*), and went to Egypt, taking in my hand the staff of God. I met Aaron at Horeb. My brother was married to Elisheba and had four sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. After the greetings, we headed for Egypt and communicated to the people the words of *I AM*; the people believed in the Lord and worshiped Him.”

“Aaron, don’t you want to tell us about the first encounter with Pharaoh?”

“Yes, your majesty! When we arrived at the palace gates, the tent where the king used to be to receive the causes of the people was set up and the soldiers were kept

beside the throne as a protection to him. The royal advisors were also at his side, as well as the known magicians, sages instructed in the art of Egyptian magic. Apparently, Pharaoh felt himself affronted by our rustic look, because we were dressed as nomads, with animal skins and with our staffs in hands. The soldiers put themselves in defense between us and him and thus we spoke in the name of *YHWH*. His reaction of repulsion was expected, so we did not find strange what he said, however, our first victory had been achieved, for he began to know that the Hebrews had a mighty God. I was eighty-three years old, and Moses, eighty years old, when we spoke to Pharaoh. It was clear to us the time of God that began in this new stage of our lives, as well as for all those people. The second phase of Moses' learning as spiritual leader had ended and now it was time to put theory into practice. After the well-known ten plagues that the Lord sent to Egypt, we went out into the desert. I think better Moses to continue the report, because he had a remarkable experience with this episode."

"Only at that moment I realized the drastic transformation that God had done in my life in these forty years in the land of Midian. I could not even remember anymore of whom the warrior Moses was, he who had been prepared to be prince of Egypt. It was strange to feel that, although the strength of youth was not the same, I was coated with a different force, not physical but supernatural. My body was still strong for my age and my mind had a new discernment that made me more daring and determined. God's time in my life had not been wasted; on the contrary, it had been a factor of improvement for my soul. Finally we left Egypt, after four hundred and thirty years of captivity, an army of 603,550 men over twenty years and upward, besides the women and children, elderly and foreigners who decided to come with us; we were also not counting the Levites, who were later set apart for the service in the tent of the meeting. During the day, the Lord went ahead of us in a cloud to guide us along the way; during the night, in a pillar of fire. Pharaoh chased us and reached us in the desert when we were camped by the sea. The people then despaired and asked me for an explanation, accusing me of having taken them out of Egypt to die in the desert. Then, it began a new phase in my training, that is, to put into practice the faith, the leadership ability, the meekness and the spiritual strength that God has placed within me."

"It must have been terrifying to feel with 'no way out', isn't it really? The sea on one side and the enemy of another, besides the people about to panic! Good heavens!"

"Believe me. My first reaction was to cry out to God, but what my surprise when He answered me, *"Moses, why do you cry out to me? Lift up your staff and tell the Israelites to move on!"* How could I know that I had to lift up my staff so that the waters of the Red Sea were divided? However, I obeyed His voice and lifted up my staff. The wind from the Lord began to blow through the whole night and the waters divided. The sea exposed before us a dry path for us to walk by it to the other side. Great walls of water arose on each side, and we started walking. The people were amazed not only by the 'walls of water' with yards and yards of height, but also by the noise they made. Men, women, children, youngsters, elderly, foreigners, flocks and cattle, carts and all kinds of pack animals passed unharmed to the other side, while the pillar of fire of the Lord kept the enemies away. We were almost three million people. I looked at all those people and the only thing I had to do not to despair was to look up, to God. I could not depend on anything or anyone else. My only security was *YHWH*. In the morning when we finished crossing, the water resumed its strength and drowned the Egyptians who had persecuted us through the sea. They all died, soldiers and horses. Miriam, tell them the experience that the Lord gave you after the crossing."

"As a prophetess of the Lord I sang a song of victory. The people had a face of astonishment which caused pity. Even a baby was born in the way of the sea, while the

crowd passed. The Spirit of the Lord came upon me with a great joy that took my whole body. I was ninety years old but I felt like a teenager. My feet whirled in the sand and my hands were beating rhythmically and safely the tambourine. The women began to sing softly at first, as if afraid, and then in a cheerful and strong voice that went 'breaking the ice' of the hearts. Moses sang with me and within minutes we were a crowd of freed slaves celebrating the great victory of our God. The time of captivity was over and a new time began."

"Moses, what did you feel after this victory?"

"Gentlemen, I can say that thenceforth my time of real experience as a leader began: forty years of faith and patience to be exercised. I faced all kinds of possible and imaginable situations: rebellion against the authority and leadership that God had given me; complaints, manifestations of idolatry, a war against Amalek at the beginning of our pilgrimage and that began our training as conquerors and warriors; shortage of food and water, pests, the wrath of God over sin and the infidelity of the people, manifestations of the forces of nature commanded by Him to stop the riots, snake bites and even the threat of curse by an Assyrian fortune teller called Balaam, hired by the king of Moab, when we were about to enter the Promised Land—"

"Honey, I'm sorry to interrupt, but why don't you also speak of miracles and of the positive things that you experienced during the journey? You know, brothers! Moses my husband sometimes gets so involved in telling the problems he faced, that he almost forgets to tell the wonders."

"—Zipporah, who said I do not count the victories as well? He who hears you talk this way thinks I'm always complaining."

"It was not what I meant, my love, but by the fact of your mission has been of so great responsibility, I'm thinking that maybe you forget to tell the good side of your relationship with God."

"What is it, woman? How could I forget the best part of my life that was to have the vision of His glory?"

"In fact, this is an interesting detail for us, Moses. How did you feel when it came to your mind the boldness to ask to see His glory?"

"Majesty, it was awesome! When He told me He was so displeased with the people that He would no longer come with us, I felt desperate. How to go alone? So, chat comes, chat goes, He went back on His decision to destroy them; I took the opportunity to ask to see His glory. He caught me and put me in the cleft of a rock and I could see Him from behind. I have no words to describe. Dazzling, Blazing!"

"And also scary! You can not imagine my shock when my husband returned from up the hill with his face shining like the sun. I was wondering what would be of me from then on. My little grandchildren were even afraid to look at the face of the grandfather. The smallest one only said, *"Grandma, look, look! What is it?"* I had nothing to say. After a while, everything returned to normal."

"But what a lack of sensibility, woman! A so tremendous experience and you turns it into a horror movie?!"

"Moses! Forgive Zipporah; she was just trying to give a touch of humor to the story. We can imagine how much your learning time was difficult. Brethren, can we draw a conclusion from everything we heard?"

"May I speak, your majesty?"

"Yes, Mordecai."

"I think the most important teaching can be summed up in few words: to know that God is in control of every situation and that at each stage of learning, He provides the supply that is necessary to walk safely."

“I could understand from everything that nothing and no one can kill God’s plan for a child, and when a stage of learning ends, God takes charge of providing the favorable conditions for the other, as Mordecai said.”

“One more interesting thing, brethren: the word of God opens the sea of the impossibilities.”

“I see that many divine characteristics had to be developed also in the life of our brother: meekness, patience, discipline, to delegate tasks and ability to manage the adverse circumstances and human wills.”

“Do you know what I found most interesting? The leader must have courage and must not be afraid to know more of God; you can remember the experience he had with YHWH by seeing His glory.”

“Just one more comment: I see that the blessing of God still stands, even if given long ago. You remember that the blessing was first given to Abraham and had to be maintained by all the patriarchs until Moses.”

“Brethren, let’s finish this testimony with a big applause to the Lord. Once again, He surprised us with His strategies, is not true?”

“Hallelujah! Glory to the name of the Lord!”

Joshua



The testimony of Moses had been particularly edifying and we were eager to see its complement through the story of Joshua because he had been his successor and, along with Caleb, he was the conqueror of the Promised Land.

“Joshua and Caleb, you can take your places.”

The first man who went to the center of the table was Joshua. He was not as tall as we might think, in the case of a military leader so famous and that had so much success in his endeavor. His cloak over his head was surrounded by a leather strap as to give more firmness, to the likeness of a helmet. Over his tunic he also had a leather shield, surrounding his entire chest in front and the back and fastened to his waist by a belt, also of leather, well adjusted. Attached to the belt we could see a sheath, protecting a bronze sword. Perhaps to give him more mobility in the war, his clothes were fastened in the lower part of the legs, forming a kind of trousers. We could see that his feet were protected by pieces of leather with thick soles, strapped to his legs as if they were boots. His steps were safe and resolute. His face expressed the strength of a conqueror, eyes ever watchful, and firm lips almost completely hidden by a full beard, but not as long as that of Moses. Caleb followed him; he was slightly taller and a little younger than Joshua, however, showed the same perseverance and authority than the partner. His garments were like Joshua’s and bore also a sheathed sword on the left side of the waist. Something in Caleb gave him a younger look, perhaps: his lips opened in a smile, the same smile that one sees in the winners. Achsah, his daughter, and Othniel his son-in-law had also came and received him with applause.

“We salute you, Queen Esther and King Ahasuerus. We salute you, brothers and sisters who hear us.”

“Tell us, Joshua, how did you feel when the Lord put you as successor to Moses?”

“A new time began for me, because the training had ended, and now I was the hope of all those people. I remembered all the instructions that Moses had given me and what I had observed in him during his ministry. The forty years that I spent in the wilderness had ‘sharpened’ my determination and my perseverance, in addition to have given me wisdom to know the proper time and procedure of God. Both for me and Caleb, that had been also a time to exercise patience, meekness, faith and loyalty, because we could not leave Moses alone in all the great difficulties he faced. The new time might be called a time of conquest.”

“I also think God gave me a very important understanding about these forty years in the wilderness: in order to have victory and to conquer something big, we need sense of unity; nothing is done alone. I mean that my fellowship with Moses, Joshua and all our subordinates has made me strong to conquer a land of giants, the Anakims, who threatened the ten princes sent to spy out Canaan with us (Joshua and I). I recognize the sovereign choice of God; therefore, the fact of having this determination was not our glory, but a gift given by Him to put us as leaders. The glory is His.”

“Is it true, Caleb, that you were ‘adopted’ by the tribe of Judah?”

“I think I understood your question, your majesty! It is true that my father, Jephunneh, and my ancestors were Kenizzites, whose name means ‘*saved once for all*’, ‘*thrown to the corner*’, ‘*push aside*’, and were descendants of Eliphaz, the eldest son of Edom, or Esau. Part of this people, the children of Kenaz, joined the Jews, when they were taken to Egypt, and in contact with their culture and their religion, they received YHWH as God, therefore, coming to be Jews also, by the tribe of Judah. Perhaps, because of this I have a blood of warrior running through my veins; as everyone knows, the tribe of Judah has always had the authority of government as a blessing bestowed by God. With Joshua was different; his ancestors are descended from the tribe of Ephraim that, since the time of the Patriarchs, held great military power. Probably this was the reason that God chose him to be our leader.”

“Joshua, please repeat for us the words you heard from the Lord when you were chosen to take the Promised Land; they are strong words and of a great incentive for everyone.”

“He said, *“Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites... Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you... No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous! Be careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful in the land which I give to possess. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”*

“We also want to hear a bit about your encounter with the angel of the Lord when you were spying the walls of Jericho.”

“Well, majesty! I had sent two spies, a few days before this encounter with the angel, to get information about Canaan, in particular the city of Jericho, which would be our first barrier to be overcome to occupy the land, soon after we have crossed the Jordan. They came up with some information about the city walls and telling that they had achieved an ally, a prostitute named Rahab, whose house stood on the walls; she was interested in our people and our God and had decided to change her life; she asked to be saved, and all her family, when we got there to destroy the city. We were camped near the plains of Moab, and we circumcised all men before entering the land, for they had been born in the desert and did not know the covenant of God made with our people through Abraham. Before talking about my encounter with the angel of the Lord, I want to describe our crossing by the Jordan River, which was a miracle similar with the one that God made with us in the Red Sea. However, this time we would not have to lift up the staff as Moses did, but we should put the Levites priests holding the Ark of the Covenant ahead of all the people. It was a very exciting experience and also moved by faith, because apparently there was no possibility of the waters divide spontaneously so we could pass. When the priests step with their feet in the waters of the river, they parted and all the people passed over on dry ground. Those young people who had not seen the miracle of the Red Sea were amazed and glorified the name of the Lord. Actually, it was their first personal contact with Him. Then, we crossed the Jordan and we expected for the Lord’s next orders. That’s when I decided, on a moonless night, with the sky obscured by the clouds, to spy on the walls of Jericho personally. I needed to be very careful, because the guards at the top of the walls seemed very much alert.

They had already heard about a people who were coming to take all that land, and whose God was awesome, the same God who had performed miracles in Egypt. I crawled through the ground, feeling every inch of land to reach the base of the outer wall. I groped the walls carefully, trying to find breaches and feel its texture. It really seemed invulnerable. It was built with huge blocks of stone and whitewashed on the outside, harmonizing its appearance. There were no breaches through where we could try an indirect attack. Likewise, the possibility of trying a direct attack through the gates was ruled out, for they were equally strong, of solid and thick wood. The bars of iron were quite resistant. I was thinking of a strategy when I saw before me a warrior of great stature and with gleaming sword. I looked directly at him, and even with the apparent darkness of the night, I could note all these details in him. It seemed incredible, but I was not afraid, despite having been caught by surprise in my espionage. So I told him, *“Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries?”* And he replied, *“I’m the commander of the army of the Lord. Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy.”* I bowed down before him, because I could see in that man an authority that was undeniable; I was sure of the sincerity of his words and the desire to instruct me. That’s when he gave me all the strategies to take Jericho. That meeting could only come from God, especially the strategy of war that would be used. I was convinced that we would witness a true miracle. I returned to camp and told everything to Caleb.”

“Brethren, I confess that I was speechless at first. What a crazy thing! I had never heard of anyone who had taken a city that way. It was clear that battle was *KORBAM*, that is, an offering consecrated to the Lord as the firstfruits in this new land He was giving us; therefore, we were facing a holy war. However, the strategy we would use that left me speechless. I told him, *‘Joshua, what madness! Are you sure you heard it right?’* He replied, *‘Sure, Caleb, the angel was clearly a messenger of the Lord. We trusted Him so far and everything had success, right? Henceforth, it will be the same. He will give the instructions and we will follow them to the letter, amen?’* I said, *‘Amen! Have you already talked to the priests about it, especially with Eleazar, the son of Aaron?’* He replied, *‘Not yet, you’re the first to know the news. We’d better sleep and tomorrow morning I will speak to everyone.’ ‘Good evening, Joshua!’ ‘Sleep well, my friend.’*”

“Caleb lay down and turned to the other side and I soon realized he had fallen asleep. Now, it was I who could not stop thinking about the strategy given by the angel to take possession of the city: we should march around the city once, for six consecutive days, with the priests ahead carrying the Ark of the Covenant and blowing trumpets of rams’ horns; on the seventh day we would do it for seven times. During the six days we should be in complete silence and in the seventh, after the ram’s horns begin to sound we should shout all at once and the wall of the city would fall; then we would plunder it. We should not take the spoils for us, it was condemned by God. We should consecrate to the Lord only the gold, the silver, the bronze and the iron and they should go to His treasury. Also Rahab and her house would be spared, as had been agreed.”

“May I make a comment?”

“Sure, Rahab! If Salmon, your husband, wants to speak, he can too.”

