



*Man Shall Not Live by Bread Alone*  
*by Nicu Butoi*

“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered. And when the tempter came to him, he said, ‘If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.’ But he answered and said, ‘It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.’” Matthew 4:1-4.

When I was first placed in prison for my faith and for distributing Bibles, Andrew, the most fierce of the prison guards, protected me. He had learned to respect my God and my faith. But even with his protection, there was not much he could do to help me when the commander of the prison ordered me to suffer special treatment because of my faith. You see, I refused to eat the prison food since much of it was pork meat, and almost all the other items were completely covered in pork fat. They could have given me more bread and vegetables, but because I refused to eat as the other inmates, the officers decided to punish me, hoping somehow to break my will, forcing me to submit to their authority and give up my faith in Christ. There was one other source of contention—I refused to work on Sabbath—something that is hard to imagine could be accomplished in prison during the era of hard-line communism.

To try to break my will, they placed me on a starvation diet for ninety days. I received a small piece of bread every morning, and then I was ordered to work as hard as the other inmates. After several days, as I was showing signs of weakness, they came to me and offered me pork meat and other items mixed with small pieces of pork, and prepared with pork fat. I was told I could have all I wanted. They knew very well that one compromise would lead to another, and after eating this unclean food, soon they could induce me to work on Sabbath. They knew then that it would be just a matter of time before I would start smoking or doing other things against my conscience. They had been successful in the past with other inmates.

Brothers and sisters, we need to be on guard against the working of the enemy every moment. He well knows how to overthrow our faith, and one of his best tools is compromise. We must ever remember that “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from



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the mouth of God.” How many souls are lost for this world’s bread instead of feasting on the Bread of heaven!

The first two weeks were very difficult. Hunger came with such force that at times I felt dizzy and lost my balance. The pain would pass and I could once again work. Many times I was forced to dig trenches across paved roads. The weather was very cold and we were not dressed with warm clothing.

My fellow inmates noticed me losing weight. We were packed like sardines, with thirty-two of us in one cell. Some of the inmates, risking their personal safety, began helping me. A few of the men worked in the vegetable cannery, and when returning to the cell from work, one or two of them would toss spinach leaves under my bed. They smuggled these leaves under their belts inside their coats. If they had been caught, they too would have faced very severe punishment. Late at night, after the lights were turned out, I would feast on these delicate green leaves.

God provided in some extra-ordinary ways. I remember one old man from another cell would gather fragments of bread that fell from the inmates as they were eating. He would carefully pick up these crumbs and place them in a small handkerchief. By Sunday morning, he had a nice ball of crumbs to secretly offer me while we were walking in the prison courtyard during our Sunday morning free time.

It may be hard for you to imagine what it was like in the prisons in those days, but try to understand that many of the same techniques used in the Nazi labor camps were used in the prisons in Romania. We suffered many things at the hands of the officers.

The snow was lightly falling on a bitter cold Sabbath morning when I was ordered to go to work with the other inmates. They drove us to a field several miles away from the prison. When I refused to work, they handcuffed my hands behind my back. These handcuff were very special—we called them “American” handcuffs. I really do not know why we called them that, but they were made from a thin metal, and tightened more and more when one tried to move. With these handcuffs on, with my hands behind my back, they ordered me to my knees. As soon as I was down, an officer, using the full weight of his body, slammed his knee down on the handcuffs. Pain shot through my body. It was as though my hands had been cut off. All feeling soon left.



I learned through experiences like this that God can be our helper in every time of trouble. I stayed on my knees the whole morning, praying. My body grew so cold that I became warm. I thought maybe Jesus was going to allow me to pass from this suffering forever. While I knelt there, the officer turned loose two dogs specially trained to torture by ripping a man to pieces without killing him. The dogs ran, growling and barking, straight toward me. All of a sudden they stopped about six feet away. Slowly they made their way toward me. I had my eyes closed, praying that God would give me His strength.

The dogs sniffed at me cautiously. Turning away, they ran back to the officer.

My mind drifted back to the story of Daniel in the lions' den. Yes, I once again realized that the promises of God are true. The same God that kept Daniel can keep us.

Some time later, the officer came and commanded me to stand. I could barely straighten my stiff knees. He took the handcuffs off, and as I looked at my hands, a deep sorrow came over my heart, because they were a dark purple color with red streaks. I could not feel them. My mind flashed back to the time I used to praise God by playing my violin—but now I knew my hands would never be the same. "I will never play again," the thought kept going over and over through my mind.

As we rode in the back of the truck on the way back to the prison, two Gypsy boys, also inmates, started rubbing and massaging my hands. Slowly the feeling began to return to the tips of my fingers, and within a few days, I was actually able to move my fingers. Praise the Lord, I was once again able to play the violin when I was finally set free from prison!

One day while I was extremely hungry, I was put to work digging a large, deep trench by a sewer lagoon. It was a cold, rainy day, and I was forced to stand in mud mixed with sewer water up past my knees. At this time in Romania we had a law that inmates were not to be forced to do manual labor in the rain. It was Friday and the officer shouted, "Butoi, since you will not work on Saturday, you must work today!" All the other inmates stood under a metal roof and talked while I was sent to dig. I was hungry, cold, and wet, and the stench of the sewer water turned my stomach.

