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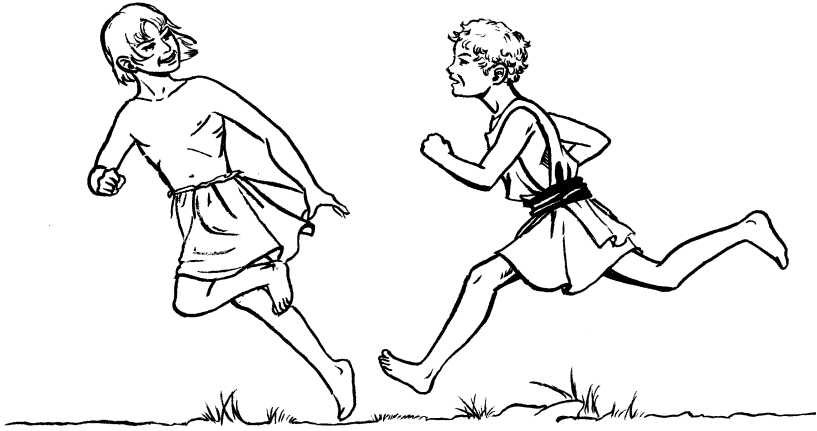
Bible Boys



by Lettice Bell
illustrated by Jessica Erskine

Sample Chapters from
Bible Boys
by Lettice Bell
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by
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illustrations by
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HOMEWAY PRESS

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*This is a substantially revised & modernized edition
of the book "Bible Boys" by Lettice Bell,
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A NOTE ABOUT THE TEXT



This book may be read and enjoyed on its own merits, but it may also be used as a tool to draw young readers into the Scriptural accounts themselves. Words in the text which are quoted directly from the King James Version of the Bible are indicated in italics and footnotes. The footnotes, located at the end of each chapter, contain a chapter reference to its location.

Students may look up these chapters and locate the specific verses quoted. In this manner they will quickly become familiar with the original Biblical text from which these stories are taken. –JRE

The Boy who was Hated

There were *ten*¹ boys already in Jacob's family when Joseph was born, and his father gave him a greater welcome than he had given to the other ten all put together. Envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness found a fertile soil in the ten hearts and grew there faster than the little brother who was preferred before them.

Being *more*² beloved than his brothers did not make Joseph's life happy or easy. All his father's indulgence could not bring him back his mother or prevent his sobbing his six-year-old self to sleep at night; neither could it stop his big brothers' persecutions.

In those days, the custom was that a man chose his heir

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during his lifetime. The eldest son did not necessarily come into the inheritance. The heir, when chosen, then wore a special kind of coat.

Until Joseph was born the brothers often wondered over their chances of being the selected; and, no doubt, Reuben, being the eldest, felt certain it would be he.

So it was not very difficult to imagine the storm of bitter hatred and indignation that raged when the order for the heir's *coat*³ was given at last, and it was found to be made to Joseph's measure.

What a terrible, miserable day that was on which Joseph wore his new, so-coveted coat. What frowns, and scowls, and mutterings met the little heir, and sent him crying with sad *report*⁴ of their hatred to his father! What increasing sin and sorrow the coat stirred up as the months went by, until ten big brothers could neither endure the sight of the favorite nor *speak peaceably unto him!*⁵ But it was



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when Joseph grew old enough to go with his brethren on the long expeditions to pasture the sheep that their best opportunities for tormenting him arose.

Away from everybody, it did not matter what they did or what they said—at least, so they thought—forgetting that God sees, and hears, and remembers cruel words and angry blows, though no one else may be near.

And God *was with Joseph*⁶ when he felt the most lonely and helpless. His Heart of love looked forward to a day when Joseph, the despised and hated boy, should see his unkind brothers kneeling before him, pleading for assistance and forgiveness. He knew that day would make up to Joseph a thousand times over for all his boyish sufferings, and He did not stop the persecution and hardness, but stayed close beside Joseph and made him strong to bear it.

Joseph learned about this through a dream. In the dream he

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was a king, great and powerful, and all his family were bowing low before him. The indignations and envy of the ten brothers knew no bounds when their victim *told*⁷ them what he had dreamt twice running. Even Jacob was cross with his favorite for letting himself look forward to such great things for himself. Yet all really suspected in their hearts that the dreams were God's way of telling Joseph what was in store for him. It must have been a great relief to Joseph that his ten brothers were obliged to take the sheep to find fresh pasture forty miles or so away soon after this, and to find himself left behind for once.

Shechem,⁸ where they had gone, was rather a dangerous part of the country. They had enemies there, besides wild beasts, and Jacob soon grew worried, and began to imagine all sorts of disasters to his family and flocks. He grew so anxious at last that he determined to send Joseph to *see*⁹ whether anything had happened.