“Brothers, the spies had arranged with me to keep tied a scarlet cord in the window of my house as a sign for them, when they invaded the city; so every member of my house would be spared from destruction. I saw the movement inside the city, and fear on every face. The king was anxious and restless and he walked incessantly from one side to the other giving orders to his captains. Anything was a cause for fright or shout. All citizens were highly sensitive. I looked through the window and saw that procession

of priests followed by a crowd of Israelites and I did not really understand what was happening. All of them quiet, surrounded the city once a day, staying beyond the distance of the arrows not to be hit. The king and the soldiers who were on the walls got alert and desperate, sweating with fear and spending all their forces trying to understand the enemy's strategy. When the people went away, they stayed bewildered and frustrated. Along the days, my people's patience began to diminish, as well as their determination and strength of war. Discouragement invaded the hearts, and many fainted at the doors of their homes. However, a real panic took hold of all citizens when, on the seventh day, the priests came and surrounded the city, this time not only once, but seven times, and making us hear the shrill sound of the trumpets of rams' horns. On the seventh time marching around, everything started shaking and became a big earthquake. The walls collapsed with a great roar and the whole city came down. Only my house remained standing by a miracle of God. My family and I were camped outside the camp of Israel for a while, until we were incorporated into the nation, because one of the spies married me, Salmon, my husband who is here beside me."

"Do you know what I like most in all these testimonies?"

"What now, Essie?"

"Even during times of war, there is always a romance to sweeten the situation. How beautiful! What a marvelous transformation of Rahab! Time of restoration and ransom. For some, a time of war; for others a time of love and good meetings."

"That comment was missing! Women!"

"I think this is what is giving a special flavor to this conference, don't you think, sisters?"

"Of course! All of us present here support the Queen. In fact, we are eager to hear her testimony of love as well."

"Oh! Not that, Essie! I will testify."

"What is this, Ahasuerus? Are you afraid that I tell the truth?"

"Hey, hey, you two! You look like two kids arguing. Do you see, brethren, how much a prime minister is needed?"

"Well then, Mordecai, ask more questions to the panelists."

"That's what I would suggest, majesty. Joshua! Rahab told what was happening inside the walls, but you who were outside them, what did you feel? Was the time of six days wait distressing as well?"

"To be honest, I was even finding strange the patient reaction of our people. They didn't seem to feel anguish or anxiety, but seemed to be aligned with God's time for us all; I even think I could see traces of joy on the faces of the youngest, like a feeling of daring for accepting the challenge of the Lord."

"And after the walls collapsed, what happened? I heard that you had to face a rebellion, is it true? Apparently, the time of peace would still take a while to come."

"I think that the preparation I had during the forty years in the wilderness with Moses was not in vain. Some things were happening in a similar way. Rebellions among our people continued to interfere a little in our walk. This time it was with Achan son of Carmi, who was born during the crossing of the Red Sea. Achan took of the things prohibited by the Lord when we plundered Jericho, therefore, our next victory was delayed, namely, the city of Ai. Only when we handed over the culprits in the hands of God, we could defeat the inhabitants of Ai. With this, I felt a little in my own skin what Moses had to face with this kind of situation among our people."

"Caleb, tell us about this time of conquest for you."

"They were, indeed, years of war, but we were prepared by God to do what we had to. Unfortunately, as time went on, some compatriots gave up fighting and conformed to

what they had already conquered, leaving few survivors of the enemy among our nation. In the years that followed, this attitude brought serious consequences for us and we all know that. In the distribution of the land, I received the countryside and villages around Hebron and I also gave to my daughter Achsah and my son-in-law, Othniel, the land of the Anakims with many sources of water.”

“Well, from all this testimony we can see that God synchronizes all things perfectly, doesn’t He? It was necessary a preparation time for Joshua and Caleb, to then, give them a time of conquest. Although it was a time of war, it came later a time of peace and a time to enjoy the blessings that have been achieved.”

“I found very interesting the comment of Rahab, because she, even a foreigner, had an amazing insight of God’s time for her life, being able to change her own story with safety, by seeing the opportunity knocking at the door. This is really what I call to be synchronized with God’s time, don’t you think?”

“I approve totally!”

“What enthusiasm is this, David?”

“If she had not taken this attitude of faith, I would not have been born. Everyone knows that she was my great-great-grandmother. You can notice that boldness is a trace of the family.”

“What a cocky! Wait for your turn to answer our questions.”

“We’ll see!”

“Look! Our next panelists are your great-grandparents, Ruth and Boaz.”

“Applause, folks.”

“Very Good!”

Ruth and Boaz



They came together, arm in arm, and sat next to each other in the place set apart for the panelists. All eyes were on them, for they were a very nice couple, and were important in the story of their people. From them, the offspring of David came, and therefore, Jesus.

Our beloved Ruth was a sweet and gentle person, exuding the perfume of love, companionship and loyalty through her attitudes, not only toward Boaz, but toward all who had known her until now. She was not of great stature, and her clear and smooth skin seemed a contrast with the black hue of her hair. Her eyes were of a light brown that resembled the polished copper. She was dressed in a simple way, with clothes of cream color. Around her waist was placed a belt of a color slightly darker than the dress and that matched with her sandals. A scarlet robe, not too bright, covered her back almost to the feet. She did not look very old, especially when we looked at Boaz by her side, a nice gentleman, probably twenty years older than his companion. He was taller and his strong constitution, walking toward us with steady steps, confirmed the meaning of his name: *strength, firmness*. He showed a smile of joy and life in the face and his satisfaction with the woman who stood beside him was undeniable. He seemed to be very pleased with her. She, on the other hand, felt important for being the partner of a distinguished citizen of the town of Bethlehem, in Ephrathah, the hill country in the territory of Judah. Boaz's beard was full and was well combed and perfumed like that of Ahasuerus and gave him an appearance of honor and respect before men. His garments were of a more bright hue than those of Ruth, cobalt blue, also adjusted to the body by a leather belt. The mantle on his shoulder was purple, however, it matched with the color of the tunic.

"Dear brothers, Ruth and Boaz, sit down with us and give us your testimony of life in relation to God's time for you."

"Your majesty, we are very honored by this opportunity and we feel quite edified by what has been stated until here. The testimony of our brothers has been very valuable."

"Tell us, Ruth, how was your meeting with Naomi in Moab."

"Queen Esther, I remember very well when Naomi came to our land with her husband Elimelech. I was very young, fresh out of adolescence; however, I can recall the details of the arrival of this couple to Moab. They did not come alone, but brought their two sons Mahlon and Chilion with them, two young boys more or less of the same age as I and Orpah, a friend of mine. It was a nice family, but at that moment seemed hungry, tired, discouraged and feeling rejected by all human beings. They had left Bethlehem in Judah because of famine in the land, and the sadness was evident in their faces; perhaps, they thought what would become of them from now on in a strange land. The citizens of Moab knew that they were Jews and some of them received them with compassion and solidarity, because they remembered their distant kinship with them through Lot, Abraham's nephew. Gradually, they were getting used to the new life and became integrated into the community. We two, Orpah and I, we tried to remain silent

under the window of their house to hear them in their prayers. We were interested, especially I, to know their God. In fact, the God of Israel was the subject of comments by all nations at that time when the judges ruled the people who had dispossessed the Canaanites from their land. The judges succeeded Joshua in leadership of the Israelites. It was interesting to hear the songs the family sang to their God and it was evident the exultation of Elimelech when he prayed, thanking the Lord for the blessings he had received on our land. However, the boys did not seem to have the same strength of the parents. Chilion always seemed ‘weakened’; everything he made seemed to bring a great weariness. The brother, Mahlon, was usually sick, pale and with a skinny appearance. We kept thinking, Orpah and I, if they have come from Bethlehem this way, or if it was the food in our land that left them in this state. Time passed and we knew ourselves better. We grew up. I married Mahlon, and Orpah married Chilion. Elimelech was growing older, became ill and died, leaving Naomi alone. Shortly after, our husbands died too. What three widows would do now? Naomi was old and heard that the famine in her land was over, and God was favorable toward His people. So, she decided to return to Bethlehem and we went with her.”

“How did you feel, Ruth, leaving your family and your homeland? It was hard, was it not?”

“I had come in contact with the God of Naomi and it seems that I was worked by Him in the ten years I was married to Mahlon. By learning of the decision of Naomi, I did not think twice; I said goodbye to my parents and followed her. I was sure to be synchronized with God’s time to my life. It was new time for me. I was not afraid of the new. On the contrary, my friendship and my loyalty to Naomi spoke louder and I did not hesitate to follow her. We three went out of the town and took the road to Bethlehem. We had already walked a good distance when Naomi urged us to return to our land; she was afraid for us, of not being able to adapt to the new life. Orpah went back, but I didn’t want to leave Naomi alone. Now, there was no turning back for me. The sense of comfort that I felt inside me made me think that we were not alone; some supernatural force sustained us and held all the power over our lives. After a few days we arrived to Bethlehem; it was the beginning of barley harvest. The people came running towards us and recognized Naomi, but she replied bitterly, because she felt very sad for the loss of her husband and children, and seemed resented because of the apparent abandonment of God for her. Actually, I could feel His protecting hand over us, but Naomi did not see things the same way; her view seemed distorted by pain. A new time was before us; however, she could not realize it.”

“With what words can you summarize this new time?”

“Queen Esther, I can call a time of renewal and new encounters, a new time, spiritually and materially speaking. In Bethlehem, I began to feel the good will of people to help me, while some of them looked at me with curiosity and with an expectation that intimidated me a little. Actually, I was facing the human prejudice for being a foreign woman and, moreover, a widow. Some people couldn’t help themselves and asked me if there was something wrong with me by the fact of having no children. To be honest, I did not bother too much about it, because this fact to us, Moabites, didn’t seem to have the weight it had for the Jews; they considered it as a curse. I, however, had enough problems with my spiritual heritage and my inner old learning which were being transformed by God, to be concerned with this situation. Naomi calmed my fears, and now that she had returned to her old customs, she seemed to be restoring her initial characteristic of *happy and blessed*, as her name meant. The bitterness seemed being washed from her heart and it made me glad. Not everyone was

hostile, after all; I began to have help of many acquaintances of the family and this gave me strength to overcome the changes in my soul.”

“Ruth, my sweetheart! When will you report our encounter? I can barely wait to hear you speak of me!”

“Aha! Didn’t I tell you that we have others here who appreciate romance, Ahasuerus?”

“Essie, it seems that our friend is having a ‘crisis of pride or narcissism’, as you prefer.”

“Don’t imagine that, my friend! It’s because I get very moved when Ruth talks about our first meeting in the field, where she was gleaning.”

“Go on, Ruth, please.”

“As you wish, King Ahasuerus! Naomi started telling me about what we were facing as widows in that society. There was an ordinance in the law of Moses, the levirate, that is, if the husband died, his widow would marry his brother to keep the name of the deceased and raise offspring; or the widow, as well as her lands, if there were no brothers of the deceased to marry her, should be redeemed by the family kinsman-redeemer, who was a close relative who assumed this function among others. As Naomi was already of a certain age and could no longer have children, it would be up to me to take the place of matriarch in the family to keep the name of my deceased husband and leave offspring. But ... How would I do this? Was I not barren? Or was my husband (because we did not have children in the ten years that we remain married)? Once again these Jews came with this conversation of children and family! Didn’t they think of anything else? I was still young and had not such a hurry to get married for a while; it is right that I should worry about my future, and sooner or later, I would feel loneliness because I had no family anymore. However, I still needed to feel sure of myself in relation to my concepts of life, not only in my relationship with people or with respect to material support, but also in relation to my spiritual life. I knew the God of Israel, however, still not so well and I was thirsty for this knowledge. There came the day that I decided to take a position concerning our livelihood; I decided to look for work and went out to the fields.”

“Oh ... Good! The hour is coming!”

“Boaz! Do you realize the ridiculous role you’re performing?”

“It is not ridiculous! I just want to participate in this new time in your life, because for me it was a wonderful time too.”

“Let me continue with the narrative. I was entering a property, but I did not know the name of its owner. I took a cloth bag to collect some ears of grain, or at least some leftover grain that remained among the sheaves that the reapers gathered. I wrapped my face almost entirely with the mantle so that the sun did not burn my skin and I trusted in the divine providence. Thus, people could not recognize me; at least that’s what I thought. I was crouched, gathering barley, when I saw the taskmaster address a middle-aged man, strong and commanding who entered the field. They talked and I saw that they looked directly at me. Would they drive me out of there? A cold sweat suddenly invaded my body and a shiver of fear ran through my spine. I stood still watching the two get closer and I heard when the servant said, *“She is the Moabite woman, daughter-in-law of Naomi; she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment.”* Impertinent! He was denouncing me to his master! And I, who thought having come disguised, had been discovered? What would I respond? Boaz, came to me and said, *“You are Ruth, are you not? Do not be afraid. I knew all that you did for your mother-in-law and how you left your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. Do not go to glean in another field or leave this*

one, but keep close to my servants and where they go, you will follow. I have ordered the young men not to bother you or reprimand you; instead, to let you freely reap what you need. Come sit with us for lunch. Eat as much as you like. May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!" He made me sit near him and his servants, and we ate. I was so afraid and so ashamed that I could say not even a word. But his peace and his kindness comforted my heart, and slowly I started to feel at ease there, and also protected. I remained gleaning grain till the end of the day and I could note that I was with great amount of supplies to bring home, to me and Naomi. I was eager to tell her the news."

"Ah! Now I'll talk, my turn came at last!"

"Speak, our anxious brother, Boaz! Since you interrupted the narrative, go ahead. Give us also your opinion."

"Majesty, can you imagine what I felt to see Ruth? She was an 'injection of liveliness' in my soul tired and discouraged. I had everything: position of honor among the citizens of that land, health and good look, the position of kinsman-redeemer of my kin Elimelech, a large portion of land and great wealth, good relationship with God; but my affective life was empty by the loss not so recent of my wife, who left me childless. I loved her and could not even think about getting married so soon again. My loneliness was replaced by my dedication to the land, however, now it came up like a dry leaf that tried to be kept under the waters. I felt again the pain of loss in my heart, but at the same time an unexpected joy by God's new time for me; that was a true renewal for my soul. I looked at Ruth standing there before me, as a 'helpless child', for she was much younger than I, and although she was not a child anymore, I noticed purity and innocence in her eyes that made me feel young again. My heart was beating with curiosity and eagerness to talk to her, although my conscience advised me to have good sense and not to let show these so euphoric emotions. Did my face blush with shame? What would my servants say? My instinct of leader and 'protector of the weak' spoke louder, and the 'inner man' mastered 'the boy'. I approached her and told her everything she already spoke. When she left, I quickly sought information about the other kinsman-redeemer of Naomi, because I knew there was another before me. I could not waste time."

"Are you happy now, my brother?"

"Of course, your majesty! Didn't I tell you that was important to get to this part of the story?"

"Now that the 'young boy in love' spoke, let us return to the sensible narrative of Ruth."

"Booooooooooooo!"

"Applause, gentlemen, instead of boos!"

Esther said, "Go on, darling! Ahasuerus and Boaz have already enjoyed themselves."

"I went back home and told everything to Naomi, and then she told me about Boaz. The next day, she advised me to look for him in the threshing floor and ask him to spread the edge of his garment over me. This not only meant a marriage proposal, but protection for both of us. I did as she had told me, and as everyone knows, I returned not only with the mantle full of barley seeds, but also with the promise that he would take care of the case. It was time of ransom for me and Naomi."

"Boaz, how was the meeting with the elders at the city gate?"

