

*Jesse and the Prince of Peace*

by Emmeline E. Beal

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## Chapter 1



## Jesse

About two thousand years ago in the land of Israel, there lived a young man named Jesse. He resided in the northern part of the country, known as Galilee, on the outskirts of the bustling town of Capernaum, by the sea that shared its name with the bordering region. At twelve years old Jesse was a reserved and thoughtful youth, the second of seven children born to Aaron the son of Abraham and Hannah the daughter of Jeremiah.

Jesse had one older brother, Daniel, who was seventeen and a strong and caring young man. He had four younger sisters. Esther was ten and took her part as the oldest sister seriously; Beth was close to nine, cheerful, and full of life; Ruth was nearly eight and rather quiet with an affectionate personality; and Sarah was five and a sweet little songbird who loved making things pretty. Jesse also had a little brother, Nathaniel, who was three, active, and full of ideas.

These were the seven children. Jesse's father, Aaron, was a tall man of wise insights, who loved to teach and encourage people. Jesse's mother, Hannah, was a kind woman, who was always looking for ways to minister to others, whether her family, the widows, the poor, or the sick.

The family lived on a small farm with Father's parents, Abraham and Elisabeth, whom Jesse and his siblings knew as Grandfather and Grandmother. Actually Grandfather had lived in that home first. He had grown up nearby with several siblings, of whom he was the youngest. The custom in those days was for sons to stay on the family property and live there with their wives and children as part of their inheritance. Once married, daughters would go to live in the homes of their husbands' ancestors.

Grandfather's family's house had been getting quite crowded, so his father and brothers had helped build another

house close by. Grandfather had moved in with his young wife, and in the years to come, God had blessed them with a son and three daughters. Now the daughters were married and in their husbands' homes; but the son, Aaron, and his wife, Hannah, were living with their children in his parents' dwelling.

Mother's parents, Jeremiah and Jedidah, lived in Jericho in the southern part of Israel, called Judaea. The family did not get to see them very often, but the visits they did enjoy were special.

Only four members of the family were home in Capernaum today: Mother, Jesse, Sarah, and Nathaniel. It was the afternoon of the twelfth day of the month Nisan, and several days before, the rest of the family had started out on the long journey to Jerusalem to keep the Passover. This feast, which would begin the next evening as the fourteenth day of the month was ushered in, commemorated how God had brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, having passed over the houses on whose doorposts was the blood of the paschal lamb.\* Passover was one of three feasts each year when all male Jews were to appear before the LORD in Jerusalem. The others were Pentecost (or the Feast of Weeks), which took place seven weeks after Passover, and the Feast of Tabernacles, which was observed in the fall. [Deut. 16:16]

So why did Jesse and the others at home not go to Jerusalem? The family would have loved to travel and celebrate together, but one fact had kept Jesse home for years. He was crippled and had been quite weak and sickly since birth. As a result his parents just did not think he would be able to make the trip. Each time either Mother or Grandmother would stay home with him; and sometimes some of the younger children stayed home as well.

Understandably Jesse felt sad this afternoon. He had

missed the others each day since their departure, but today was especially hard. He imagined the travelers' excitement as they approached and came into the city. He thought of the preparations that would ensue as they made ready the sacred meal. Would he never be able to observe the Passover with the rest of his family and his people in the lovely capital? So it seemed to him.

Jesse buried his face in his hands and fought to keep back the tears. "O God, help me," he cried inwardly. "You know my desire to go up to Your Temple, to worship with all Your people, to celebrate Your deliverance of our forefathers from Egypt. Yet I am crippled and weak. I cannot even work with my father in the fields, much less go up to Jerusalem. You hear the cry of the poor and the afflicted. I believe that You are able to save and to heal. O LORD, please give me strength and the use of my legs that I may appear in Your Temple and rejoice with Your inheritance."

Jesse sighed. His heart ached. He believed in God's power to do miracles, but the possibility of a miracle in *his* life seemed so far away. His faith was small, yet it did exist. Trembling with emotion, he began to pray for his family.