Now all the way from Hebron to Shechem, and all the way

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from Shechem on to Dothan, the ten tongues and the ten hearts of the angry brothers had talked and thought of little else than their hatred and jealousy of Joseph and his dream. “Who does he think he is?” they sneered, as they rested under the shadow of a rock. “A king indeed, and we bowing at his feet.” As they spoke a boyish figure stood out on the horizon. Starting to their feet, with shaded eyes, they gazed into the clear distance and saw, long before he came near, that it was Joseph himself.

“It is he,” they said to one another; “the heir, *this master of dreams*.”¹⁰

“Let us kill him,” proposed one, “and then *we shall see what will become of his dreams*.”¹¹

Seven of the ten fell in with the idea, and eight heads and eight hearts conspired together how best to hide the cruel deed after it was done.

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But Reuben, the eldest, and therefore the one who must have had the most cause for jealousy, was filled with horror as he *overheard*¹² the murder discussed. In the depth of his heart, he, too, conspired and planned. “Look, brothers,” he said, “here is an empty pit; let us throw Joseph down there. Do not let us kill him.”

The nine fell into the trap laid for him and gloried in the thought of watching the dream-king die of starvation and thirst under their very eyes.

Suspecting nothing, only rejoicing to have found his brothers, Joseph came up as Reuben's scheme was unanimously accepted.

Before he knew what was happening, he was seized and *stripped*¹³ of the coveted coat, and pushed violently towards the empty pit. The next thing he remembered was finding himself bewildered and bruised at the bottom of the well.

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Up above, the bright blue sky looked down on him; but he might as well have tried to climb to heaven as to scale the hard sides of his grave.

He did not know that one friend on the grass above was planning his rescue. He did know that the Heavenly Friend was with him in the pit, and could bring him safely up, and that whatever happened was God's *good*¹⁴ plan for him.

*“Let me be delivered from them that hate me,”*¹⁵ he cried.

*“Let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.”*¹⁶ For Thou canst bring me up again from the depths of the earth.”

In cries like these we may be sure Joseph poured out his soul to God night and day.

Meanwhile, Reuben, his unknown friend, was far away, and the nine other brothers sat down to eat their dinner around the mouth of the pit. Poor, hungry, thirsty Joseph heard the fire crackling and the delicious sound of water

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poured out. Only smoke and jeers came down in answer to his imploring cries. *They would not hear.*¹⁷

Presently he became conscious of a stir and excitement other than the meal above. Bits of conversation floated down, and he gathered that an Arab caravan was approaching.

It was some of Ishmael's family trading with Egypt in spice and *balm and myrrh*.¹⁸

Quantities of these products were bought by the Egyptians for embalming their mummies; and, when directly Judah sighted the Ishmaelites, he felt sure the traders would find a ready market there for a Hebrew slave as well.

“Let us sell Joseph to the merchants,” he said. “We shall never be troubled by him again once he is a slave in Egypt. It will pay us better than killing him. Besides, after all, he is our brother. I, for one, do not like the idea of starving

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him to death.”

Joseph heard of the proposal, and found himself drawn up *out of the pit*,¹⁹ and his good points shown off to the merchants.

The bargain was arranged, and the beautiful boy was valued and sold for twenty pieces of silver, in spite of his *anguish*²⁰ and entreaties.

The profit Judah had foreseen turned out to be but two coins apiece. And the loss? They never calculated for the loss until old Jacob's ceaseless cry wrung their hearts: “*Joseph is not*.”²¹ Joseph is not. Oh, Joseph, my son, my son!”

Moreover, each of those silver pieces purchased one year of regret and poverty, of bad harvest, and prolonged drought for Jacob's household.

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The “profit” it brought to them was not to their pockets, as they had planned, but to their souls, which did not enter into their reckoning.

God *meant it*²² all for good. And this best of stories does not end until the day which God had long foreseen really happened, and the ten unkind brothers came to powerful, forgiving Joseph down in Egypt, and, falling down before him, said: “We *are servants of*²³...God now, and thy servants. We pray thee forgive us all we did unto thee.”

No wonder Joseph cried back: “Never mind it. Do not be *angry with yourselves*²⁴ for selling me, for God sent me here. Nothing has happened to me by chance. All has worked together for good.”

If ever a story ended happily surely the story of the boy who was hated ends more happily than any other. Yet we miss the best of it unless we see in Joseph a faint picture of the Lord Jesus, and in the brothers a clear one of ourselves.

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| 12 <i>Genesis 37:</i> ____ | 24 <i>Genesis 45:</i> ____ |

The Boy who Killed the Giant

He really was the most terrible giant you have ever heard of, since the Once-upon-a-time days. He was so enormous that he could never get inside any ordinary house without banging his head against the ceiling, and he could eat a whole lamb as easily as you could get through a mutton-chop. His every day voice was like a lion's roar; and when he shouted, people for miles around said there must be thunder about. You should just have seen his boots and *helmet*.¹ Then you would have a little idea what sort of giant he was.