"I should have wisdom to deal with the case because if I acted recklessly, the other kinsman-redeemer could rescue them, what would be good, perhaps, for them, but to me

it would be to turn everything into ruins. I stayed still and prayed to God for His will to be done. The conversation we had, you all remember: I exposed them the situation of the two women and spoke to the other kinsman-redeemer on the rescue of the land that belonged to Naomi. He was willing to make the deal, but when I talked about his marriage to Ruth he retreated, to my complete joy, for he could not marry her without taking the risk of putting his own family in the game of competition for the land and the offspring, since the child that resulted from that union would bear the name of Mahlon. Therefore, the child would divide the inheritance with his other children. So he retreated, thanks God, and I immediately made clear my willingness to rescue the two women, besides the land of Elimelech. The elders agreed and blessed us, Ruth and I. I don't know if Ruth was truly barren or if the blessing of the Lord came upon her. I just know that I got too excited at the news of being a father. I felt like a young man, such was the joy and liveliness that was in my heart. We walked down the streets and were pleased with the smile of our friends. Everyone was happy. When Obed was born, the joy was general. Naomi took her grandson on her lap and did not let anyone else to hold him; she seemed to be the mother. She held the baby as a great treasure. David! Are you listening? Your grandfather was cute; he had just been born, and shouted praises to the Lord—"

"Of hunger, I would say!"

"— Oh! Ruth! Do not take away the excitement of my narrative!"

"Okay! Talk to David about the most remarkable feature of the family, after the 'modesty', the worship to the Lord."

"Take it easy, great grandmother! I'm enjoying the story."

"Brethren, I think David will give a 'show' here, don't you think?"

"Let's see!"

"The important thing is to summarize the learning about God's time in the life of this so wonderful couple: time for a change of life, to accept the new of God, re-encounter (in the case of Naomi); time of ransom and protection, of reaping what was planted, to live in family, to be accepted and freed from isolation; time to be the 'owner of the field' and time to praise God for the restoration; time to worship Him."

"Thank you, Ruth and Boaz for the wonderful testimony."

"Beautiful! Beautiful!"

David



We were waiting for the testimony of David because he was the next. Then he got up from his place and sat where the panelists used to sit. When we talk about David, the first image that comes to mind before of the king is of the warrior's, because he was the most famous God's instrument to unify His people and give rise to the dynasty from whose offspring the Savior would be born. It was David who, through the wars of the Lord, brought to Israel the respect as a nation before all other peoples. In his reign, all the tribes were together, constituting a single kingdom and submissive to his government.

He came with the safe and determined steps of a sovereign. He did not come with the garments of a warrior, but of a king. He was dressed in a tunic of white color embroidered with gold, and a belt also of gold where it could be seen the mark of the tribe of Judah printed in it. The purple cloak embroidered with gold covered him almost entirely and was bound for a chain of the same precious metal around his neck. The crown that was placed on his head enveloped it like a helmet; there were no precious stones in it, but the simplicity of the warrior, contrasting with the authority of a true anointed of God. In his right hand there was a ring with the symbol of the Davidic dynasty, as well as the ring in the hands of Ahasuerus with his royal emblem.

"Brother David, where is your sword?"

"Today, I don't need it because I am among friends, but I'm sure that if it's necessary, my commander Joab will run to my room and bring it."

"It won't be necessary. We are peaceful people."

"Praised be the Lord!"

"My dear brother, explain to us: what did you feel when you saw the prophet Samuel in your home?"

"I was afraid. What the prophet was doing there, in a so humble house? I was called in haste and was ashamed of it. I was tending the sheep of my father and the servant came to me, desperate, as if he had seen an apparition. It had been some days I was away from home and he found me on the way back. I was deplorable: dirty, with that smell of sheep, the clothes were a little torn, because it had not been an easy journey; a bear had tried to kill the flock, and I had to put up a great fight to free the animals from its claws. Blood stains could be noticed, not only in my clothes, but also in my arms and legs. I wanted to introduce myself properly to the famous and well-known prophet of Israel, but there was no time. He was waiting for me. The servant informed me that he had spoken to my father and all my brothers, but had not yet decided anything until talk to me too. I asked, *"Decided about what?"* He answered, *"I'm not sure, but it seems that it was God who sent him to his father to choose a child of his for an important mission"*. I spoke again, *"What kind of mission?"* He just said, *"I don't know? I only saw a ram's horn in his hand, full with oil."* I was curious and said, *"Gosh! What is this?"* But he was impatient and replied, *"Stop asking questions, master, and let's walk fast."* I entered by the back door, but it was not necessary any presentation. When I entered, the smell of sheep came along with me and everybody knew that David had

arrived. My brothers Eliab and Abinadab looked at me with that usual air of superiority, seeming ashamed of my outward appearance before Samuel. My third brother Shammah, who had also been ruled out by the prophet, looked at me with his sad face of who was about to burst into tears. My father Jesse gave me the paternal well-known guidance through his reproachful look as if saying, “*Be careful not to say what you should not.*” In fact, I did not want to say anything; I was startled with all that, but something inside me showed joy, spontaneity, sense of humor, courage, confidence and faith. I don’t know if that’s what influenced the prophet, because he quickly turned to me and poured all the oil that was inside the *shophar*, the ram’s horn, on my head. He said that God had chosen me to lead His people; then, as fast as he had arrived, he went out. I needed time to think; I was not sure what was happening at that moment, because no one explained to me clearly. I just know I was feeling a little different after that the oil has been spilled on me: somehow, I felt special to the Lord. Why? I wondered what He had seen in me!”

“David, how were the days that followed to that anointing? Did you know God’s time for you?”

“Apparently nothing has changed; I continued the ‘black sheep of the family.’ I only noticed that something seemed to have been kindled in my heart, praise. When I was alone at night, resting after a day of tending the sheep, I looked at the sky and a spontaneous and different song of praise came to my mind. So I took my harp and began to sing. That seemed to calm me down, at the same time that strengthened me internally but I did not know what for. I can say it was a time of wait.”

“When did you meet King Saul?”

“It was shortly after, when there was war against the Philistines and the famous Goliath appeared on the scene. I was carrying supplies for my older brothers who had enlisted and I could hear for the first time the voice of that uncircumcised, affronting the armies of the *living God*. The affront stirred me; it seemed to come directly to me. That’s when I knew the whole situation, the reward that the king was giving to who defeated him, and I offered myself to defeat the giant.”

“What courage! Don’t you think, Ahasuerus? Just a boy, trying to defeat an experienced warrior like that! For sure he thought to be son-in-law of the king, didn’t he?”

“Wait a minute, Essie! I see no romance here! The case was urgent, and certainly David was not interested in any woman, at least for now! Am I not right, David?”

“Yes, your majesty! My love for God was at stake and I also found myself affronted by that giant, who despised the army of Israel as a nation, besides mocking YHWH as if He could not save us. These Philistines touch my nerves! Am I not saying, Bathsheba, that just talking about them makes me itch?”

“Calm down, dear! They no longer exist. Their time has gone!”

“Thanks goodness! But back to the subject, your majesty, a soldier took me to the king. I could barely see his face beneath the armor. It seemed more a hiding place where he was sheltered not to show the fear he felt. I had the impression that he was trembling, by the anxious tone of his voice. He began to take everything away from him and clothed me with that ‘heap of tin’. More than quickly, I disentangled myself of all that weight and told him my desire to defeat Goliath, but it would have to be my way. I think he thought I was just a ridiculous kid. However, I did not care with what he thought; I cared about the order of God in my heart to go to fight. I left him standing there and ran to the brook. I picked up five smooth stones and put them in my bag of shepherd. In the distance I could see the giant, fiercely screaming like a wounded animal. I paid no heed to his cries of affront but I focused on the Lord, I thought of His

protection and looked at Goliath. The only gap in his armor was an opening between the eyes; my aim would have to be accurate. That's when I felt a force truly divine as if wrapping me and giving me the security of victory. If God was for me, who would be against me? I looked at the target and threw the stone. The shot was accurate and he fell with his face on the ground. I ran to him, under the shouts of encouragement of the Israelite soldiers and took the sword out of his hand, cutting off his head with it."

"Ouch ... What a horror! I cannot see blood!"

"What was it, Sarah?"

"May the kings forgive me, but I cannot hear of war or blood. I remember Isaac. Poor thing! He was almost killed by my husband! Mother is mother, do you understand?"

"Sarah, what a shame! Our son is alive, he was saved by the Lord, was he not?"

"Yes, Abraham. Sorry. You men, do you only think of war and blood? I think like Queen Esther; is it not better a love story?"

"Calm down women, not all is war, is it, my dear David?"

"King Ahasuerus is right, but those times were times of war, indeed. When I cut off the Goliath's head the people rejoiced. So I went back to the camp of Saul and gave him 'the trophy'. He looked at me with that suspicious face, but thankful for the victory. He liked me and asked my father to leave me under his command; when he needed my services, he would send for me. His son Jonathan at his side looked at me in silence; by seeing his eyes, I was sure that I would have a friend for the rest of my life. Jonathan taught me many things and when I was in the palace of Saul playing my harp to calm him from the nightmares, we talked a lot about many subjects. When Saul gave me Michal in marriage and I became the king's son-in-law, I began to understand God's plan for me and remembered the anointing of Samuel years ago. It was a time of victory, but that soon became a time of escape and anonymity, evolving into a time of learning and training, a time of 'cave'. Oh, oh...! A long time! Around fourteen years."

"Tell us a little about this time, majesty. I can also call you this way, huh? After all we are talking to a king."

"Of course, Queen Esther! They were hard times: to master the fear, to learn to lead other lives, to truly trust in God and His strategies placed in my heart, not doubting them; time to work my confidence and my self-esteem, to be transformed from an insecure and inexperienced kid into a true warrior and king; time of escape and rejection; to know who the real friends were, time to gain experience, learn to fight properly, develop certain diplomatic strategies, since I had to do to agreements even with enemy kings so I could stay alive; time to learn to wait for God's time and not to rush the ascent to the throne. It was also a time to know His justice on my life, freeing me from the enemies; time of maturation and to know how to deal with frustrations. After 'receiving the diploma' from His Sovereign hands, I was anointed king of Judah by my countrymen. The time of anonymity was over, and it began the time to be publicly known and put into practice what I had learned over all these years as a fugitive. It was time to reap what I had planted, time of reward."

"How was the first part of your reign in Hebron?"

"I reigned in Hebron as king of Judah for about seven years and six month, but the first two years of my reign there were a time of war against the only surviving son of Saul, Ishbosheth, who at that time had been placed as king over Israel. I was sure of God's choice in relation to me to be king of Judah and Israel; therefore, I waited on Him until everything was resolved. Ishbosheth was murdered and I rose to power as king of the whole nation."

"Did the times of war finish?"

“Calm down, Sary! Nothing bad will happen.”

“I knew that underneath this clothing of king there is a ‘bloodthirsty warrior.’”

“Forgive us, King David, the fact is that she was a little frightened by the report.”

“Never mind, Abraham! Are we not seeing many healings in this Conference? Maybe your wife is cured from the ‘horror of blood’ and begins to see me with other eyes, after all.”

“Hey, hey, Sary! Where did you get this expression: ‘bloodthirsty warrior?’ It looks like the phrase that I told my husband Moses, does it not?”

“No, Zipporah, darling! You called me a ‘bridegroom of blood’ because of the custom of circumcision of our children by God’s command.”

“It’s almost all the same thing! We women here want to make a protest against the war. It is we who suffers the consequences, isn’t it true, sisters?”

“Hear, hear! That’s right!”

“Stop this nonsense, ladies! Our subject is serious. Times of war are times of war, and that’s it!”

Sarah said, “As you wish, your majesty, but we do not like it. Fortunately, there are times of love and time of peace. Glory to God!”

“Return to the report, David!”

“Where was I? ... Ah! As king of the nation I faced not only external wars to take the foreign lands and attach them to the territory of Israel, but also the palatial intrigues, who sought all the time to undermine my reign. Has your majesty not faced the same problem? Is it not a terrible case for any monarch?”

“Hem, hem (clearing the throat)! Let’s put this aside!”

“Sure, sure! But as I was saying, there was a new time for me too: to make the religious reformation in Israel, time to bring the ark of God to Jerusalem; we will call it time of praise. Everyone knows of my two attempts to bring it; only the second time I succeeded, because then I brought it in the right way, under the praise of the Levites. Oh! ... What a beautiful thing! I danced with all my strength, and the ark of the Lord was placed in the Tent of Meeting, which made the place of a temple until it was built. It was a great party. Kings do not have only their time of war or to exercise authority; they also have their time of leisure and joy.”

“David, tell us also of your time as husband and father. I know that you had some incidents in family that were not so pleasant. After all, they are part of life, are they not?”

“Right, majesty! We are not known only by our heroic acts, but also by our mistakes, unfortunately, for they serve as an example for other brothers, lest they suffer the same consequences than us. After that little ‘time of idleness’ in the palace (thanks God it was a very short time), when I looked through the windows and saw Bathsheba in the other house, and everyone knows what happened next, I don’t need to tell, I lived some time with the family; first, rejoicing at the birth of Solomon, and then getting sad with the ‘little problem’ with Absalom, my third son. I’ve already had the experience of being a father; however, with Solomon it was different. He was special, mainly because his mother Bathsheba was very important to me, beyond what the Lord had already chosen him to succeed me on the throne. As for Absalom, who I also loved, God’s time for us was not so nice. He got resented because I banished him from the court for having killed my first son Amnon (because of that incident of incest with his half-sister, Tamar). Then he tried to take my throne and it was then that he died in the struggle between my followers and his. I do not want to talk much about it; it brings tears to my eyes.”

“No, no, David, we have no intention to grieve you. We know it is very hard to be king. We know that the palace is a place to kings, to princes and nobles; finally, for those who know how to reign. But the training is done out in the arena, in the forests, in the battlefields and in the teachings among the subjects. Very little is learned at parties among the futile and snobbish people who attend the court – which is not our case! Very little we have to learn from the snob and arrogant ones dressed in silk. All experiences come to be a training to properly exercise the authority, so that lives can resurrect and evil can be destroyed and overthrown. The best king is he who knew to be a slave; only he knows, truly, the price of freedom. Esther knows, don’t you, my sweetheart?”

“Yes, Ahasuerus! God knows all things.”

“Thanks to your efforts and your love for the Lord, being a great example for us all, because you’re *the man after God’s heart*, the whole nation was united in these years of your reign; besides that all your effort in saving money and material for the construction of the temple brought us a great benefit to our faith. Is it not true, brothers, that we learned important things from the life of this *Lord’s beloved*?”

“Of course, your majesty! So I, Mordecai, I’d like to hear from David about his intimacy with God to write so inspired praises and with so much emotion. It seems that each fight and test that he went through was also an opportunity to draw closer to the Lord and let recorded the words of incentive from the Holy Spirit for the future generations. Tell us, dear brother, how was your evolution from shepherd of sheep to king of Israel, regarding your knowledge of God.”