"God, please watch over Father, Grandfather, Grandmother, Daniel, and the girls on their journey. Keep them safe and bless them in this festival. Thank You for Mother's willingness to stay home with me and the little ones and for all her faithful care for us. I know she would love to go along and to see her parents, but she doesn't complain. Watch over Sarah and Nathaniel also and help them to be good for Mother. Oh, that there might be a day when our whole family could worship together in Jerusalem and praise You for Your everlasting mercy!"

Jesse's slight frame shook, and his tears could be restrained no longer. He wept and hurt and could not continue his prayer. Just then he felt a gentle touch on his shoulder.

He looked up and saw that Mother had softly entered the room and was kneeling beside him.

She understood. Enfolding Jesse in her loving arms, she laid his head against her shoulder just as she had when he had been a small child. For a few moments she said nothing but just let him feel her love through the warm embrace. In it, Jesse felt not only her love but God's. A passage from Isaiah came into his mind: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem. And when ye see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb: and the hand of the LORD shall be known toward his servants, and his indignation toward his enemies." [Isa. 66:13+14]

Blessed hope! It flared up again in Jesse's soul. Now came a line from Genesis, words of God to Abraham: "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect." The patriarch had been ninety-nine years of age when God had said that and gone on to confirm His promise of multiplied descendants. In the eyes of man, it had looked impossible. Yet God had supernaturally granted Abraham and Sarah's desire for a son and increased their progeny according to His Word. Being Jewish, Jesse and his family themselves were descendants of Abraham – living proof that Jehovah is a God of miracles, boundless power, immeasurable love, and unchanging truth. [Gen. 17:1]

"Walk before me." Limp as Jesse's physical legs might be, he still had the obligation and privilege of spiritually walking uprightly before the God of his fathers. And "I am the Almighty God." There was still the possibility that someday Jesse might be able to walk on his feet.

Mother spoke soothingly. "I love you, Jesse, and nothing can lessen my love for you. You are my son, and you always will be. You are a wonderful gift from God, a priceless treasure.

"God has made you in a special way. Whether your body is sick or healthy, weak or strong, crippled or not, He has given you unique gifts and abilities. He has a plan for you and wants to use you for His glory. It's not the outside that matters most to Him, Jesse. Your father and I are doing our best to help you become exactly who the LORD wants you to be, starting with the inside – a young man who loves Him with all his heart, soul, and might.

"God sees your heart to serve Him, and He will provide opportunities. Sometimes when we are having a hard time, it helps to think of a way we can bless someone else. Would you like to hear my plan for the Passover supper?"

"Yes, Mother."

"I think it would be nice to invite some others who aren't able to go to Jerusalem, whatever the reason, to have a small celebration with us. I know it's not the same as being in the Holy City, but we can still fellowship with friends, remember what God has done, and perhaps add some joy to another's day."

"Oh, Mother, could we invite Zipporah?" Jesse asked eagerly. She was an elderly lady in town who had lost her sight over the past few years.

"That's a wonderful idea, Jesse," said Mother. "What about Huldah and Merab, too?" They were widowed sisters who lived together just a couple houses down the road. Huldah particularly had trouble getting around now, and Merab (who was several years younger) faithfully took care of her.

"Oh, yes! I'm looking forward to this. It's good to be able to gladden someone else's festival, especially these older saints who can no longer make the journey."

At this point Sarah wandered into the room, followed by a sleepy-looking Nathaniel. They had been napping in the next room.

"Is it suppertime yet?" asked Sarah. "I'm hungry."

"Me, too," agreed Nathaniel.

"It's not time yet, dears. I do need to go to the market and buy a few things for our meal tonight and for the feast. Jesse, could you watch the younger ones while I go?"

"Yes, Mother." The youth nodded willingly.

"Sarah, Nathaniel, please behave for Jesse and do what he says. I won't be gone long."

"Yes, Mother," the little ones answered.

Sarah and Nathaniel did well, and to Mother's great pleasure Jesse was able to give a good report when she came home. Mother said that she had invited more guests to their Passover celebration, but she would not share whom until supper was served.

\* Remember that each new Jewish day begins in the evening, following the pattern set in Genesis 1: "And the evening and the morning were the first day."

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