If little boys were naughty in those days, nurses and big sisters could generally make them obey by saying, “*Goliath*² will have you!”

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With one grab of his great creepy-crawly fingers, the giant could squeeze the breath out of anybody, and it would have been a brave boy indeed who would dare to irritate so terrible a monster. We only ever hear of one child who was not afraid of the giant.

He was a little Israelite shepherd. The giant was a Philistine warrior. The Philistines and the Israelites were fighting each other. The Philistine camp was on the top of one mountain; the Israelites on the top of the opposite one, *and there was a valley between them.*³ The valley was the battlefield.

Every *morning and evening*,⁴ the great giant—who stayed in his big tent most of the time—used to arise in his strength and stand on the brow of the hill and cry across the valley to *the armies of Israel*,⁵ “Come along and kill me! Who will come? Choose any man you like. Send your giant, and if he can kill me there need be no more fighting for we will all be your servants. *But if I kill him*”⁶ —here

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the giant crunched his teeth and curled his creepy-crawly fingers—“if I kill him, then you shall serve us.”

The King of Israel would have been glad indeed to settle the long war in so simple a manner; but although every *strong man*⁷ he had ever come across was in his army, he knew quite well none of his soldiers could kill the giant.

So day by day the giant came out and roared his challenge, his monster sword clanking against his *brass*⁸ leggings, and his coat of mail gleaming in the sunshine, striking terror into every Israelitish heart. *When they saw*⁹ him they fled, one and all. It just shows you how dreadful his face must have been, that it could frighten grown-up men.

Not so very far away from the battle-field there stood a little farm-house, nestling among the hills. *Three*¹⁰ of the sons from the farm were soldiers fighting for their king. There were eight boys altogether. *The youngest*¹¹ of them was the boy who did not fear the terrible giant. It was not

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just talk with him either. Some boys talk very big about what they would do if they saw a lion or giant, while they are safe at home, and then run away at the first fright. David had learned the secret of true bravery. He had learned it and proved it too. Not only could he speak bravely, but he could be brave as well.

Whether the thunder of the giant's voice ever came rumbling over the hills where David kept his sheep, we do not know. But for *forty days*¹² we do know the soldiers who did hear it were sent flying by its ominous roar.

Seventy-eight times did the giant make his great invitation, and for the seventy-eighth time he went back unchallenged to his tent, chuckling with hideous joy.

And away in the little farm among the hills, the farmer was planning to send David down to the camp with a supply of bread and cheese for his soldier-sons.

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*Early*¹³ the next morning, long before the giant was stirring, David set out. The giant was having his breakfast as David finished the last bit of climb, and came to the camp. He found his brothers, who, on consideration of the eatables, condescended to talk to him quite amiably.

While they stood and *talked*¹⁴ together the sound of clanking metal came echoing down the mountains. The three brothers turned deadly white. The next moment David found himself alone—alone, while the terrible shout of the giant rent the air.

“Come, you cowards; come and fight me, and let us end the war!” were some of the words he *heard*.¹⁵

“Why does nobody go and fight him?” thought David.

“How does he dare look down on us and speak so scornfully about our God!”

His loyal boyish heart was full of indignation to hear the

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giant's great swelling words against the God who had made him. “*Who is this*¹⁶ man? Why does no one go and kill him?” he said aloud to the first soldiers who found their senses and legs to come back with.

“Have you *seen*¹⁷ him?” they asked—as much to say, “If you had seen him, you would not ask such a silly question.”

David could not believe that no one meant to fight Goliath; nor could he stop asking questions.

“Oh,” said the soldiers, “it is not for want of a reward that no one will try. The King will give anything—even *his daughter*¹⁸ to the man that kills Goliath of Gath.

David straightened his shoulders, clenched his fists, and put on an expression which meant, “I shall fight him.” *His eldest brother*¹⁹ noticed the look and guessed the boy's thoughts.

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In a perfect fury of jealous *anger*,²⁰ he turned on the small hero. “I know your *pride*,²¹ and what you are planning. Do you think a little whipper-snapper like you can kill the giant and become the King's son-in-law? It is just like your impertinence. You have been unbearable ever since that old man came to our house and turned your head with his flattery. What do you mean by coming down here at all and leaving your work? And who, I should like to know, is minding those few poor sheep of yours?” So stormed the elder jealous brother.

David waited till the torrent of abuse was over; then, lifting his *beautiful*²² face, he said quietly, “I don't understand. *What have I...done*²³ that is so dreadful?”

Getting no answer, David *turned*²⁴ and questioned one soldier after another as to the giant, and the reason that no one had fought him. “I would go,” he said, with shining eyes, and a wonderful look on his face; “I can fight him.” And the report went round the camp that a boy was ready

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to attack the monster. The tale of his bravery reached the King. The King sent for him at once.