“As I said, Mordecai, at the beginning of this testimony, as shepherd of the sheep I stayed looking at the starry sky at night and I felt free, then, to talk with Him. Good times! I had never received a vision of Him, as occurred to our brother Moses, but I always had a perfect awareness of His presence in my life. I cannot explain how it is. I was sure he knew me and loved me, although having made me with the soul of a warrior and I have never had great demonstrations of affection from my family; they liked me, but they did not pampered me too much, because I was different from them. They thought I was somewhat ‘absent-minded’ with the ‘head in the clouds’, thinking of different things than those of the earth, as my brothers did. That’s why, despite the rejections and persecutions that I passed in my entire life, the assurance of His love for me gave me strength to overcome the obstacles and always advance. I wish it had been otherwise, but here today, by calling me *“the beloved of the Lord, the man after God’s heart”*, I can say I was also healed from some wounds of my soul. With the praises that came to my mouth, I strengthened my faith and felt free of my problems to continue my mission. Through praise, I knew the altar, the throne of God, where He told me all His secrets and did not rebuked me for my sin. On the contrary, He relieved me of it. We had a long chat in those nocturnal meetings in front of my tent or at the terrace of the palace. Of course I consulted Him through my priests Zadok and Abiathar. But often, He left aside the formalities and spoke directly to me. Thanks to His direction, I could rule with wisdom and authority over the people and judge difficult cases, and thus, show them the path to the ‘altar’. I think that this intimate communion with Him is what made me feel His heart also, that is, His wrath and His mercy, His sorrow and His joy. I know His heart. His Spirit speaks through me. You may notice that I did not hide any of my emotions in any of the psalms. On the contrary, I made a point of letting them recorded for all generations, so that by reading them the brothers did not feel alone in their struggles and remembered that other brothers in the past went through the same trials and won. The Lord spoke to me in dreams or visions during the praise, which guided me on how to proceed. In my moments of fierce battle against the enemies,

when I had no time to take my harp and sing, I felt temporarily away of this communion, but it was just an impression. He was there beside me, giving me victory so I could praise again. It was very good when the time of peace and solace came; the communion was resumed. I am saying this so that the brothers do not dismay in the tests or fights, but may know that nothing lasts forever and that the Lord controls the time in our lives. We're having a great time of communion now, don't you think?"

"Didn't I tell you that the testimony of David would be great? How about you praise the Lord now, so that we can hear?"

"Yes, it will be very good, David!"

"Sure, take your harp and sing for us. Musicians! Accompany him!"

"I will exalt you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.

Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever.

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.

One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts...

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love...

The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

He fulfills the desire of all who fear him; he also hears their cry, and saves them.

The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.

My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever...

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?

And who shall stand in his holy place?

Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.

They will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation...

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.

Who is the King of glory?

The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in.

Who is this King of glory?

The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory" (Ps 145: 1-4; 8; 18-21; Ps 24: 3-5; 7-10).

"Glory to God! Hallelujah! Great is the Lord!"

"Thank you, David, for your participation with us. Brothers! You may continue praising the Lord, while the afternoon tea will be served. Then, we'll resume the lectures."

Esther



The expected moment to hear the story of the hosts Ahasuerus and Esther came. We all looked at them with receptivity and love. After all, they were our brothers in faith and had also gone through difficult tests; however, they won all of them.

“Dear brothers, what do you think about staying right here? I see no need to sit down in place of the panelists.”

“What is this, Ahasuerus? Now it’s I who wants to experiment the seat of honor. Let’s go. What do you think, ladies and gentlemen; does he sit or not?”

“Sit, sit, sit.”

“All right, all right! I’m coming. You first, Essie.”

“He remains a gentleman, didn’t I say?”

“Who will be the mediator?”

“I will.”

“Thank you, Deborah!”

“Since I am here only as a listener, I want to place on record my participation as a woman and a warrior at the same time.”

“This is what I call combining business with pleasure! Do you see how we can give a ‘feminine touch’ to the wars and revolutions?”

“Sary, my angel! What an idea!”

“Abby, only sit and listen.”

“Deborah! We are ready.”

“Yes, your majesty. Queen Esther, tell us about the meanings of your name; it seems that you have a Hebrew and a Persian name, and as we could notice, one of them seems to be confirming your preference for romantic stories, right?”

“You’re smart, Deborah. One of my names, the Persian, is *Ishtar*, which means ‘*as beautiful as the moon*’, related to the Babylonian goddess (Ishtar) of fertility and love, so my preference for romance; the other, *Stara*, also Persian, means: ‘*star*’; *Hadassah* is the Hebrew name, meaning: ‘*myrtle*’. Another Hebrew meaning for Esther is ‘*secret*’, ‘*hidden*’.”

“King Ahasuerus, your name also has a Persian equivalent, has it not?”

“Yes. *Ahasuerus* (*Achashverosh*) is the Hebrew equivalent of the Persian *Khshayarshan*, *Xerxes* in Greek, which means ‘*great warrior, warlike, bellicose, lion*’. So my warlike actions as Head of State.”

“What story was that about the feast offered to your ministers and officials in the third year of your reign, when the former Queen Vashti refused to appear?”

“I had already achieved great victories over other kingdoms and decided to share the honors with my nobles and subjects because I wanted them to see how great the spoils of war were. Vashti refused to attend because of the conditions that I imposed on her, with the intention of showing the guests not only the royal crown, but also her extreme beauty. Today, I can recognize her reluctance in appearing and I can only agree. Really, appearing without any clothes before a large bunch of drunkards, wearing only the crown was not a great proposal. However, what’s done is done. I deposed her

from her position of queen and beg forgiveness from God and everyone for my folly. But I know that all things were and always will be under the control of the Lord, so her place was given to Esther. After a while I felt alone, without my queen, although I had many concubines, and that's when my servants suggested me to choose another to replace her; they suggested that virgins of good look and beauty were brought to Susa, and she who pleased me might reign in place of Vashti. I agreed."

"King Ahasuerus! When we were listening to the testimony of David, it was commented on being a slave, and then your majesty set the example of Esther. I wanted to hear the Queen a little, and her cousin Mordecai, about this time of exile."

"I can talk about our exile. My name, Mordecai, means '*small man*', and I am from the tribe of Benjamin, a descendant of Kish, which links me to the tribe and the family of king Saul. I'm saying this to explain the conflict between me and Haman, the Agagite, our former prime minister and who was deposed after having conspired against our people. He was a descendant of Agag the Amalekite king who was spared by Saul against the orders of God and then killed by the prophet Samuel. We Jews always took very seriously the conflicts of blood and this can persist for many generations. My ancestors had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon after the fall of Judah under the dominion of Nebuchadnezzar. I was born in Babylon, and some years later, it was conquered by the Persians. My cousin Hadassah, known among the Persians by Esther, was raised by me as a daughter when her parents died. For the Jewish people, those years were times of flight, of extradition from the homeland, time of weeping and longing for what was known to us, time to submit to God's treatment. After all, our people had sinned and turned away from Him, so we had been delivered into the hands of our enemies. When Nebuchadnezzar was defeated by the Persians, many who left Jerusalem during the exile had died, and their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, who didn't know their country of origin, had become accustomed to the new life under the Persian style; hence, they did not want to return after the release of the orders of King Cyrus. We both, Esther and I, we got used to live here. Indeed, I received a few years later, after Cyrus having been replaced, an office in the service of the king, at the city gates, near the royal palace, and I felt very well this way. As everyone knows, the city gate is the center of business and legal activities of the citizens. So, my office in the service of the king obliged me to stay there as a secondary official in the royal administration. Many know me by the name of Mardukaya. Although we were in coexistence with the Persians, there were still some hostility against the Jews, because the news coming from Jerusalem and other nations regarding the action of our God with miracles and wonders among the peoples, besides to confirm Him as strong and true God, caused reverence in some, fear and dislike in others. For this reason, I forbade Esther to declare her nationality openly; it was a way to protect her from any kind of segregation and aggression, do you understand?"

"Queen Esther, tell us what did you feel when the soldiers of King Ahasuerus, by his orders, began to invade homes in search of virgins of good look to be taken to the king's house. Was it difficult? Were you scared?"

"Well, I was without action in face of those orders. Neither I nor Mordecai could do anything. All in the neighborhood knew that I fitted the qualifications of the royal orders; however, they could not defend me for fear of reprisals. I tried to hide among the sheaves of wheat placed behind the house; the first time, the soldiers did not find me, but on the second inspection by the surroundings I only had time to scream to Mordecai, telling him not to worry about me; just to pray and intercede for my life. I was taken to the palace with all the other girls. We stayed under the care of Hegai, the eunuch. The Lord made me find grace in his eyes and he hastened to give me the ointments and

proper food; he did the same with the other seven girls who were chosen. Every day Mordecai passed in front of the court of the king's house and asked the guards about me."

"Now let's get into the theme of our lecture that is time. It is true that you spent a whole year being prepared to be brought before the king?"

"It's true. I want to make it clear that it is not only to be warrior or conqueror, like David, Joshua, Moses and others, that there is a time of preparation of God; the same time is also in activity to be queen. Folks! A whole year being treated for beautification was not easy; it was six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and perfumes and ointments. Myrrh, like the myrtle (the meaning of my name), and that was the ointment used initially to prepare us, tastes bitter and is also called gall (symbol of pain and suffering, as well as anesthesia of this pain). Myrrh symbolizes, then, anointing of healing and redemption, life changing, inner strengthening and preparation. Afterwards, my beautification was completed with other spices. This means that in order to take our place as kings and priests, we must be prepared through the suffering (gall), receiving upon us the healing power of God, closing our wounds and giving us ransom, inner strength and a real change of life, through the transformation of our way of thinking. After the myrrh, I was prepared with spices and other ointments, which means the gifts that the Spirit of God pours on us after having been healed. Now, in His strength, we can exert our calling and exercise His authority on earth. All of us, the candidates for the throne, we were being instructed in all knowledge that a queen must have, not only as for her duties as wife of the king, but also etiquette, customs of the court, how to behave in public, how to speak or address an authority, even in politics, because although we did not have a direct participation in the affairs of the nation, our influence over the king could have great repercussion on many lives. I had more experience as a child of God during this period. Spiritually and emotionally, big changes were happening too, so I understand what Ruth told us here about adapting to a new reality. I actually had always been a simple girl. I did not understand why God had chosen me to be in that position. For me it was on one hand a privilege; on the other, a scary task, especially when dealing with a foreign country and an uncircumcised husband. These were things that clashed in my soul, and only the careful hand of God to comfort me and give me the certainty that I was truly synchronized with His time and His will for my life! I can call this time, a time of preparation, change, transformation, wait and time to rely on the divine guidance. As for the women who were with me, the feeling was the same: expectation, missing the family and insecurity about what would happen to them henceforth. They knew that, even if not chosen, they could never return to their old life. After twelve months of preparation, they could come to the king, being allowed to carry what they wanted from the house of women to his house. Then, they would return to the house of the concubines under the care of Shaashgaz, the eunuch in charge of them, and they would only return to the king if he so wished."

"Dear Esther! When the time was coming what did you feel?"

"Wait a minute! I want to make a comment apart. It even seems that you are turning me into an executioner. What a serious talk it was! Essie, weren't you so eager to tell our romantic story? And now you're turning me into a bellicose lion and ready to devour defenseless lambs."

Jael interrupted the conversation, "But is not this the meaning of your name? I said that one cannot rely too much on men; they are dangerous."

Deborah rebuked her, "Jael! Did you forget you are speaking with the king?"

"Excuse me, Deborah! Excuse me, your majesty! But I'm saying that not all of them are very trustworthy. I know these 'conquerors' very well. If I did not have

determination and had not killed Sisera – that meddlesome – our people would not be free until today. Heber my husband, that softie, had already made an agreement with the enemy so he wouldn't have to fight, do you remember, Deborah? You also had to 'set fire' to Barak to go to war, you know exactly how everything happened!"

"Well, well! Weren't you, women, against war?"

"My dear Prime Minister Mordecai, with due respect, don't distort our words; we are against this 'bloodshed' you are so fond of doing for fun, but when it comes to war for a just cause, then yes, we agree; after all, war is war!"

"Ouch ... I think I'll faint. I cannot stand hearing about blood."

"Calm down, Sary, they will change the subject very soon."

"I hope so. I'm too old for these things."

"Queen Esther, go ahead, please!"

"Well, when my turn came, I asked Hegai nothing to take with me to the king's house. I think it was the hand of God on my life, for I found favor of everyone who saw me. I was taken to the king in the seventh year of his reign, in the tenth month (December-January), the month Tebeth."

"Oh ... Now it's my turn to speak."

"Not yet, Ahasuerus, I'll tell the brethren how our meeting was. Afterwards, you speak just to agree with what I said."

"Who says they are more fragile? I'll tell the truth."

"Well, brethren, the great doors of the royal chambers were open to me and then I entered. I could barely look ahead; I was looking at the floor, so ashamed I felt. Fortunately, my face was hidden by the veil and the king could not see the blush of my cheek. It seemed more like a time of test to put into practice what I had learned in those twelve months. What would I do? I talked to myself, "*Esther, Esther, trust in God and do not go wavering now; He will give you victory.*" I plucked up courage, straightened my body, even knowing I was being watched, and looked at the chair of the king. What was my astonishment to find that there was nobody in that room, and the king's chair was empty! I had never seen a room so large. Two whole houses would fit in there. I almost screamed with fright when I realized that the king was behind me, within a little distance, quiet, and staring at me silent and with curiosity. I could even see a sign of respect in his eyes. For me? A Jewish woman?"

"You must have felt butterflies in your stomach."

"Mordecai, don't put more wood in the fire. Can't you see that we can barely breathe with so much suspense?"

"Exactly, little cousin! Go ahead. It's funny; is it not, cousin Ahasuerus?"

"Yes, yes, Essie, my little dove; continue."

"How about you talk now? Weren't you so eager to bear your testimony?"

"Since I have the word, let's go. Have you ever seen a king indecisive and insecure like a teenager when he finds himself face to face with his girlfriend? It was not only Esther who went through a time of wait. I also went, for I had much time to reflect, not only in my political functions, as well in my personal life. The great and known conqueror Ahasuerus was now looking like a kid with no direction. It was ridiculous to think that, though I was so powerful in certain areas of my life, I had not grown or had success in my affective life. I'm talking about love indeed, deep and sincere relationship with someone who could really understand me and complement me, not the sporadic affairs with some frivolous and superficial women that I made queens by force of circumstances, much less with concubines, as it's a custom of every king. I had ordered everyone to get out and leave me alone with the one whom I have already heard about. I knew many things about her: she was gentle, calm, had good humor, confident in the

future and owned an uncommon wisdom to the women of these lands. Actually, nobody knew where she came from, that is, her nationality, but she spoke our language perfectly, and her keen intelligence allowed her to learn anything that she didn't know yet. Perhaps she was the wife for which I was waiting for so long. I preferred to put myself in an observation position. I saw very well when she came in and I loved her as soon as I saw her. She was everything that they had told me and much more: she displayed innocence, purity, sincerity and true love. Her shyness by entering the room made me keep silent to see what would be her next reaction. Although shy, she did not seem coward. That's when she looked back and saw me; to me, with those silly and goggle eyes of interest, looking directly at her. Although hidden by the veil, I could see, yes, the blush of shame on her fair skin. I loved her more than all the other women; of all the virgins she won my favor and devotion. So we knew each other and I put the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. For both of us it was a time of love and mutual knowledge, consolidating the confidence of both and healing the emotional wounds of the past. I think she saw that the time of slavery was over for her and a time to reign began. What I admired most in Esther was her discretion. Although knowing that she pleased me and that I would do anything for her, she did not behave foolishly or made me absurd requests. She remained in her place until she was called to my presence, and this only served to increase my respect for her. Haman, my former prime minister, was my 'right arm' and I discussed all matters of State with him, but often I wanted to discuss them with Esther, for she seemed to be more reliable. What subsequently happened to Haman, 'palatial intrigue' as our brother David said, confirmed my suspicions."

