

JOEL:

"A BOY OF GALILEE"

[ILLUSTRATED]

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By



Annie Fellows Johnston

Illustrated by L. J. Bridgman

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CONTENTS

PREFACE	8
CHAPTER I.	9
CHAPTER II.	34
CHAPTER III.	50
CHAPTER IV.	74
CHAPTER V.	83
CHAPTER VI.	94
CHAPTER VII.	112
CHAPTER VIII.	123
CHAPTER IX.	136
CHAPTER X.	148
CHAPTER XI.	164
CHAPTER XII.	179
CHAPTER XIII.	193
CHAPTER XIV.	204
CHAPTER XV.	217
CHAPTER XVI.	229
CHAPTER XVII.	241
CHAPTER XVIII.	254
CHAPTER XIX.	268

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NEW ILLUSTRATED EDITION

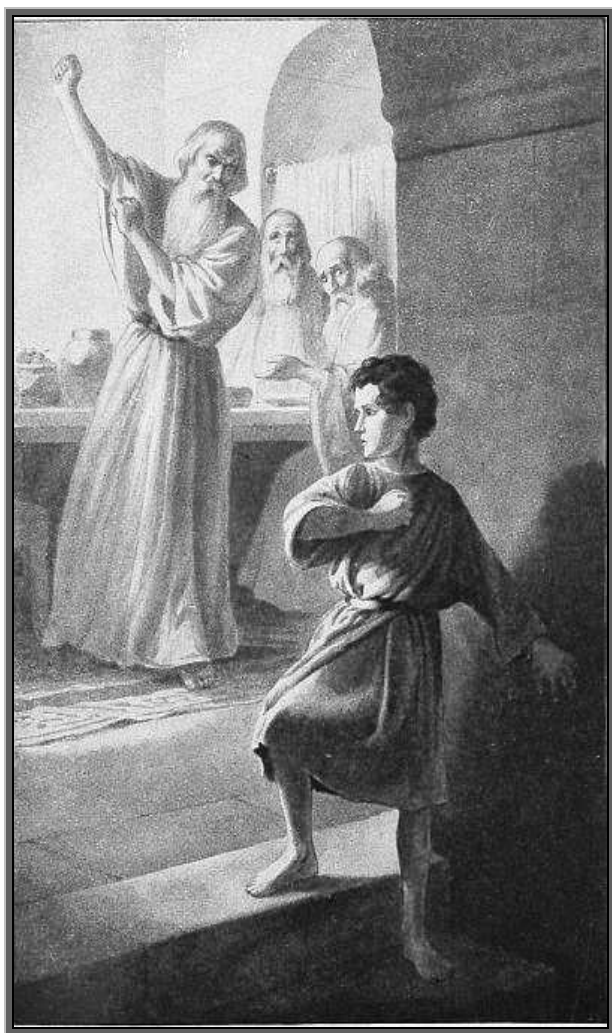
By

ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

Author of "The Little Colonel Series," "Big Brother,"

"Ole Mammy's Torment," "Asa Holmes," etc.

With Pictures by L. J. BRIDGMAN



"THEN TAKE YOURSELF OUT OF MY SIGHT FOR EVER"

PREFACE

In this volume, it has been the purpose of the author to present to children, through "Joel," as accurate a picture of the times of the Christ as has been given to older readers through "Ben Hur." With this in view, the customs of the private and public life of the Jews, the temple service with its sacerdotal rites, and the minute observances of the numerous holidays have been studied so carefully that the descriptions have passed the test of the most critical inspection. An eminent rabbi pronounces them correct in every detail.

While the story is that of an ordinary boy, living among shepherds and fishermen, it touches at every point the gospel narrative, making Joel, in a natural and interesting way, a witness to the miracles, the death, and the resurrection of the Nazarene.

It was with the deepest reverence that the task was undertaken, and the fact that the little book is accomplishing its mission is evinced not only by the approval accorded its first editions by so many, from Bible students to bishops, but by the boys and girls here and in distant lands.

CHAPTER I.



It was market day in Capernaum.
Country people were coming in from the little villages

among the hills of Galilee, with fresh butter and eggs. Fishermen held out great strings of shining perch and carp, just dipped up from the lake beside the town. Vine-dressers piled their baskets with tempting grapes, and boys lazily brushed the flies from the dishes of wild honey, that they had gone into the country before day-break to find.