High above me was a railroad trestle on which a short train was going back and forth, while the engineer looked down at me shoveling mud in the pouring rain. I looked up as once again the train was going by, and as usual, the engineer looked down at me with an expression of pity. Staring up at him, I mouthed the word "bread" as clearly as possible. I was desperate, but I knew somehow the Lord would provide, and if not, I knew that He could give me the strength to die, if necessary. May we ever remember that "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 1 Corinthians 10:13.



A while later, the train was again passing overhead. All of a sudden something landed beside me in the mud—a loaf of bread wrapped in plastic. Yes, God sent bread from heaven through this engineer! It would have been a serious crime for him to get caught helping an inmate.

I kept working, looking around to see if anyone noticed the "bread from heaven." Soon I was sure it was safe—no one saw it fall from the sky. I quickly took the bread, broke it into pieces and shoved them into the waistband of my pants, under my coat. Shortly after that, the officer came and ordered me to come out because it was time to go back to the prison. Little did he realize that the miracle God had wrought to help me was hiding under my coat! Late at night, while everyone was sleeping, I would enjoy a midnight feast!

One of the most remarkable miracles that God blessed me with during that time began by way of a dream. One Sunday night a vivid dream woke me, in which I remembered hearing a loud, clear voice which said, "On Friday you will receive a box of food." This dream was a great source of encouragement for me, since I was now at about sixty days of my ninety days punishment by starvation. I was thin, pale, and very weak.

Many of the inmates knew that I was going through this for my faith and started calling me the "holy one" and would worship before me by making the sign of the cross. This came from their Orthodox background. Other times, they would call me a religious fanatic, saying that I was killing myself for no purpose, and despising me openly. I knew that if things did not change soon, I would be facing death before very long.

During these ninety days of punishment, I was not allowed to receive any food from outside the prison. Many inmates were allowed to receive a small box of food, usually pork meat and other "goodies." One time my mother came to visit me and desired to give me a loaf of bread. She knew my situation all too well. As soon as the prison officials saw that she had bread to give me, they pushed and shoved her roughly all they way out of the prison. All chances of receiving food from family or friends was totally out of the question.

Speaking of my mother, let me deviate for a moment. My mother was and still is a dedicated Adventist. The officers called me to a room one day and handed me a letter which was already open. It was from my mother. The letter pleaded with me to obey all the rules of the prison and save myself from starving to death. "God will forgive you. When you get out, then you can live out your convictions. God does not require you to go through all of this in these conditions. I am near death knowing that you are taking your religion too far. Please relieve my suffering and submit to the officials," so the letter read.

"Well, what do you think about your poor mother? What are you going to do now?" asked an officer as if he was really concerned.

"I know what I will do," I answered, looking into the officer's eyes. "I will pray for my poor mother's faith."

I knew that my mother would never write such a letter. It was her handwriting, perfectly reproduced by an expert whom the prisons employed for just such letters. Such were the tactics of those officials.

Now, getting back to this dream I had received. Remember, in my cell there were thirty-two other men. One of these men was an old Armenian, having been in the prison for years and with no relatives in Romania. On Friday this man was called to the door of our cell. The guards told him that he had a package—a very special package. In fact, they commented on how strange this package was, never having seen such a package come to the prison. Instead of containing pork meat and other similar goodies, it contained walnuts, raisins, biscuits, and other types of natural food. All the guards were amazed, and even more amazing was the fact that this Armenian man, who had never received any package of any kind from outside the prison during all these years, was now receiving this one!

The old man opened the box of strange goodies and took out a package of biscuits. On tearing them open, something like a cigarette fell out on the floor. He picked it up and to his amazement, realized that it was a piece of paper rolled up tightly.

Slowly unrolling it, he read, "THIS FOOD IS FOR NICU BUTOI." Reverently he came to me and set the box at my feet, then handed me the note. As soon as I read it, I fell on my knees in thanksgiving to our wonderful God for fulfilling His promise given to me in the dream that previous Sunday night. Yes, the Scriptures are true when it tells us: "He shall dwell on high: . . . bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." Isaiah 33:16.

I told the old Armenian man that he could eat any of the food in the package. He looked at me and said, "This food is for you. I will not eat any of it."

I asked him to keep the package at his bed, and every evening to give me a little of this and a little of that, knowing that the food needed to last as long as possible to keep me alive. It did just that!

How was it that this package came when it did? God heard my petitions and sent a former inmate to an Adventist church in Bucharest one Sabbath as church was getting out. This inmate had been from my cell, and finding an Adventist church, he yelled to the people, "Does anyone here know Nicu Butoi?"

Seeing just the shaven head of this man peering over the fence, the Adventists knew that he must have recently been released from prison. Two brothers came near the fence and said, "Yes, we know Nicu Butoi."

"Do you know he is starving to death?" asked the inmate.

"We heard that he was not eating the prison food and that his own mother was cast out of the prison when she tried to bring him some bread," they soberly replied.

"Yes, all these things are true, but there is a way to get food to him—"

"How do you know Nicu and how could food get to him?" they interrupted.

"I was in the same cell with Nicu. I was just released from prison two weeks ago. I know a way to get food to him." The former prisoner went on to explain his plan to send food to the Armenian man. This is how the Lord worked to get that precious box of food to me just when I needed it desperately.



*A thin, but joyful Nicu Butoi, shortly after his release from a Romanian prison.*