"What did you feel, Esther, when you learned of *Pur*, that is, the dice that Haman had cast to kill the Jews on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar (February-March), the last month of the year?"

"How the decree had been sealed with the king's ring and could not be revoked, I was very sad about everything, especially by the attitude of neglect of Ahasuerus when it comes to human beings, because he cared about the suggestion of Haman, beyond what gave him total authority in the kingdom to do what he wanted. Was Ahasuerus not the king? Would he now be willing to get rid of his responsibilities, passing certain decisions to a man as unscrupulous as Haman? It had been a long time since he didn't call me to his presence and I felt ruled out. Would there be a new candidate for queen? Didn't he like me anymore? For me, it seemed that the time of exile had returned but it was not true; it was God's time to move circumstances that would reveal to me and to His people why I have been made queen of Persia, besides to show Ahasuerus that a living and true God held the power and the control of all nations and all kings. That's when Mordecai sent me a message to intercede for our people with the king. I trembled and said him that the laws did not allow me to appear before him without being summoned. In fact, I was scared, but Mordecai reminded me that I had not come to the position of leadership without the approving hand of God. Therefore, I strengthened my faith and told him and to all my servants with me to fast for three days so that the Lord opened the way for our victory. It was a time of true consecration when the Lord strengthened me internally and gave me the right strategy to save the Jews and confirm me as queen."

"What the king has to say regarding all this?"

"Esther thought I had forgotten and despised her. In fact, I was going through a time of meditation and reassessment of my actions as monarch of Persia. It seems that certain acts of Haman no longer did so well to me as before, and my own actions, thoughts and emotions were going through 'God's sieve'. I thought what was right and

what was wrong. I spent days and nights without sleep, trying to discover the correct path to continue in power and, above all, I missed Esther. But my pride did not allow me to show her this insecure and frail side at the moment. I can summarize this time in time of treatment of God to my soul.”

“Mordecai, don’t you want to tell us what happened after those three days?”

“After three days, Esther went to the king, who held out to her the golden scepter. Esther touched the tip of the scepter, and he asked her what she wanted. Then, she invited the king and Haman to a banquet. At night, during the feast, the king asked again what she wanted. Esther invited him once more for a second dinner. This was part of God’s strategy to execute His sovereign plan, besides what Esther still wanted to feel more secure before giving the ‘final blow’. Haman, with hate of me, had ordered to build up a gallows of seventy-five feet high on the wall to exalt himself personally before the citizens of Susa and openly show his power, with the purpose to hang me on it. The night before the second banquet, Ahasuerus could not sleep and ordered to be brought the book where were recorded the memorable deeds of the kingdom, and in it, it was found written that it was I who had denounced a conspiracy against him a few years ago and this had led the culprits to execution. He was surprised that no honor had been given to me by this act. In the morning, Haman was in the yard, ready to talk about the gallows. The king asked him what should be done to whom the king desired to honor. Thinking that it was about him, Haman suggested to the monarch to put on the man the royal crown and the royal robes and that he could ride the horse of the sovereign. Then the king sent for me and made to me as Haman said. Once dressed, I was taken to a tour through the city and it was proclaimed before me the honor given to me by Ahasuerus. Haman, enraged, went home and later attended the second banquet of Esther. Ahasuerus asked her again what she wanted and she asked him that her life and the lives of her people could be spared. Thus, she revealed her nationality for everyone and told him about the decree of Haman. He was arrested and hanged on the same gallows he had prepared for me. It was a time to know the truth and put down the lies and betrayal, a time of revelation of God’s purposes. That same day the king gave Esther the house of Haman, and gave me his royal ring, placing me as the second in the kingdom below him. The previous decree against the Jews could not be revoked, according to the law of the Persians. So, we issued a second decree in which it was granted to the Jews to fight for their lives, killing their oppressors. The letter was sent to the Jews from all provinces of the kingdom. On the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, when the decree of Haman would be fulfilled, the Jews fought against their enemies and prevailed. The ten sons of Haman were killed, but nobody touched the spoils. Esther asked the king to hang the corpses on a gallows. So it was done. This meant a sign of vengeance from the Lord and that God’s curse against the Amalekites had been fulfilled by the descendants of Saul. It was time to be fulfilled the righteousness of God. On the fourteenth day, we rested and made feast. It was a day of joy. In Susa, the Jews celebrated on the fifteenth day. So we commanded, Esther and I, that the fourteenth and the fifteenth days of the month of Adar were celebrated every year to remind the people of the victory over their enemies. We called those days *Purim*, because of the name *Pur* (luck). It was time for celebration and joy.”

“That’s what we are feeling now, isn’t it, brethren? With a great joy for the victory of Esther and that was also our victory. One, among many cases, in which God made His children to prosper, even in captivity, and changing the hearts of our oppressors in our favor.”

“Essie, do you still think I’m an oppressor?”

“Of course not! What nonsense! God made a wonderful change in you, Ahasuerus, don’t you see?”

“You are one of ours, not of our adversaries.”

“Good, Joshua! Well spoken! Well remembered!”

“Phew, I almost thought I was out of the team. Do you give me a kiss, Esther?”

“Just one, not to get used too much.”

“Hey, everyone! Have you ever seen a so pampered king?”

“Thank you, King Ahasuerus and Queen Esther, for your wonderful testimony. We were very edified by everything.”

“Let’s switch places again, Deborah, because the next panelist can already prepare himself. Job, you are the next one.”

Job



*A*s soon as Esther and Ahasuerus sat on their thrones, another panelist took the place of honor: Job. His long white beard and his long hair, coupled with the appearance of his garments denoted the remote origin of his figure as biblical character. He walked slowly with the patience and meekness of one who had been deeply tested and worked by God's time. Looking at his clothes, he seemed to be a rich and influential man; however, he didn't seem to be a king. He also did not seem a priest, although he sometimes acted as one of them, by the fact of interceding for his children. Job came along with three other men more or less of the same age: Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. A young man named Elihu also came with them.

"Dear Friend, Job, sit down and feel at ease. We all know that your example of life was a great testimony to humanity, showing that many sufferings that we go through have hidden causes, only of God's knowledge, so we often feel alone in our hardships, because even our friends seem to be against us, isn't it true? But I'm sure that after the Lord explained why it all happened in your life it became easier the restoration of fellowship with friends and family, did it not? Your wife and sons and daughters are confirming what I'm saying."

"Yes, your majesty. My wife and my friends didn't understand me because in the mentality of our time, when someone suffered it was a sign of the divine wrath on him for having sinned; they did not understand the different ways of the Lord and that someone can suffer, even having no condemnation upon him. To Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar my case was a case unlike anything they had ever seen."

"Can you remind us about what was at stake in your case, dear friend?"

"What was hidden was the attack of Satan against God Himself, using me as a weapon. He showed the Most High that I was faithful because I had everything; if He took His hand off me and from everything I had, he (Satan) doubted that I could remain loyal to the Lord. Thanks God, our brothers who came after the coming of His Son to earth, they have no doubt that the Lord never withdraws His hand from those whom He calls to Himself. But in my experience, I did not know this truth yet and I thought that God didn't love me and had forgotten me."

"It must have been a very hard experience, that is, the time of loss. Tell us about it, please."

"I lost goods and sons in only one day. At first, I accepted the judgment of God and I didn't sin against Him. Not satisfied with the situation, Satan demanded from Him also my health, as everyone knows, and He also allowed that I was touched on my body to have one more reason in the end to put the adversary to shame. The Lord allowed these things, in order to show that the fidelity between me and Him would never be broken by anything."

"Let me complement, your majesty."

"Speak, Eliphaz, we are listening."

"Our friend Job cursed the day of his birth, and his wife told him to curse God and die—"

“Wait a minute, it was just a slip. What’s up? Only because of this, you will always go mentioning this fact? What a bad habit of staying reporting the mistakes of others!”

“Calm down, darling, this is a conversation between friends for healing, not a police interrogation. No one will hand you over to the king’s soldiers, calm down. Besides, have you not heard that after the Son of God came to earth and shed His blood for us on the cross, accusation no longer exists on His chosen?”

“Jobby, honey, I don’t belong to this time, but I think you’re right; I want to update my time with the Most High, that is, I want to live this new time of forgiveness and salvation for me. I think it’s better for your little friends to think about it too, instead of speaking ill of the lives of others.”

“Sweetheart, time and forgiveness belong to Him. He knows all things and is hearing the cry of all our hearts. I’m sure He already forgave you. Forgive my friends too, to get out of here completely cured, right?”

“Of course, dear. The four of you are forgiven: Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Elihu. Oh! I feel better now with this liberation. Sorry for the interruption; you can go on, gentlemen.”

“As I was saying at first, we, his three friends, we sat down with him to comfort him and grieved ourselves on his pain. For seven days and nights we did it. Then I, Eliphaz, reminded him that he was an example to the people and should seek God. I did nothing wrong, did I?”

“Not until then, but we must recognize that thereafter we began to accuse him saying that his sufferings were caused by his sins. Unintentionally, we distorted the truth and only made his pain increase. Poor thing!”

“Job, tell us; did you begin to be influenced by the accusations of your three friends?”

“In no time I started to think that I had sinned or that I was guilty of anything. I knew this was not true. I did not let myself be seduced by the accusations of my friends because I knew how I walked before God. I kept moments of faith and trust in Him, even not understanding what was going on. Sometimes I demanded an explanation of the Lord as for the reason of being falsely accused by my friends. I began to remember my first happy state and declared my integrity. I remembered how much I had helped all who came to me, how I had been a helpful instrument in His hands, but it seems that He paid no attention to this, and this lack of answer made me feel alone and abandoned. Of course this was just an impression of my soul; however, I could not feel His presence or His approval anymore. I can call this time a time of testing: of my faith, integrity, trust, loyalty, perseverance; test of the certainty of my beliefs and my spiritual attitudes, time of reflection on whether to change or not certain personal concepts, among other things. It was also a time of inner loneliness.”

“How long you and your friends remained in this theological discussion?”

“I do not remember, but I know that was a long time. The wounds in my body ached, and while I worried about cleaning them and rubbing them to ache less, we talked about all the things we thought to understand about God. Later, we discovered that we did not understand anything of His eternal purposes.”

“It’s true! And this situation made us more humble too, taking away from us the desire to judge whoever it was, don’t you agree, Bildad?”

“Yes, Zophar. I learned a lot from Job, I learned to look inside myself, before looking at the defects in my brothers. I also learned that God’s purposes fit into our lives, causing us to grow together through our similar trials. Too bad we only realized it when the Lord rebuked us by our proud and wrong attitude before Him! If we had the

humility to accept and understand these things before, surely we would have lessened the suffering of Job, and learned together with him all that the Lord wanted to teach us.”

“Fortunately I entered on the scene at that moment!”

“It could only be the wise boy, Elihu. He thinks that was of a big help, but he only put more wood in the fire.”

“I’m only joking a little with you. Like them, I thought I was helping our friend here, trying to defend God. Then I realized that He doesn’t need a defense lawyer. However, some things of what I said served to lead Job to seek the solution of his problems in the right place, in the Lord.”

“Elihu is right, brethren. Even without a real vision of the situation, his attitude rebuking my three friends and justifying God, trying to explain all His actions toward men, was the beginning of a new time in my story: time to stop the fruitless discussions and the empty human explanations to seek the answers in the right person. So I started looking for the revelation in Him. I can call this new time a time of search and revelation. After that, the Lord reprimanded me, what started working my inner bitterness and explaining many things, ending up for supporting me and berating my friends for having accused me falsely.”

“What a shame! When we heard His voice speaking to us and showing us the truth, we felt very small before everything. It was a time of repentance and humiliation for us too, asking him forgiveness for the nonsense that we said. But I can say that it was worthwhile, for thus we could know better the Lord’s purposes and understand that it is He who holds all the wisdom and power; not we. When Job forgave us and interceded for us, God gave him twice as much as he had before. God also gave him the same number of children he had lost: seven men and three women.”

“Job, we know that talking about the beautiful daughters of a hero is a sign of divine blessing. The names of your daughters represented a blessing from God for you, right?”

“Yes, your majesty.”

“Women, we are a blessing in the lives of men, are we not?”

“There comes the ‘feminist committee’ again!”

“Ahasuerus, my sisters are right; behind every great man there is always a great woman, is this not what people say? Applause for the women of God.”

“We are a minority here, gentlemen.”

“Stop whining, Ahasuerus! You have enough problems in learning to manage the power that the Lord gave to men, don’t you agree? Who said here that would like to exchange ideas about the affairs of State with his wife, it was not you? This means, ladies, that these great men of God had our important influence to be winners. Applause.”

“Returning to the subject, my dear friend Job, tell us about the names of your daughters. The Lord blessed you through them, didn’t He?”

“Yes, King Ahasuerus! The first was *Jemimah*, which means *pigeon, dove*, symbol of peace; the second was *Keziah*, which means *cinnamon*, symbol the restoration of the personal things, not to make again the mistakes of the past, fear of God, ransom; and the third is called *Keren-Happuch*, from *Pukh* = *glow of colors, source of beauty*; therefore, a symbol of color, joy, life, light and understanding. For me, it symbolized that my life would be no longer gray, without life, but colored with the joy, with a different vision of things and the light of divine understanding. Thus, He gave me back the inner peace and the peace at home, the love and the desire to live, giving me a life of joy, true life, light and a new understanding, especially in relation to Him. He really restored my intimacy and my communion with Him, my most precious asset.”

“Brethren, what we learned from all this testimony is that the time of pain and loss of God for us is part of a larger purpose, which leads us to seek Him, to the true learning through His revelation, and therefore, to a time of liberation, change and healing. Only then we can achieve a time of restoration and restitution in our spiritual life, moving to a new level of growth, relationship and learning. The time of loss, sadness and loneliness does not last forever. When it is fulfilled, a new time of joy begins; a real time to reign in security, for our healing was completed.”

“How wonderful! Great, amazing! Of course we do not like the destruction or loss, but we are referring to the fact that God turns the curse into a blessing and to aim, through the suffering of man, at his good and his growth. When we hear the testimony of Nehemiah, we can understand more about reconstruction, I’m sure.”

“What about me? When will it be my turn? I’m already feeling a desire to go to the other side of the garden; it is a beautiful place with plants, birds, fish—”

“Hey, Jonah! Do not run away. Stay sitting right there, because you’re the next. As soon as we’re done with dinner, we’ll hear you, okay?”

“Thank you, Job, for your testimony. Enjoy and savor the dish that will be served: whale pie. You don’t need to eat if you don’t want, Jonah. You can just taste the salad and the dessert.”

Jonah



“**O**ur dear Jonah, sit down. We want to hear you.”

“Jonah? Where did he go?”

“I don’t know; it seems that he ate the whale pie and got a little sick.”

“I am here, your majesty!”

“What happened to you? Why did you come with him, Shasbar?”

“Sir! I caught him at the gates of the garden, he was trying to escape.”

“Jonah, do not be afraid. Susa is completely different from Nineveh. Here we are all servants of the Lord; you shall not be forced to convert anyone.”

“I hope so, your majesty! In fact, I’d better face this situation once and for all so that I’m healed of the fear of being a prophet and evangelist.”

“Didn’t I tell you that trauma of water is terrible?”

“Who is she?”

“Noah’s wife. You were healed, sister, don’t you remember?”

“Amen, your majesty! I was just giving support to our little brother; I know what he experienced inside the great fish.”

“By the way, Jonah, was it big indeed? Was it a whale?”