A ten-year-old girl pushed her way through the crowded market-place, carrying her baby brother in her arms, and scolding another child, who clung to her skirts.

"Hurry, you little snail!" she said to him. "There's a camel caravan just stopped by the custom-house. Make haste, if you want to see it!"

Their bare feet picked their way quickly over the stones, down to the hot sand of the lake shore. The children crept close to the shaggy camels, curious to see what they carried in their huge packs. But before they were made to kneel, so that the custom-house officials could examine the loads, the boy gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Look, Jerusha! Look!" he cried, tugging at her skirts. "What's that?"

Farther down the line, came several men carrying litters. On each one was a man badly wounded, judging by the many bandages that wrapped him.

Jerusha pushed ahead to hear what had happened. One of the drivers was telling a tax-gatherer.

"In that last rocky gorge after leaving Samaria," said the man, "we were set upon by robbers. They swarmed down the cliffs, and fought as fiercely as eagles. These men, who were going on ahead, had much gold with them. They lost it all, and might have been killed, if we had not come up behind in such numbers. That poor fellow there can hardly live, I think, he was beaten so badly."

The children edged up closer to the motionless form on the litter. It was badly bruised and blood-stained, and looked already lifeless.

"Let's go, Jerusha," whispered the boy, whimpering and pulling at her hand. "I don't like to look at him."

With the heavy baby still in her arms, and the other child tagging after, she started slowly back towards the market-place.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," she exclaimed. "Let's go up and get the other children, and play robbers. We never did do that before. It will be lots of fun."

There was a cry of welcome as Jerusha appeared again in the market-place, where a crowd of children were playing tag, regardless of the men and beasts they bumped against. They were all younger than herself, and did not resent her important air when she called, "Come here! I know a better game than that!"

She told them what she had just seen and heard down at the beach, and drew such a vivid picture of the attack, that the children were ready for anything she might propose.

"Now we'll choose sides," she said. "I'll be a rich merchant coming up from Jerusalem with my family and servants, and the rest of you can be robbers. We'll go along with our goods, and you pounce out on us as we go by. You may take the baby as a prisoner if you like," she added, with a mischievous grin. "I'm tired of carrying him."

A boy sitting near by on a door-step, jumped up eagerly. "Let me play, too, Jerusha!" he cried. "I'll be one of the robbers. I know just the best places to hide!"

The girl paused an instant in her choosing to say impatiently, although not meaning to be unkind, "Oh, no, Joel! We do not want you. You're too lame to run. You can't play with us!"

The bright, eager look died out of the boy's face, and an angry light shone in his eyes. He pressed his lips together hard, and sat down again on the step.

There was a patter of many bare feet as the children raced away. Their voices sounded fainter and fainter, till they were lost entirely in the noise of the busy street.

Usually, Joel found plenty to amuse and interest him here. He liked to watch the sleepy donkeys with their loads of fresh fruit and vegetables. He liked to listen to the men as they cried their wares, or chatted over the bargains with their customers. There was always something new to be seen in the stalls and booths. There was always something new to be heard in the scraps of conversation that came to him where he sat.

Down this street there sometimes came long caravans; for this was "the highway to the sea,"—the road that led from Egypt to Syria. Strange, dusky faces sometimes passed this way; richly dressed merchant princes with their priceless stuffs from beyond the Nile; heavy loads of Babylonian carpets; pearls from Ceylon, and rich

silks for the court of the wicked Herodias, in the town beyond. Fisherman and sailor, rabbi and busy workman passed in an endless procession.

Sometimes a Roman soldier from the garrison came by with ringing step and clanking sword. Then Joel would start up to look after the erect figure, with a longing gaze that told more plainly than words, his admiration of such strength and symmetry.

But this morning the crowd gave him a strange, lonely feeling,—a hungry longing for companionship.

Two half-grown boys passed by on their way to the lake, with fish nets slung over their shoulders. He knew the larger one,—a rough, kind-hearted fellow who had once taken him in his boat across the lake. He gave Joel a careless, good-natured nod as he passed. A moment after he felt a timid pull at the fish net he was carrying, and turned to see the little cripple's appealing face.

"Oh, Dan!" he cried eagerly. "Are you going out on the lake this morning? Could you take me with you?"