“I will *go and fight*²⁵ the giant,” cried David, forgetting his manners and to whom he was speaking, so full was his mind with his great resolve.

And the armor-clad King smiled indulgently as he looked on the earnest face of the little shepherd boy. “You don't understand, I am afraid. You are only a boy. The giant is a man who has been fighting all his life. You—”

“But,” interrupted David, “it is you that do not understand. I know that I am only young, yet God can make me stronger than the giant. How does he dare to defy *the living God*²⁶ and to despise Him. Oh, let me go and kill him!”

There was almost a sob in his voice as he went on again: “Once before, God made me stronger than *a lion*,²⁷ and I

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killed the lion. If God could do that He *will deliver me*²⁸ from the giant. Please let me try.”

The King could not withstand such simple, earnest faith. “Go,”²⁹ he said; “and may God be with you.”

So a message to get ready came through to the giant at tea-time, and he smiled a greedy confident smile as he buckled his armor. Whoever the Israelite champion might be, Goliath knew he was more than his match. With his beam³⁰—thick spear in one hand, and his massive sword in the other, the terrible giant strode down the mountain-side and came *near*³¹ to his unknown opponent.

The troops were ranged round a vast space, and every eye was fixed towards the Israelite camp to see which of the *valiant*³² men had screwed up his courage at last.

The giant glared round *about*,³³ and his eye fell upon a little boy with a stick in his hand, and a *shepherd's bag*³⁴ at



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his side.

Then was his fury terrible to behold; he danced with rage to think he had been played a trick with. “*Am I a dog,*”³⁵ he roared, when speech returned to him, “that you come to beat me with a stick?” Then he cursed, and swore, and gnashed his cruel teeth, striding nearer and nearer to David every second. “*Come to me,*”³⁶ he kept shouting in the blood-curdling tones. “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the fowls of the air, and grind your bones to powder.”

You have no idea what it sounded like when the giant said “bones and flesh.” Yet David stood quite still, and his clear, boyish voice rang back fearlessly, “I will give your flesh to the fowls of the air, and cut off your head, giant though you are; for God will give you into our hands *this day.*”³⁷

With that David ran towards the giant, and as he ran he put

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his hand in his bag, drew out one of the smooth stones that were his only weapon, and before the giant had got over his surprise at David's hasty approach David had the stone in *his sling*,³⁸ and God guided his aim so that the little stone *sunk*³⁹ like a pellet right into the giant's forehead. With a terrific thud, the giant fell headlong on *his face to the earth*.⁴⁰ Before he regained consciousness David, as sharp-witted as he was brave, took the enormous sword out of its enormous sheath, and cut off the giant's enormous head.

And a great shout of triumph went up from the onlookers when they saw that the giant was dead, and the enemy running away. So did they learn that day how Two can chase a thousand, and *put ten thousand to flight*,⁴¹ when One of the Two is the God of Hosts Himself, and the other is the trusting heart of a child.

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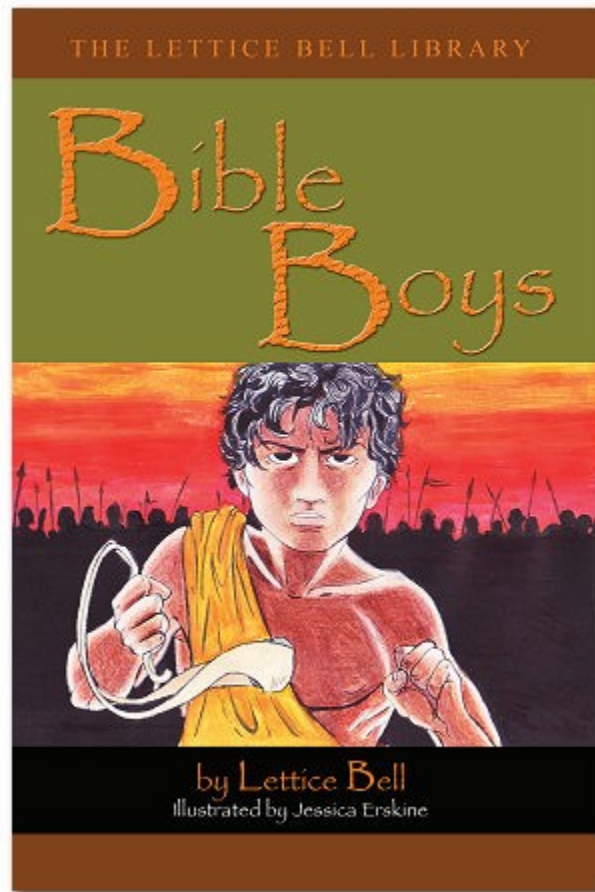
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