“Queen Esther, I do not understand very much about fish; I just know it was huge.”

“Oh, bah! Fisherman’s talk. Nobody has ever been swallowed by fish.”

“Who are you?”

“My name is Thomas, Jonah. I’m sorry, but I lived with fishermen; and I know them very well, indeed.”

“I protest!”

“And who is this one?”

“I am Simon Peter, the leader of the apostles of the Lord. I understand very much about fish, my brother, and I give you support on this. I believe you. It must have been big indeed. I’ve witnessed some amazing things with fish.”

“Really?”

“Yeah! I came to the point to take a coin from the mouth of one of them just to pay a tax.”

“Oh! Really? Gosh!”

“I am a tax collector and want to clear up this story.”

“Who is this now?”

“I am Zacchaeus, and nobody ever paid me with coins taken out of fish. Well, well!”

“Dear guests, what is happening here? Our subject is serious. It’s about God’s time in our lives and you’re looking like a bunch of kids. Let’s stop this silly talk and discuss what matters.”

“Ahasuerus, honey, we just took time to make jokes, that’s it.”

“But now it is time to talk seriously. Come on, Jonah, begin your testimony.”

The man in front of us was neither so young nor so old, but combined the good humor, the loyalty to God, the strength of prophet and the insecurity of human flesh in

the critical moments of decision. He was neither too tall nor too short. His head was covered by the hood that was sewn to his garment of camel's hair, characteristic of the prophets. He also held the staff in his right hand, a symbol of God's authority. The blue color of his eyes changed slightly in intensity, depending on the emotions he externalized. He sat in front of us and looked directly at the hosts waiting for the next question.

"What do you want to know first, your majesty?"

"Jonah, the meaning of your name is '*peace*', '*pigeon*', is it not?"

"Yes, majesty!"

"This explains why this tendency to 'fly away' from situations of conflict, doesn't it?"

"Ahasuerus!"

"Forgive me, Esther. I was not trying to be rude; it was just a comment—"

"In bad taste, I'd say. Jonah, it seems they are all very interested in enjoying your misfortune, my dear, but forgive all this and tell us what you felt about God's time in your life. Now we promise to behave ourselves well."

"Majesty, as everyone knows, I am God's prophet and I was instructed by Him to exhort the citizens of Nineveh to repent, in order to free them from judgment of the Lord because of their sin. At first I thought it all very risky and I recognize that I was reluctant to obey the orders of YHWH; first, for fear of their reaction; and in the second place, because they were very wrong indeed. They were cruel barbarians. King Ahasuerus knows very well how the Assyrians were, and they deserved to be punished, according to my point of view. I had forgotten that one of the conditions to be a good prophet is 'to obey first and ask questions later', but I did not even care about it. I fled to Joppa. Oh! What a beautiful place! And what wonderful beaches! Crystalline turquoise waters, which could make any shepherd to want to be a fisherman. I boarded a ship going to Tarshish as fast as I could, and I hid myself until they set sail. I did not want anyone asking me questions. The first days were 'a blessing', but in the middle of the trip it came in full force."

"It, what?"

"The storm, folks! I am a fisherman and I understand very well what our brother is saying. The thing is ugly indeed. Carry on, brother, don't get nauseous."

"Peter! The storm caught us on high seas, and nothing was left, not even the sails. The masts had been destroyed by the thunderstorm and the ship shook from one side to side. The sailors shouted and tried to throw in the waters all that could weigh in the boat. It was—"

"Like the Flood, is it not? Noah, it looks like what happened to us! I really wanted to throw all those animals out of the ark to stop howling, groaning, bleating and chirping in my ears."

"Honey, calm down. Our time of Flood is over".

"Thanks goodness! It's because I have compassion on our little brother."

"Ladies and gentlemen, as I was saying, the sailors were so nervous that they began to seek the cause of all that. Someone there had displeased some god and they were receiving his wrath. They found me sleeping downstairs, where the baggage was. I woke up from my sleep with the kick of one of them, and they dragged me to the deck in the middle of all that rain, without I had no time to wake up the proper way and understand what was happening. In a quite rude manner they asked me who I was, where I came from and what god I served. When I told them I was a Hebrew and my God was YHWH, they became desperate, for they knew His renown. They wondered among themselves that to provoke such fury in Him it was because I had done

something very wrong. The decision was unanimous and quick: they threw me overboard in a few seconds, without making any other questions. In fact, it was I who had suggested this to deliver them from that misfortune, but I did not expect that this attitude was so immediate.”

“Did you see the fish coming?”

“I do not remember. I only know that suddenly, the waters stopped making waves, but I felt in a hot and humid place, with a strange odor, and it was dark, very dark. When I realized, I knew I had been swallowed by a sea animal. I discovered this when it rose up to the surface to breathe and I had the impression that a thin ray of light came into it, illuminating partially the place where I was. It was... how to say?—”

“Smelly!”

“—Yes, smelly, disgusting! But it was God’s time for me to make me think and find out ‘who is the boss.’ It was a time of deep reflection. The seaweeds were wrapped in my head and were an expression of my confused thoughts, which needed to be enlightened by the light of divine wisdom. It was not completely dry inside there and, occasionally, more water entered to throw me from one side to the other; it reminded me of my spiritual instability, my weak relationship with Him, and my emotional instability before things that required of me some attitude of firmness and determination. I needed to learn many things and also be more flexible and aware of human weakness and instabilities, leaving the judgment of sins to God and waiting for His right decision. At the same time that this reminded me of human instability, it also reminded me the mercy and flexibility of God toward us. I seemed to be buried in a tomb, without relationship with any other human being, isolated from my normal coexistence. Sometimes I thought to be a divine strategy to teach me to value my fellow men; sometimes, I thought to be a way that He found to take me away of all kind of external influence to make me get in touch with His ‘entrails’, with His heart. I needed to seek Him truly to find the answers to my life. It was a time to seek His revelation and meditate on the important things that He wanted to teach me. It was also time to learn to obey. Meanwhile, I assimilated one more important teaching, which was to concentrate and not paying attention to any distractions around me that could try to separate me from the real communion with Him. I learned to ‘be in the sanctuary’ and to value this deep relationship, in a place where no one enters, only me and Him. I could realize that this emotional and spiritual abyss where I was in was the reflection of my sin, as would be the fate of all who forsake God. There, it was dark and that darkness bothered too much, so I started to value the light of His face on my life as a result of His approval. The days passed and I lost the track of time; I only cared about to get out of that fight. Then, I cried out to Him and He heard me and took me out of that situation, for He knew I had learned the lesson: to seek Him above everything. Only His hand could free me from anguish. Suddenly I heard His powerful voice, the voice of many waters ordering the fish, and it spewed me out upon the dry land. This was the last lesson to be learned there: if a fish obeyed Him how would a prophet do the contrary? I thought, *“Jonah! What a shame!”*”

“Allow me a comment: did you feel punished by Him?”

“Job, it was more or less like what you felt when you lacked understanding. I think that when we lack a deeper understanding of the circumstances or when we do not really know His purpose for us, we think we are being punished by Him. I need a better word to express this attitude from His part and that is not the word *punishment*. It is—”

“*Discipline*. In fact, we are disciplined by God until we are what He wants us to be. It was a time of discipline in your life, Jonah. I think we can summarize this way.”

“Our brother Saul of Tarsus, who is here, can repeat the words that the Lord had dictated him when he wrote one of his letters and that describes our reasoning very well. Speak, Saul.”

“He said, *‘We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.’*”

“Glory to God! Continue your narrative, Jonah.”

“I came to the beach and lay down on the sand. Then I remembered that the mission was still standing; He had not changed His mind. I went to Nineveh and cried out for three days in the midst of the people, exhorting them to repentance. They repented and were saved by the Lord. I felt frustrated.”

“Huh! Was the mission not a success?”

“It depends on the point of view. Not for me. I wanted them to be killed; after all, they were bad.”

“Jonah, Jonah. Now it’s clear. You haven’t heard of Jesus yet, have you?”

“Yes, the Son of God! I got to know about Him right here and I felt freed of the charges on my life when I told my husband Job to curse God and die. But after they told me about Him, I can feel forgiven of what I said. We’ll still hear at this conference about the time of God to mankind, sending Him to His children.”

“Maybe I leave this place healed, but I’m reporting what I felt after all that. I didn’t finish yet. As I was saying, I left the town frustrated and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for myself there. I sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. God did grow a plant miraculously, which protected me from the sun and ‘refreshed my soul’ tired and disheartened with all that. Night came and I slept. When I woke up and the sun began to rise, do you believe that the Lord made the plant dry up? I didn’t understand anything. I got angry and He asked me if my anger was reasonable. Don’t you think I was right? Do you think it is right to kill the poor little plant and still leave me roasting under the sun, after having carried out His orders?”

“Jonah, you had not yet learned what the Lord wanted you to learn: that He does what He determined in the lives of His children for their good, and He is merciful even with those who are in error, in order to rescue them into His light. He wanted you to notice the Sun of righteousness over you too, don’t you understand? When the Sun of righteousness is born on someone’s life it’s time of resurrection and new life, time of forgiveness and healing.”

“Folks! I feel ridiculous. Could you learn something good with my testimony? It is I who should learn a bit more with my own story. On the contrary, I am learning with the testimony of the brothers.”

“Do not be ashamed, Jonah! If you learned something from the brothers it’s something good, don’t you think? This means that if you learned something from them, it’s because you saw likeness with you and this is a positive factor, right? I think you’ve grown a lot along your narrative and you are no longer the same Jonah of before, isn’t it true? Get up, winner! You learned that obeying the Lord brings victory. Now it’s time of victory for you, dear brother, time of maturity and growth.”

“Queen Esther, you are a true psychologist, a specialist in emotional release. I feel like another man. Thank you, thank you.”

“Let’s give a big applause to the Lord for His miracles of healing, brothers.”

“Praised be the Lord.”

“What is that noise from the other side of the garden?”

“Majesty, Nehemiah saw a breach in the wall and called some servants to rebuild it.”

“Go get him. We’ll all go to the banquet hall to continue the work. He is the next. Shasbar! Ask him to wash his hands dirty with earth before sitting in the place of the panelists.”

“Essie, do not worry so much about the house. The servants clean up after. There’s no problem.”

“How not? We bought the carpet one week ago for the event and I do not want to see it dirty, amen?”

“As you wish, woman of God! Brothers, let’s go inside. We will continue there in the banquet hall.”

Nehemiah



Nehemiah came a bit rushed in the hall; he seemed to be ashamed of his attitude before the hosts. However, did he not see that breach in the wall of the palace? He needed to do something before ‘the defenses crumbled.’ At least this was what was going through his mind trained to build destroyed walls. Our guest sat in the place of the panelists and waited for the questions of Ahasuerus.

“Our dear brother Nehemiah, can you tell us a little about your experience as a rebuilders of Jerusalem and God’s time in your life through this mission?”

“With pleasure, your majesty! After your compatriot, the King Artaxerxes gave me permission to return to Jerusalem after the release of my people from captivity, to rebuild the walls of the Holy City, I put myself in prayer, asking God’s guidance on how to proceed. Under the leadership of Ezra the priest, the Israelites had rebuilt the temple, but the walls of the city remained in ruins. When I heard the news of the destruction of our city, I got very sad and even the king noticed the desolation of my soul. He asked why I was sad and that’s when I told him about what was happening, so he allowed me to return. I had already prayed and fasted for four months. I had received the direction and the revelation of God on how to proceed, so I started acting. I knew it was a long distance between Susa and Jerusalem, more or less, one thousand miles, and we would take many days to walk on foot to get there, almost five months. However, I was determined; nothing would make me give up my goal. The honor of my people and the glory of our God were at stake. It began for me a time of restoration.”

The man who was in front of us seemed to be really determined and sure on all the things he did. He was not dressed as the cupbearer of the Persian king as before, but as a Jew invested with authority to lead their brothers in a work of such responsibility as the rebuilding of the walls of the City of David. His straight posture and his beard well combed and anointed with perfumed ointment gave him seriousness and reliability; his face had firm traces, his eyes seemed to inspect all things, and his mouth gave orders that were undeniable. However, in Susa he wasn’t the leader but the subject, and should maintain his reverence to the monarchs before him. So he felt uncomfortable to be caught in the act, giving orders to the servants of Ahasuerus to restore a portion of the south wall of the palace that was partially cracked.

“Tell us, Nehemiah, my dear, what were you doing with my servants out there?”

“Forgive me, my king, but I was worried about the crack that I saw in the south wall of the palace. I know these things very well; it begins with a little crack here, another little crack there, and when we realize the situation, may be too late.”

“What an exaggeration! It was only the plaster that fell slightly due to rain.”

“Ahasuerus, dear, do not belittle the opinion of an expert. It is always better to be safe than sorry. Don’t mind him, Nehemiah; we want to hear the opinion of a true expert in this area. Please continue.”

“With pleasure, Queen Esther! As I was saying, we went back to Israel, and where we passed, the way was open for us because the King Artaxerxes gave me letters to the governors of the provinces, which facilitated the travel. This does not mean, however,

that everybody saw us with good eyes. Wherever we went, everyone knew that we were coming back to restore our country, and the news ran ahead of us. I think that our victory began in Persia, when I heard the news of the destruction and prayed to God, asking forgiveness for my sins and for those of my people, because we had not been in captivity for seventy years for anything. We had committed a lot of mistakes before the Lord and we needed His grace back over us, so that everything had success. I can say that our greatest sin was the apathy toward the commandments, that is, our people disobeyed the word of the Lord and fell into idolatry. As I said, many were already aware of our mission and were not too happy about it: Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the Ammonite, heard about and opposed. Sanballat was the governor of Samaria, the region north of Jerusalem, not far away. Tobiah was official of Ammon, the region to the east of Jerusalem, across the Jordan River, and friend and business partner of Sanballat. Although under Persian yoke, these men had become rich and powerful, exercising control over Jerusalem and its inhabitants. Probably, they wouldn't like anyone who entered their territory."

"We heard about Sanballat; it seems to me that he was a bit violent and rancorous, was he not? And Tobiah seemed to be an accommodated type of person, preventing the development of progress, is it true?"

"Perfectly, your majesty. These were our first obstacles to face, for they were in this position for so long that would not allow anybody else on their territory to dispute power. We were not there to compete for power, but to rebuild what was ours. Probably, it would bring a shock to the *status quo*. However, I had said to Sanballat, *"The God of heaven is the one who will give us success, and we his servants are going to start building; but you have no share or claim or historic right in Jerusalem."* There was a third man who also did not approve of our reconstruction. His name was Geshem the Arab. He had a weird characteristic: he did everything to confuse us, to convince us that the Lord was not listening to our prayers and would not respond to our requests. What he wanted was to undermine our liveliness, the fire placed by the Most High in our heart to restore the Holy City."

"You mean that, before the true time of reconstruction there was a time of struggle and confrontation to make room and make it clear who had the authority, don't you?"

"Exactly! I also did not speak to anyone before inspecting the damage. This was for two reasons: with the walls destroyed, Jerusalem was inhabited by non-Jews; therefore it suffered political intrigues, and spies could sell secret information to the enemies of Israel. In second place, I did not want those Jews, who were already weakened and discouraged, ceased to believe in me and in God's plan to rebuild. After assessing our situation and starting the reconstruction, I had to inspect it myself and decide if I would ask for help or not and to whom, because they might 'sell me' to the enemy."