The boy hesitated. Whatever kindly answer he may have given, was rudely interrupted by his companion, whom Joel had never seen before.

"Oh, no!" he said roughly. "We don't want anybody limping along after us. You can't come, Jonah; you would bring us bad luck."

"My name isn't Jonah!" screamed the boy, angrily clinching his fists. "It's Joel!"

"Well, it is all the same," his tormentor called back, with a coarse laugh. "You're a Jonah, any way."

There were tears in the boy's eyes this time, as he dragged himself back again to the step.

"I hate everybody in the world!" he said in a hissing sort of whisper. "I hate'm! I hate'm!"

A stranger passing by turned for a second look at the little cripple's sensitive, refined face. A girlishly beautiful face it would have been, were it not for the heavy scowl that darkened it.

Joel pulled the ends of his head-dress round to hide his crooked back, and drew the loose robe he wore over his twisted leg.

Life seemed very bitter to him just then. He would gladly have changed places with the heavily laden donkey going by.

"I wish I were dead," he thought moodily. "Then I would not ache any more, and I could not hear when people call me names!"

Beside the door where he sat was a stand where tools and hardware were offered for sale. A man who had been standing there for some time, selecting nails from the boxes placed before him, and had heard all that passed, spoke to him.

"Joel, my lad, may I ask your help for a little while?" The friendly question seemed to change the whole atmosphere.

Joel drew his hands across his eyes to clear them of the blur of tears he was too proud to let fall, and then stood up respectfully. "Yes, Rabbi Phineas, what would you have me to do?"

The carpenter gathered up some strips of lumber in one hand, and his hammer and saws in the other.

"I have my hands too full to carry these nails," he answered. "If you could bring them for me, it would be a great service."

If the man had offered him pity, Joel would have fiercely resented it. His sensitive nature appreciated the

unspoken sympathy, the fine tact that soothed his pride by asking a service of him, instead of seeking to render one.

He could not define the feeling, but he gratefully took up the bag of nails, and limped along beside his friend to the carpenter's house at the edge of the town. He had never been there before, although he met the man daily in the market-place, and long ago had learned to look forward to his pleasant greeting; it was so different from most people's. Somehow the morning always seemed brighter after he had met him.

The little whitewashed house stood in the shade of two great fig-trees near the beach. A cool breeze from the Galilee lifted the leaves, and swayed the vines growing around the low door.

Joel, tired by the long walk, was glad to throw himself on the grass in the shade. It was so still and quiet here, after the noise of the street he had just left.

An old hen clucked around the door-step with a brood of downy, yellow chickens. Doves cooed softly, somewhere out of sight. The carpenter's bench stood under one of the trees, with shavings and chips all around it. Two children were playing near it, building houses of the scattered blocks; one of them, a black-

eyed, sturdy boy of five, kept on playing. The other, a little girl, not yet three, jumped up and followed her father into the house. Her curls gleamed like gold as she ran through the sunshine. She glanced at the stranger with deep-blue eyes so like her father's that Joel held out his hand.

"Come and tell me your name," he said coaxingly. But she only shook the curls all over her dimpled face, and hurried into the house.

"It's Ruth," said the boy, deigning to look up. "And mine is Jesse, and my mother's is Abigail, and my father's is Phineas, and my grandfather's is—"

How far back he would have gone in his genealogy, Joel could not guess; for just then his father came out with a cool, juicy melon, and Jesse hurried forward to get his share.

"How good it is!" sighed Joel, as the first refreshing mouthful slipped down his thirsty throat. "And how cool and pleasant it is out here. I did not know there was such a peaceful spot in all Capernaum."

"Didn't you always live here?" asked the inquisitive Jesse.

"No, I was born in Jerusalem. I was to have been a priest," he said sadly.

"Well, why didn't you be one then," persisted the child, with his mouth full of melon.

Joel glanced down at his twisted leg, and said nothing.

"Why?" repeated the boy.

Phineas, who had gone back to his work-bench, looked up kindly. "You ask too many questions, my son. No one can be a priest who is maimed or blemished in any way. Some sad accident must have befallen our little friend, and it may be painful for him to talk about it."

Jesse asked no more questions with his tongue; but his sharp, black eyes were fixed on Joel like two interrogation points.

