

Adventures in Galilee

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Adventures in Galilee

Bradley Booth



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my daughter, Aubie, who has always been my “little girl.” And now comes the next big stage in her life: marriage to the man of her dreams. I pray that like Tabitha, Aubie, in her new life, will always look to Jesus as the Source of life and hope and happiness.

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Chapter 1

Warm shafts of sunlight slanted through the opening of a synagogue window, revealing dust motes dancing on the early morning air. The beams settled on the sleeve of Tabitha's tunic, making the iridescent blue shimmer.

Tabitha sat with Zeruiah, her mother, on the floor of the women's side of the synagogue, waiting for the Sabbath service to begin. She and her family always arrived early to get good places to sit and be ready for worship. Jairus, Tabitha's father, sat at the front of the congregation in the "seat of Moses," the chair reserved for the one leading out in the synagogue service.

The crowd was larger than usual at the synagogue this morning, and Tabitha wondered if her father might soon suggest they build another wing to the existing building. The synagogue was large for a town the size of Capernaum, but then Capernaum was one of the main centers of Jewish worship in upper Galilee, so that was no surprise.

Then, too, in Capernaum there seemed to be a greater interest in spiritual things lately. Tabitha's father said he thought it had something to do with a new Rabbi who had begun preaching in Galilee during the past few months. Jesus of Nazareth was His name.

A sudden stir at the back of the synagogue caught everybody's attention, and Tabitha turned to see the cause. To her surprise, it was the Rabbi Jesus Himself, and several men with Him, disciples no doubt. She recognized some of them. There was Simon Peter and his brother, Andrew, fishermen from Capernaum. Years ago, they had moved down from Bethsaida, a small fishing port on the Sea of Galilee east and north of Capernaum. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, also fishermen on the Sea of Galilee, were among the disciples

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of Jesus too. Tabitha didn't know any of the other men who were with Him.

A flurry of whispers followed Jesus as He and His disciples filed in quietly to an open space on the floor. Others from the street crowded in and filled any spots that were vacant. Scores more stood at the rear of the synagogue.

Nobody knew much about this Jesus. "Rabbi" was what everybody was calling Him because He was a religious teacher; it was rumored He knew as much about the Law of Moses as any lawyer or scribe in Jerusalem. That was puzzling because the popular saying was that nothing good had ever come out of Nazareth. "I don't recall any scribes or Pharisees of prominence coming from that obscure village," Tabitha's father said cynically when he first heard of Jesus. But Rabbi Jesus' large following was growing by the day. When He was in town, He usually came to the synagogue, and His followers always filled the place to capacity.

When the synagogue had quieted again, Tabitha's father stood to his feet. He was supposed to read the scripture. But today he beckoned Jesus, as a Guest, to come to the front and read a passage of His choosing.

Without hesitation, Jesus came forward and opened the *Aron Kodesh*, commonly called "the ark," an ornamental closet where the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, was kept. He chose a scroll from the book of Psalms, stepped up behind the pulpit, and began to read. "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters." Jesus read the words with warmth and expression, and His resonant voice carried to every corner of the synagogue. "He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."

Tabitha sat up a little straighter. When a rabbi read from the scrolls on Sabbath morning, she sometimes had a hard time staying awake, and she occasionally drifted off a bit. Most rabbis read the sacred scrolls with little or no feeling—but this Rabbi Jesus was different. He spoke as if He really believed what He was reading. He read with certainty and conviction, as though these words from Psalms were His own. *Unusual. Quite unusual for a Rabbi.* It seemed others in the synagogue thought so, too, because they began to nod at one another with smiles of surprise and satisfaction on their faces.

Tabitha could imagine the picture Jesus was creating for everyone with this psalm about a shepherd. She could see the sheep following the shepherd to lush pastures verdant with growth. She could see the shepherd damming up rushing streams so the waters would be still enough for the sheep to drink from them. Sheep would refuse to drink from swiftly moving waters—that

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was their nature. The shepherd would protect them from poisonous plants and the cold and predators in wild country. Sheep were the prized possessions of a shepherd, and he would do everything he could to see that they remained safe. Tabitha felt a sense of peace begin to surround her as she continued listening to the famous words.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” Jesus continued reading, “You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

A hush settled over the congregation as Jesus was reading, and when He had finished, they waited, silent and reverent, to hear more of what He had to say.

“A Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep as though they were His own children.” Jesus glanced from face to face in the congregation. “No one wants to leave a hired hand in charge of the flock,” He said. “It’s too risky. The sheep don’t belong to the hired hand, so when he sees a wolf coming, he thinks only of himself. He loses his head and flees, and the wolf comes upon the flock and scatters them.”

Tabitha felt a twinge of anger as she listened to this talk of hired hands. Her father had had servants like that, and they never lasted more than a few days. Their character flaws were soon open for the world to see, and out they went.

Suddenly, Jesus’ reading was interrupted by a loud, obnoxious voice. “Why have You come here with such nonsense? We don’t need to hear about sheep!”

Tabitha turned to stare at a man standing near the back of the synagogue. His graying hair was wild looking, and his eyes were glassy. She grabbed at her mother’s arm nervously and frowned when she saw that the man was Jorai, the town drunk. He was always staggering around town, sometimes quite early in the day. She hated it when he made a scene like this. *What is wrong with him?* Tabitha wondered. *He is drunk, but that doesn’t give him the right to come in here shouting and interrupting the Guest Speaker in the middle of His reading. This is a synagogue, not a marketplace!*

Everyone else was looking at Jorai by now, too, but it didn’t seem to make a difference to him. “I know who You are!” he slurred at Jesus in a deep, throaty voice. “You think You’re the Holy One of God.” He stepped into the walkway between the watching worshipers, and people began moving away from the aisle to get away from him. His eyes had a strange light in them, too, and Tabitha thought he looked like he was a little bit crazy. No actually, he looked like he was a lot crazy.

A strange feeling formed in the pit of her stomach. *What is Jorai going to do next? Will he keep on shouting like this and ruin the service? Will he start a fight?*

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She had seen him make a scene in public before, but never in the synagogue like this!

And then something even more surprising happened. Rabbi Jesus stepped out from behind the pulpit. He gazed at Jorai as if He were looking right through him. Tabitha felt a tingling sensation run up her spine. Something very unusual was about to happen, and she was right in the middle of it. Everyone in the synagogue was in the middle of it. But strangely enough, she wasn't afraid, and she didn't really know why. Was it because Jesus was there? He had an unusual way about Him, to be sure, and a warm smile that made a person feel genuinely safe, as if He were a Shepherd, perhaps, and they were the sheep.

That was it. This feeling she had was like the story of the shepherd and the sheep Jesus had been reading about in the scroll of Psalms. Tabitha could not take her eyes off Jesus. When He read the Scriptures, His strong voice carried with it a sense of authority that made her feel secure, as if He had everything under control—as if He could protect her and the rest of the people in the synagogue from anything, no matter how bad or frightening or dangerous it might be!

It was a strangely warm feeling, and Tabitha found herself almost forgetting about the crazy man stirring up trouble in the synagogue. But not quite. With baited breath, she waited to see what would happen next.