"This seems more like a case of espionage than construction. It even looks us, when we sent spies to inspect Jericho; I'm enjoying the story. Listen, brother, weren't you visited by the Angel of the Lord as I was at the feet of the enemy's wall?"

"No, Joshua, no angel appeared; moreover, we didn't have walls to knock down, only to build up."

"I just thought that the same strategy could be used, that is, to sound the trumpets and the walls rise up. Don't you agree, Caleb? Nehemiah certainly would have a memorable experience."

Caleb answered, "Joshua, don't you know that our God never uses the same strategy? Furthermore, it is easier to knock down than to construct."

Noah's wife also said, "That is true. My hands were deplorable when my husband decided to build that ark to protect us from the Flood; you cannot even imagine what tribulation!"

"Honey, please, don't interrupt our brother."

"Tell us, Nehemiah, after this time of preparation and evaluation of the damage, did you get someone to help you?"

"Yes, your majesty. I asked for help from those who wanted to build with me, but I had to give them a word of encouragement, strength and faith in God. One of the arguments that I used and that weighed heavily on their decision was the shame they were going through, for the City of David was still a point of honor to the nation, and the way it was, it shamed them before the peoples around."

"Bandits! They destroyed my city. I assure you that there were Philistines in the middle of this plot."

"Calm down, David! The Philistines no longer exist. But we rebuilt it totally; be at rest, your city is beautiful, you need to see it!"

"Oh, good! I almost offer my army to take action."

"There is no need, David; our brother Nehemiah already took care of everything for us. Let us continue."

"As I said, sir, I didn't pay much attention to those who mocked. With the answer I had given them, I placed God ahead of everything and started working. I separated the people into groups to rebuild each part of the walls. Apparently, the northern and western parts of the wall only needed repairs. The eastern wall, however, had to be completely redone. The walls, with a base of about eight feet thick, were rudimentarily built with gravel and whole stones, explaining why it was mocked, but that's what we had at our disposal. The height varied between nineteen to twenty nine feet, with almost two and half miles long, in a circle of two hundred and twenty six square miles."

Solomon spoke, "If you allow me to interrupt Nehemiah, here I see an interesting parallel with our Christian life. The North, in the bible, means the throne of God, what guides our lives, His Word and His abundant life for us. The South means our own lives, our humanity and imperfection in comparison with the majesty and fullness of God. The West means the material world, the natural things, the ancient things; and the East, the spiritual world, the spiritual things. If we notice what happens to us, most of the destruction that occurs in our lives starts with the action of demons and with our spiritual weakness, for in general we are born with no sense of spiritual realities and often we grew wrongly seeking God's presence through idolatry. This weakens us, because it takes us out of the center and the goal of our true worship that must be the Lord. Therefore, we must begin our rebuilding by our right spiritual life before God, with the exact vision of the spiritual realities and the true weapons to be used; only this way we'll have victory. Another attitude that we must have is that of Nehemiah: he soon started the work and did not arrange excuses to delay the reconstruction; it is to put immediately into practice what God has already told us, without procrastination."

"Solomon! What wonderful comment; worthy of a wise man! Was this way you planned the first temple?"

"Not exactly, but I had enough time to meditate on the subject after I got tired of my seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines; women talk too much."

"Ahasuerus, don't you defend us?"

"What for, Essie? You don't need anyone to defend you all. So far, it seems that you won all discussions."

"We are essential to build or destroy our house; is it not really, sisters?"

“That’s right! It seems that it was Solomon who said, *“The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands”*. Weren’t you, Solomon?”

“It was not I, but the Spirit of God made me write this. Surely He already knew you long ago.”

“The foolish talk again! What does a king do in this moment?”

“Just say, *‘Go on, brother.’* Ok, Ahasuerus, we finished our parenthesis.”

“Nehemiah!”

“Yes, your majesty! I’m continuing. It was a hard time because we watched over and worked at the same time, with courage, strength and perseverance. Even under threat, we did not leave the work for anything. As the wall was rebuilt in fifty-two days, we didn’t leave it neither to bathe nor to care about other chores. With one hand we held the shovel; with the other, the sword, the spear and the bow.”

“Solomon! Do you have a wise comment on the subject in question?”

“If you allow me, your majesty, this means to keep praying, prophesying, and acting in a practical way. It is interesting that Nehemiah went on to encourage the people, reminding them of the Lord and their families, because these were the real incentives to continue the work. If I recall correctly the story, he makes mention of sound of the trumpet so that the people helped each other when necessary. This means that we should ask for support of prayer when necessary so we have strength to continue the work. The other warning is important: not to take off the clothes, that is, not to leave the protection of the armor of God, our divine covering.”

“Tell us a little, brother Nehemiah, how it was to build with one hand and hold the sword with the other.”

“Well! When we were concentrated, each in front of his house to rebuild our bit of the wall, we were quite tired; however, we had no choice but to finish the job as soon as possible because the enemies were not willing to play. Some of us put the stones, while others watched, holding their swords. Then we reversed the situation until our brother rebuilt his part. Besides being a time of rebuilding, I’d say it was a time to learn cooperation and mutual respect. We were, so to speak, all in the ‘same boat’ and we could not leave our job. We had committed ourselves to one another and this was good, kept us united and strong. I also asked God for discernment to avoid falling into the snares of the enemy and I didn’t let myself be distracted by futile and unimportant things that Sanballat and Tobiah placed so that I relinquished the work. The adversaries did everything to take me out of my place and of my project: they called me for a conversation; they used false accusations and even cunning for me to incur the wrath of the Lord. I knew that I was not a priest and therefore could not freely enter the temple. Through spiritual discernment I realized that it was a snare and that it was not God who sent the message through the false prophet Shemaiah.”

“What suspense! What happened next?”

“After we finished, I kept watchfulness to prevent theft and invasion until God filled the place fully with new inhabitants. I kept the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites; in fact, one of the strategies that gave us a lot of strength during reconstruction was the praise to the Lord. While we sang, we forgot our tiredness and the Lord blessed us, strengthened our soul and our spirit. I had to recognize that we completed the work by His intervention only. The glory is all His, for it becomes clear to us that humanly speaking we didn’t have conditions to do anything that was done. Ezra! As a priest, tell us your experience when you were called to speak to the people.”

“After rebuilding the walls, Nehemiah called me to read to the people the law of the Lord, and thus remind them of the divine precepts that His children had forgotten in captivity; also to teach those who were born in a foreign land the things that they never

heard or knew about the true God and of the history of Israel. Listening to all these things, they cried and repented of their sins and the sins of their parents and then they began to rejoice. From that moment on, we began to live a life of joy because God was again among His people, protecting them. The Feast of the Tabernacles served to remind the inhabitants of the Promised Land what to live in the desert meant. In captivity, however, the Jews could not celebrate the joy of living in their own land. Now they had returned home, they could celebrate once again. For us, commemorating the Feast of Tabernacles meant to remember with gratitude the wonders that God had done for us and where He took us from. Nehemiah restored the observance of the Sabbath so that the people learned to rest in the Lord in what only He can do, and no longer rely on their own strength to do things.”

“How do you feel now, Nehemiah, as a leader respected by your community for having rebuilt the city of Jerusalem in ruins?”

“I would say that I feel more mature spiritually and emotionally, for this time of reconstruction did not fail to be a time of learning with the Lord. As it was said here, it is easy to destroy, but it’s difficult to build because it forces us to follow God’s direction to the letter and leave laziness aside, putting all our effort in the work we have before us, until it is completed. This performs a true ‘tidiness in our inner closets and drawers’, helping us to store only what is useful for the new structure that we are building, throwing away what no longer matters. It means a detachment of what we once thought was precious, but now is nothing more than a worthless antique. We need to get used to the new from God.”

David said, “I suggest we finish this wonderful interview with a beautiful praise to the Lord. I can call my musicians; do you agree, Nehemiah?”

“Yes, David, it will be a pleasure. I would you like to sing a praise of my own composition, which was very helpful during our work of reconstruction.”

“How will they know to follow you, then?”

“Mine musicians begin and soon yours will see that it is very easy to follow. Here we go:

*Edify the walls
Of our souls, Lord
And your temple in us
From where love flows
May the praise go up to you
As sweet incense
Touching your heart
And releasing the miracles
Glory to you, O King of kings
Eternal and sovereign you are,
The true God
Give us your strength to edify
To build our lives
And so cheer you up, Lord
Come visit,
Come restore,
Edify and forgive
Come renew the fellowship
With your Holy Spirit
Filling us with your anointing*

Glory (Glory)
Glory (Glory)
Glory (Glory)
Glory to the King!
Glory (Glory)
Glory (Glory)
Glory (Glory)
Glory to the King!"

"Sing, brothers! The Lord delights in our praise and our gratitude for the reconstruction of our lives. Hallelujah!"

"Hallelujah! Hallelujah!"

"Glory to our King!"

"Keep the praise in your hearts, because our next panelists will show us what God made of so grand for our people through the Messiah. Get ready for big emotions, for God's time for humanity, bringing salvation and eternal life already came. Thank you, Nehemiah, for your testimony and thank you for the rebuilding of the walls of my palace."

"You're welcome!"

Zechariah and Elizabeth



Our next panelists were already positioning themselves in front of Ahasuerus and Esther, and were quite excited by the opportunity that was being given to them to testify about the important events of their lives, particularly about the birth of his son John the Baptist, because God's time for His chosen people was coming through the Messiah. Zechariah and Elizabeth was a friendly and captivating couple and we were all with the eyes turned to them. They were elderly and showed the wisdom of God, which was worked for many years in their lives. Zechariah presented himself first and with all gentleness, trying to put Elizabeth in a very comfortable position. His white beard was scarce and had some hair burned by sparks from the nails and metals that he forged, for he was a blacksmith. As a Levite he didn't have a secular job to give him financial support, but he did it as a hobby to help their neighbors and friends. He exercised his priestly offices in the temple of Jerusalem during two weeks a year, along with his brothers belonging to the division of Abijah. Zechariah and Elizabeth lived in a quiet and peaceful village in the mountains of Judah. Tonight, he came dressed in the priestly garments, with white linen undergarments, tunic also of linen, as well as the headband on his head. Over the tunic he was girded at the waist with a white sash embroidered with blue thread. He walked with meekness and sure that he would be used by the Lord, once again, to talk about God's time in the life of His people, because his son was the one who prepared the way in the heart of Israel for the coming of the Savior. Elizabeth sat beside him with a scarlet tunic of pale hue, which almost approached to the rose color. Her cream-colored cloak was spotless and embroidered with scarlet threads throughout its edge, partially hiding her gray hair. Her light blue eyes were serene and still had the glow of exultation for the great miracle that God had done in her old age. The reason for this glow was the young man who was waving at her from the other side of the table, John the Baptist. He dressed as he was always known by all Israelites, as a prophet, with garments of camel's hair and a leather belt, wearing thick leather sandals that protected his feet from the rocks and the stings of the desert scorpions. His beard of copper color was quite full and covered his face almost completely. His hair of the same color always looked disheveled, and when his brown eyes sparkled with some kind of a more explosive emotion, hidden by the thick eyebrows arched over his eyes, his appearance became almost leonine, which caused fear in anyone who opposed his ideas. However, when he looked at his elderly parents with love, his mouth opened itself in a tender smile that resembled that of a child.

"Zechariah, my brother, tell us about your experience when you saw the angel of the Lord in the Holy Place of the temple, telling that you would be a father."

"My dear brethren, what an old man can feel, and whose wife is also old, suddenly receiving the news that is going to be a father, especially when the child to be born will be a preparer of the way for the long-awaited Messiah? For me it was a shock at first, even because the dream of having a child had already been forgotten and that day was a very special day for me; one of the few in my life that I could be separated to offer incense in the Holy Place of the temple. As everyone knows each of the twenty-four

divisions of Levites who are separated from each week twice a year to perform his priesthood consists of many priests descended from Aaron. So, it's very rare that someone has the privilege of entering the sanctuary more than once in his entire life to offer sacrifice to the Lord. I know it was God who prepared this time for me because this was the time determined so that His people heard and received the great news of salvation and redemption, as well as the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies about the long-awaited Messiah. I had already put on the priestly garments and entered the Holy Place, where another priest lit the hot coals over which I would put the incense to offer to the Lord. It was very hot inside there and the ember gave a reddish tinge to the sacred chamber. Only a ray of light entered through the window that afternoon. I put the plate with the incense on the embers and the fire went up, the smell of sacrifice going up in a pleasant way before the altar of the Lord, that's what I thought. Suddenly, the place shone with a powerful light, not with the reddish tint of the glowing coal, but like the silvery flash of lightning that crosses the sky. The brightness was inside that place, from the floor to the ceiling of the small enclosure, and from inside it I could see something like a human appearance, whose voice spoke to me, *"Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."* I could not believe what I saw and heard; it looked more like a work of imagination of an old and tired mind. Then I said to him, *"How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years."* That's when he told me, *"I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."* It was this way, mute and scared, that I left the temple; that's why the people knew that I had a vision inside there."

"Now do you understand why I laughed when I heard the news that God would give me Isaac? These miracles of God are things of crazy people. They make us scared and catch us off guard, isn't it true?"

"Sary, do not interrupt the testimony of Zechariah; it is important."

"I know, Abby, but don't you remember the shock we felt when we knew that we would be parents too? And we were even older than Zechariah and Elizabeth; moreover, Elizabeth and I, being sterile. I understand perfectly what Zechariah went through. Thanks God I did not stay mute too!"

"It would not be a bad idea."

"What did you say? I didn't understand very well."

"Nothing! I was just thinking aloud ... Forgive me, darling. Brethren! They were long months of intensive advertising on the part of Sarah in the middle of our people. We all got pregnant too. What a party!"

"We were more discreet, weren't we, Zechy?"

"Sure, Elizabeth! I could not say anything; besides, you became a bit shy when your belly began to grow and you tried to hide it for five months, until everyone started to realize that God had blessed us in our old age, after fifty years of marriage."

"Yes, brothers; after fifty years of marriage we come to know our spouse very well. Any change in his behavior, no matter how small, it becomes transparent to us. My

husband surprised me when he returned from Jerusalem completely mute. At first, I thought he was sick, but soon I changed my mind when I realized that no one gets sick with so much excitement in the movements and look. He asked me for a tablet of wood where he wrote with coal what had happened to him. I stopped talking and magnified the name of the Lord, for what was happening to us was truly a miracle. My baby, a Nazirite; a separate to the Lord from the womb! Wow! I kept quiet and waited.”

“Zechariah! Tell us, how was this time of wait?”

“Well, I’d say it was very gratifying, because we knew that the present from God was coming to us. In fact, we acquired a new life. We had expected for a baby for so long that we no longer remembered of the old plans and dreams to welcome him; nevertheless, now it was real and this made us participants in the plans of God for mankind. Our body seemed to have acquired a new liveliness. I did my work with joy and the sound of the hammer on the anvil sounded to our neighbors like bells announcing a party. Elizabeth seemed to have renewed her culinary skills. I worked and could perceive the sweet smell of the honey cakes, which now had a special touch of love and joy. I was already thinking of another little mouth, hungry, in our midst to be fed. At night we prayed and praised God (actually, only she spoke) and we made plans to create our son in the best possible way, according to the word of the Lord, for he had already been separated to be His and some rules in his education had to be respected.”

“Elizabeth, what did you feel when you received the visit of Mary in your home?”