"I do not mind telling about it," said Joel, sitting up straighter. "Once when I was not much older than you, just after my mother died, my father brought me up to this country from Jerusalem, to visit my Aunt Leah.

"I used to play down here by the lake, with my cousins, in the fishermen's boats. There was a boy that came to the beach sometimes, a great deal larger than I,—a dog of a Samaritan,—who pulled my hair and threw sand

in my eyes. He was so much stronger than I, that I could not do anything to him but call him names. But early one morning he was swimming in the lake. I hid his clothes in the oleander bushes that fringe the water. Oh, but he was angry! I wanted him to be. But I had to keep away from the lake after that.

"One day some older children took me to the hills back of the town to gather almonds. This Rehum followed us. I had strayed away from the others a little distance, and was stooping to put the nuts in my basket, when he slipped up behind me. How he beat me! I screamed so that the other children came running back to me. When he saw them coming, he gave me a great push that sent me rolling over a rocky bank. It was not very high, but there were sharp stones below.

"They thought I was dead when they picked me up. It was months before I could walk at all; and I can never be any better than I am now. Just as my father was about to take me back to Jerusalem, he took a sudden fever, and died. So I was left, a poor helpless burden for my aunt to take care of. It has been six years since then."

Joel threw himself full length on the grass, and scowled up at the sky.

"Where is that boy that hurt you," asked Jesse.

"Rehum?" questioned Joel. "I wish I knew," he muttered fiercely. "Oh, how I hate him! I can never be a priest as my father intended. I can never serve in the beautiful temple with the white pillars and golden gates. I can never be like other people, but must drag along, deformed and full of pain as long as I live. And it's all his fault!"

A sudden gleam lit up the boy's eyes, as lightning darts through a storm-cloud.

"But I shall have my revenge!" he added, clenching his fists. "I cannot die till I have made him feel at least a tithe of what I have suffered. 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth!' That is the least that can satisfy me. Oh, you cannot know how I long for that time! Often I lie awake late into the night, planning my revenge. Then I forget how my back hurts and my leg pains; then I forget all the names I have been called, and the taunts that make my life a burden. But they all come back with the daylight; and I store them up and add them to his account. For everything he has made me suffer, I swear he shall pay for it four-fold in his own sufferings!"

Ruth shrank away, frightened by the wild, impassioned boy who sat up, angrily staring in front of him with eyes that saw nothing of the sweet, green-clad

world around him. The face of his enemy blotted out all the sunny landscape. One murderous purpose filled him, mind and soul.

Nothing was said for a little while. The doves as before cooed of peace, and Phineas began a steady tap-tap with his hammer.

A pleasant-faced woman came out of the door with a water-jar on her head, and passed down the path to the public well. She gave Joel a friendly greeting in passing.

"Wait, mother!" lisped Ruth, as she ran after her. The woman turned to smile at the little one, and held out her hand. Her dress, of some soft, cotton material, hung in long flowing folds. It was a rich blue color, caught at the waist with a white girdle. The turban wound around her dark hair was white also, and so was the veil she pushed aside far enough to show a glimpse of brown eyes and red cheeks. She wore a broad silver bracelet on the bare arm which was raised to hold the water-jar, and the rings in her ears and talismans on her neck were of quaintly wrought silver.

"I did not know it was so late," said Joel, rising to his feet. "Time passes so fast here."

"Nay, do not go," said Phineas. "It is a long walk back to your home, and the sun is very hot. Stay and eat dinner with us."

Joel hesitated; but the invitation was repeated so cordially, that he let Jesse pull him down on the grass again.

"Now I'll tickle your lips with this blade of grass," said the child. "See how long you can keep from laughing."

When Abigail came back with the water, both the boys were laughing as heartily as if there had never been an ache or pain in the world. She smiled at them approvingly, as she led the way into the house.

Joel looked around with much curiosity. It was like most of the other houses of its kind in the town. There was only one large square room, in which the family cooked, ate, and slept; but on every side it showed that Phineas had left traces of his skilful hands.

There was a tiny window cut in one wall; most of the houses of this description had none, but depended on the doorway for light and air. Several shelves around the walls held the lamp and the earthenware dishes. The chest made to hold the rugs and cushions which they spread down at night to sleep on, was unusually large

and ornamental. A broom, a handmill, and a bushel stood in one corner.

Near the door, a table which Phineas had made, stood spread for the mid-day meal.

There was broiled fish on one of the platters, beans and barley bread, a dish of honey, and a pitcher of milk. The fare was just the same that Joel was accustomed to in his uncle's house; but something made the simple meal seem like a banquet. It may have been that the long walk had made him hungrier than usual, or it may have been because he was treated as the honored guest, instead of a child tolerated through charity.

He watched his host carefully, as he poured the water over his hands before eating, and asked a blessing on the food.

"He does not keep the law as strictly as my Uncle Laban," was his inward comment. "He asked only one blessing, and Uncle Laban blesses every kind of food separately. But he must be a good man, even if he is not so strict a Pharisee as my uncle, for he is kinder than any one I ever knew before."

It was wonderful how much Joel had learned, in his eleven short years, of the Law. His aunt's husband had

grown to manhood in Jerusalem, and, unlike the simple Galileans among whom he now lived, tried to observe its most detailed rules.

The child heard them discussed continually, till he felt he could neither eat, drink, nor dress, except by these set rules. He could not play like other children, and being so much with older people had made him thoughtful and observant.

He had learned to read very early; and hour after hour he spent in the house of Rabbi Amos, the most learned man of the town, poring over his rolls of scriptures. Think of a childhood without a picture, or a story-book! All that there was to read were these old records of Jewish history.

The old man had taken a fancy to him, finding him an appreciative listener and an apt pupil. So Joel was allowed to come whenever he pleased, and take out the yellow rolls of parchment from their velvet covers.

He was never perfectly happy except at these times, when he was reading these old histories of his country's greatness. How he enjoyed chasing the armies of the Philistines, and fighting over again the battles of Israel's kings! Many a tale he stored away in his busy brain to be

repeated to the children gathered around the public fountain in the cool of the evening.

It mattered not what character he told them of,—priest or prophet, judge or king,—the picture was painted in life-like colors by this patriotic little hero-worshipper.

Here and at home he heard so many discussions about what was lawful and what was not, that he was constantly in fear of breaking one of the many rules, even in as simple a duty as washing a cup.

So he watched his host closely till the meal was over, finding that in the observance of many customs, he failed to measure up to his uncle's strict standard.

Phineas went back to his work after dinner. He was greatly interested in Joel, and, while he sawed and hammered, kept a watchful eye on him. He was surprised at the boy's knowledge. More than once he caught himself standing with an idle tool in hand, as he listened to some story that Joel was telling to Jesse.

After a while he laid down his work and leaned against the bench. "What do you find to do all day, my lad?" he asked, abruptly.

"Nothing," answered Joel, "after I have recited my lessons to Rabbi Amos."

"Does your aunt never give you any tasks to do at home?"

"No. I think she does not like to have me in her sight any more than she is obliged to. She is always kind to me, but she doesn't love me. She only pities me. I hate to be pitied. There is not a single one in the world who really loves me."

His lips quivered, but he winked back the tears. Phineas seemed lost in thought a few minutes; then he looked up. "You are a Levite," he said slowly, "so of course you could always be supported without needing to learn a trade. Still you would be a great deal happier, in my opinion, if you had something to keep you busy. If you like, I will teach you to be a carpenter. There are a great many things you might learn to make well, and, by and by, it would be a source of profit to you. There is no bread so bitter as the bread of dependence, as you may learn when you are older."

"Oh, Rabbi Phineas!" cried Joel. "Do you mean that I may come here every day? It is too good to be true!"

"Yes; if you will promise to stick to it until you have mastered the trade. If you are as quick to learn with your hands as you have been with your head, I shall have reason to be proud of such a pupil."

Joel's face flushed with pleasure, and he sprang up quickly, saying, "May I begin right now? Oh, I'll try so hard to please you!"

Phineas laid a soft pine board on the bench, and began to mark a line across it with a piece of red chalk.

"Well, you may see how straight a cut you can make through this plank."

He picked up a saw, and ran his fingers lightly along its sharp teeth. But he paused in the act of handing it to Joel, to ask, "You are sure, now, that your uncle and aunt will consent to such an arrangement?"

"Yes indeed!" was the emphatic answer. "They will be glad enough to have me out of the way, and learning something useful."

The saw cut slowly through the wood; for the weak little hand was a careful one, and the boy was determined not to swerve once from the line. He smiled with