“It was a time of joy even greater we spent together, because she was the daughter of my cousin Jehoiachin and I had not seen her since she was little. I want to leave most of this report for her, since much of the joy that I felt was because of her, but I was really surprised when I saw her standing at my door, and the baby in my womb leapt with all his strength. It has been confirmed for both of us the new time of God to His people that would change everyone’s life, some for better, others for worse. I can say it was a time, not only of joy, but of certainty of the Lord’s project. The Messiah would be born within my own family and this was a privilege. I was in the sixth month of pregnancy and Maria stayed with me until the day of the birth of John the Baptist.”

“Zechariah, the fact of having given the name John to his son on the day of his circumcision was an impact to your relatives and neighbors?”

“Yes. In the first place because the name had been given by God Himself, and second, because nobody in my family had this name. They only believed in the supernatural when my tongue became loose and I started singing the song we all know, glorifying the Lord and prophesying on the life of my son.”

“I would like to hear a little the testimony of John. My brother, what is the reason for this odd choice to live in the desert, afar from civilization, eating locusts and honey and drinking water from the rocks? And what about of your sermons urging the people to repentance and calling them *brood of vipers*? Without criticism, but don’t you find it too strong?”

“I was aware of the mission that God had given me and I needed to prepare myself for it as best as possible, without the religious contamination of my people, and without the worldliness of Rome that reigned in our cities. There, in the loneliness of the desert, I could hear the silent and gentle voice of the Lord instructing and forging me for His projects. I know that my parents missed me, but I went there to visit them from time to time, during the festivals of our people and they rejoiced; then I returned to my life of prayer and consecration to God, until He released me to preach. Regarding the content of the sermons, we all know the time we were and how much we were away from God; the words had to hit as iron against those hardened hearts so that, afterwards, Jesus could bring His teachings and the salvation for our sins.”

“I agree. My own brother Andrew was a disciple of John. Even I, Simon Peter, not being directly his disciple, I often accompanied my brother on these walks and once told him, *“Andrew, I like this guy; he doesn’t mince words and that’s what this people need, energy.”* I agree with you, John. Good old days!”

“Now, Now, Peter! You applaud the strong and direct preaching of John, but your heart melted with the meek preaching of Jesus.”

“Of course! Every man needs a balance, right? But all the disciples who are here with me remember that Jesus was not so gentle in His preaching against hypocrisy and legalism, nor when He turned the tables of the moneychangers in the temple. Even I felt scared. Well, folks! The testimony is of Zechariah and Elizabeth, and for me, it was very instructive. What do you think?”

“We felt quite honored with the wisdom, with the love and mercy of God, granting us salvation and a new time of forgiveness and communion with the Father. Glory to Jesus!”

“Thank you, Zechariah, Elizabeth and John for your valuable testimony. Your lives glorify the name of the Lord. Praised be the name of our God. And may all say, Amen!”

“Amen!”

Mary and Joseph



*M*ary, the mother of our Savior, was no longer the brave teenager who faced all the prejudice of her time to fulfill God's will and His time for mankind; at this moment she was a mature woman. However, she retained the same humility and simplicity of the youth. Physically, she was a woman of average height. The brown hair, now permeated with gray, gave her the respectability of all. The little hands were crossed as if waiting for orders to take her seat. Her eyes, however, kept the same vivacity and observation that when in her youth, the same way that the warm and expressive smile, like that of Jesus. She was dressed in a white tunic and was covered with a light blue cloak that hid her head partially, showing only a portion of her hair. She was of David's lineage, daughter of Hanna and Jehoiachin, cousin of Elizabeth.

Joseph her husband, quiet and patient man, walked beside her, wearing garments of brown wool with a simple belt of woven fabric and tied to his waist; over his shoulders, he also maintained a cloak of wool, however, slightly clearer than the tunic. His thick leather sandals seemed to give him security and firmness to his walk. He was the son of Jacob and grandson of Matthan, a descendant of David, from whom the prophesied Messiah of Israel would be born.

The two came, arm in arm, and sat in the place of the panelists. All were eager to hear their valuable testimony as servants chosen by God to beget and give a home to His beloved Son, the Savior of us all. Through their attitude of submission to the will of the Father, God's time for humanity had been fulfilled.

"Dear brethren, we are very happy with your presence in our midst. Please tell us about your experience with God's time for your lives."

"Do you want to begin, Mary?"

"Yes, Joseph. You know, brethren, Joseph was never talkative, but his comforting presence next to me confirms my testimony. I was born in the city of Nazareth, as everyone knows, where I lived with my parents, Hanna and Jehoiachin. I have always been a child very smart and full of life, interested in everything that was happening around me, and always much concerned in doing the Lord's will. I went to the temple in Jerusalem at Passover time following my parents, and I stayed with my mother in the Court of Women watching the activities of the priests, especially when they made the sacrifice with the lamb, for we would eat its consecrated meat after we returned to our home. I also was very interested in the sacrifices that the parents of the newborn babies offered to God, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, in the act of the presentation of the child to the Lord. The parents left the temple with their faces shining with joy. This comforted my heart and gave me the hope that one day I could present a child of mine before God.

I could see that, in those days, something was changing in the middle of our people; it seemed that "a mystery hovered in the air" as an omen of what God was planning to Israel. It seemed to be a time to give birth to a new thing that would change our lives forever; it was time to generate and time to see something being born. We haven't heard prophetic messages from God for many centuries; it seemed that He would no longer

speak to His people and this silence bothered my heart in particular. Our ancestors had moved away from Him too much, since the last prophecies of Malachi, but now I could perceive a new move in our midst, as if I knew that the time had come for the long-awaited Messiah to come to us. That's why I got used to separate a part of my day to meditate on the word of God, alone in my room or on the places of my house near the stable. Although I was a happy teenager, sometimes even with some remnants of childhood, I caught myself at moments that would be more applicable to adults.

That afternoon, I left my parents' bedroom and went to the place where the cattle were; I liked the smell of the hay and took pleasure in petting the sheep and cows, which looked at me with mild eyes like we were old acquaintances. My parents had gone out for a while and I found myself alone. I sat near the window and stared at the hills of Galilee in the distance, admired with the golden light of the sun setting that passed through the clouds. That's when it seemed to me to see the sun shining into the room with all its force, emanating heat like a bonfire. I realized, then, an almost human presence that came from inside the pillar of light and that knew me; I could almost feel his touch in my body. He watched me for a brief moment and then said, *"Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."* Can you imagine what feelings went through my heart at that moment? I was like motionless, wondering what that greeting would mean. He continued, *"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."* He called me by name, so he was not a fruit of my imagination. The angel of the Lord knew me. He then continued, *"And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."* That's when I told him, *"How can this be, since I am a virgin?"* He said again, *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."* How interesting! It was true what I was feeling through my spirit these last few days. God was showing Himself to His people again, and now it was different; something very strong was to come and would bring a great change in many hearts. I had nothing else to answer him, but what my heart said, *"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."*

With this, the angel departed from me. He went away, like disappearing in a smoke in the air, but something seemed to have filled at that moment any void that could exist within me and would only manifest itself after nine months. I didn't feel alone anymore. I was also very happy with Elizabeth because she had been visited by God and, finally, her request of many years had been met; she had been rewarded and honored. I don't remember how much time I spent there after the departure of the angel, but suddenly I realized the veracity of that visitation and the words that had been exchanged between us. They were not mere words, but orders given by God and would no longer turn back. I was pregnant by the work of the Holy Spirit, knowing that the one to be born of me would be the Son of God.

Brethren, how I wanted to cry! The tears that had been repressed by the scare in the presence of the angel now sprang up uncontrollably and ran through my entire face seeming to wash me in the body, soul and spirit, since the time that I myself had been conceived. I was being washed of all my past and of all memories that could prevent me at that moment from receiving God's strength that I certainly would need to carry out a so daring plan. First, I thought of Joseph my bridegroom, with whom I had committed

myself and who was already preparing himself for our wedding to come. Then my parents came to my mind, as well as all my relatives and friends. What would I answer? They would not understand at all what I had witnessed. What they understood of miracles? It was a miracle for me, but madness and irresponsibility, besides a big lie, for those who had not seen the angel. I cried and asked God to have mercy on my life, giving me a strategy to explain everything, in addition to prepare and transform the hearts of all who were around me to the great surprise of the Lord. It was time to be still and wait, to rest in Him and in His providence. That's when I remembered Elizabeth. That's it! I'd go to her home and would tell her everything. Wasn't she pregnant too? She was the best person to advise me. More than quickly, I packed my things for about three days' journey to the south of Israel and I left immediately without telling anyone; I didn't even leave a note for my parents. Surely, God would take action regarding this too. First, I needed to get rid of the fear that had befallen me with the impact of the news. What would happen if they knew by the mouth of others? I might be stoned as an adulteress without being guilty of anything."

"I want to interrupt the narrative for a moment, if I may, and hear a little of what Joseph has to say about it. What did you think when you didn't find your bride in her parents' house?"

"Well, your majesty! As you know, I am a man who meditates and remains quiet until I am sure of what is happening. I observed all the evidence, all the 'clues', so to speak, and I found no answer that satisfied me. In fact, I was desperate just like Hanna and Jehoiachin, thinking that something bad had happened to Mary. She was young and liked to walk by the mountains; she could have fallen from some cliff or have been assaulted by robbers. My Goodness! What now? After seeking her for six days, we received a note from her saying that she had decided to spend a few days in the house of her kinswoman Elizabeth in the hill country of Judah. On one hand, we calmed down with the news; on the other, we begin to think what was behind this decision, since the two women had not seen each other for years. Hanna and Jehoiachin quieted down soon, but my heart told me that there was something else. I had no option but to pray, even because Mary had said she would only return after three months, after the son of Elizabeth being born."

"Mary! When Elizabeth gave us her testimony regarding your visit, she said she preferred to leave the details to you. Please, tell us about your meeting."

"Well, Queen Esther, when I left home, I went out quickly and at night. When I was tired of walking, I sat next to the rocks seeking shelter to escape of likely thieves in the path. I found a cave where I placed myself near the entrance, after making sure that there was not any wild animal inside it. I opened my bag of food and ate a piece of bread; I drank water and watched in detail the amount of food I had with me to calculate how much would be left to me for the rest of the journey. I felt the boldness of my endeavor, but I did not dismay nor thought in retreat. I ate, I lay down and slept. I woke up invigorated and relieved, and after three days' journey I arrived to the house of Elizabeth, almost at evening. I saw the light of the lamp filtered behind the curtains and the smoke going out from the chimney. When I got closer, I could feel the pleasant smell of the food she was preparing; it should be a delicious soup. I knocked at the door and waited. I heard her slow steps and her hands turning the door handle. Then our eyes met and I told her, *"The peace of the Lord be with you, Elizabeth."* By saying this she screamed, for the baby in her womb moved; then she embraced me and said, *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who*

believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." Elizabeth already knew everything. How could this be? She looked at me and said, *"I miss you, my beautiful! We have not seen each other for so long, but I can see that you are no longer a child. The Lord also visited and looked at you, didn't He? Yes, Mary, I know everything. When John leaped inside of me it was a sign from the Spirit about the work that God intends to accomplish from now on.. New times are coming, my dear; time of birth, life and restoration to some; a time of loss and humiliation to others."* So, we ate together and talked about many things; even Zechariah who was mute took part in our joy."

"Wait a minute, darling! I had a great idea now. Let's all sing the song that the Lord placed on your lips at that moment. It will be amazing! Can you sing along with us?"

"Yes, Majesty!"

"Music!"

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped her servant Mary, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

"Hallelujah! Great is the Lord!"

"Joseph, when Mary came back and you noticed something different with her, what did you do?"

"Majesty! It was a shock. I think it would be a shock to any bridegroom to know that his beloved bride, in whom he placed all his confidence, suddenly appears pregnant; especially when she tells him that the child's father is the Holy Spirit. Who would believe? I trusted Mary, but that was baffling news that took away my thoughts and emotions from balance. I took my tools of carpentry and performed my work totally oblivious to what I was doing, sometimes even hurting me with the saw or planer. Then the pain came, not so much the physical pain of the cut, but the emotional pain of 'betrayal.' I couldn't understand anything. The days and nights passed and everything was mixed in my head. I thought about to show Jehoiachin a divorce document before presenting it formally to the elders of the town, not to defame Mary, whom I still loved, and not to carry upon me the burden of guilt of her punishment for the act of adultery. For me it was a time of sadness and pain for not knowing the truth. I wrote the document and prepared to take him to Jehoiachin and Hanna in the next morning. So I lay down and soon fell asleep. That was when the angel of the Lord told me in a dream, *"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.'"* I woke up and tore the document and prepared to go to Mary's house; my decision was already made: she would be my wife and *"our son"* would have a home. Tell them, Mary, the discussion that took place between you and your parents the night before, when I had the dream."

"Brethren, can you imagine the content of the conversation? My mother said, *"What a shame you brought to all of us! What the citizens of the city will say? Our dear*

little girl, raised with all modesty and discretion, now comes with a degrading story like this! I have no courage anymore to face people. My Goodness! The adolescents of these days are totally without limits; they no longer respect the parents, let alone God's laws. Jehoiachin, do something. Take action." Poor father! He just looked at my mother, desolate, without any reaction. Only when he saw her eyes burning with rage, he seemed to feel the strength to shout, *"Just tell me who the guy was and I'll take care of getting rid of him myself; no one will know anything. I'll finish with him."* Lord! What a fight! How to tell the truth, or rather, how to make them accept the truth? They were good people and faithful to God, but had not yet had deep spiritual experiences with Him. They didn't know what it was to be truly touched by Him. We went to bed resentful with one another. In the morning, we heard the knock on the door and my father went to attend, furious. He clenched his right fist with full force, ready to punch the guy that had done that shameful thing with his daughter. However, by opening the door and seeing Joseph, his hand froze in the air and the expression of hatred on his face turned into a moan that most resembled the cry of a baby. He turned on his heel and ran inside the house. It was my mother who said to Joseph, *"My dear, I'm sorry for what happened. We do not know what to say to you. Mary told us that you are not guilty and we don't know what to do to compensate you for this shameful act. Please, forgive us. We understand if you want to undo the engagement. It is perfectly understandable."* Joseph did not answer anything, but walked slowly to me and embraced me, confessing that he knew everything and was willing to marry me as soon as possible. His act baffled my parents. He knew everything and still accepted to bear such a shame? Indeed, Joseph was an honorable man! Then he told them his dream and what the angel of the Lord told him. As he spoke, the faces of everyone relaxed and the understanding were opened. The darkness gave way to light. Glory to God! The day had started in a so heavy way ended like a big party. We married and everyone knows what happened next. Jesus was born in humble conditions in Bethlehem, He was circumcised according to the law of Moses, presented at the temple, and educated both in the spiritual and the material things. He grew in stature before our God until the time to manifest Himself to our people. His cousin John baptized Him in the Jordan River, and from there He followed His calling as *the Savior of mankind*. He died on the cross for our sins and rose again bringing a new time of forgiveness, communion with the Father and eternal life; a time of new birth."

"Brothers! We do not have words to express in face of all that we were told, have we? It only remains our praise to the Lord for all His mercy to us and by His eternal dominion, power and majesty both on earth and in heaven and that will last for eternity."

"Majesty, Jesus left me a note and wants me to read it to everyone."

"Sure, sure, it will be an honor for us to hear the word of the King of kings for our lives. To Him alone belongs the honor and to no one else."

"Take the scroll in your hands and read to us, your majesty!"

"Brothers, listen carefully! He says,"



“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth... I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty... Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day... and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water... See, I am making all things new... To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.”