

123:2 (partial), 123:3 (partial), 123:4, 123:5
(“The Fifth Year (2 B.C.),” “Events of the Sixth Year (1 B.C.),” “The Seventh Year (A.D. 1),” “School Days in Nazareth”)

from

Paper 123 — The Early Childhood of Jesus

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Sources for 123:2 (partial), 123:3 (partial), 123:4, 123:5

- (1) Rev. Alfred **Edersheim**, M.A.Oxon., D.D., Ph.D., *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Eighth Edition (Volume One) (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907)
- (2) Dr. William **Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible**, Volume 3, Marriage to Regem, Revised and Edited by Professor H. B. Hackett, D.D. et al. (Boston: Houghlin, Mifflin and Co., 1870)
- (3) George A. **Barton**, Ph.D., LL.D., *Jesus of Nazareth: A Biography* (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1922)
- (4) Robert **Norwood**, *The Man Who Dared to Be God: A Story of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1929)
- (5) David Smith, M.A., D.D., *Our Lord’s Earthly Life* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1925)

Note: This source is coded **Smith2**.

- (6) Walter Russell **Bowie**, *The Master: A Life of Jesus Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928)

Key

- (a) **Green** indicates where a source author first appears, or where he/she reappears.
- (b) **Yellow** highlights most parallelisms.

- (c) **Tan** highlights parallelisms not occurring on the same row, or parallelisms separated by yellowed parallelisms.
- (d) An underlined word or words indicates where the source and the UB writer pointedly differ from each other.
- (e) **Blue** indicates original (or “revealed”) information, or UB-specific terminology and concepts. (What to highlight in this regard is debatable; the highlights are tentative.)

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PAPER 123 — THE EARLY CHILDHOOD OF JESUS

2. THE FIFTH YEAR (2 B.C.)

II, IX: THE CHILD-LIFE IN NAZARETH.
 (Edersheim 217)

These conditions were, indeed, for that time, the happiest conceivable, and such as only centuries of Old Testament life-training could have made them. The **Gentile world** here presented terrible contrast, alike in regard to the relation of parents and children, and the character and moral object of their upbringing. Education begins in the *home*, and **there were not homes like those in Israel** ... (E1 226-27).

123:2.5 **There were few homes in the gentile world** of those days that could give a child a better intellectual, moral, and religious training than the Jewish homes of Galilee.

These Jews had a systematic program for rearing and educating their children.

Considering what loving care watched over Jewish child-life, tenderly marking by not fewer than eight designations the various **stages** of its development [*see fn below*], and the deep interest naturally attaching to the early life of the Messiah, that silence, in contrast to the almost blasphemous absurdities of the Apocryphal Gospels, teaches us once more, and most impressively, that the Gospels furnish a history of the Saviour, not a biography of Jesus of Nazareth.

They divided a child's life into seven stages:

[footnote 3] *Yeled*, the newborn babe, as in Is. ix. 6;

Yoneq, the suckling, Is. xi. 8; *Olel*, the suckling beginning to ask for food, Lam. iv. 4;

Gamul, the weaned child, Is. xxviii. 9;

Taph, the child clinging to its mother, Jer. xl. 7;

Elem, a child becoming firm;

Naar, the lad, literally, 'one who shakes himself free;'

and *Bachur*, the ripened one (E1 221).

1. The newborn child,

the first to the eighth day.

2. The suckling child.

3. The weaned child.

4. The period of dependence on the mother,

lasting up to the end of the fifth year.

5. The beginning independence of the child

and, with sons, the father assuming responsibility for their education.

6. The adolescent youths and maidens.

7. The young men and the young women.

123:2.6 It was the custom of the Galilean Jews for the mother to bear the responsibility for a child's training until the fifth birthday, and then, if the child were a boy, to hold the father responsible for the lad's education from that time on. This year, therefore, Jesus entered upon the fifth stage of a Galilean Jewish child's career, and accordingly on August 21, 2 B.C., Mary formally turned him over to Joseph for further instruction.

3. EVENTS OF THE SIXTH YEAR (1 B.C.)

II, IX: THE CHILD-LIFE IN NAZARETH.
(Edersheim 1 217)

123:3.5 Having met John, who came from near Jerusalem, Jesus began to evince an unusual interest in the **history of Israel** and to inquire in great detail as to the meaning of the **Sabbath rites**, the synagogue sermons, and the recurring feasts of commemoration. His father explained to him the meaning of all these **seasons**.

There could not be **national history**, nor even romance, to compare with that by which a Jewish mother might hold her child entranced.... Long before he could go to school, or even Synagogue, the private and united prayers and the domestic **rites**, whether of the weekly **Sabbath** or of festive **seasons**, would indelibly impress themselves upon his mind. In **mid-winter** there was the **festive illumination** in each home.

The first was the **midwinter festive illumination**,

lasting **eight days**,

In most houses, the first night only **one candle** was lit, the next two, and so on to the **eighth day**;

starting out with **one candle** the first night and adding one each successive night;

and the child would learn that this was symbolic, and commemorative of the ***Dedication of the Temple***, its purgation,

this commemorated the **dedication of the temple**

and the restoration of its services by the lion-hearted Judas the Maccabee

after the restoration of the Mosaic services by Judas Maccabee.

Next came, in earliest spring, the merry time of **Purim**,

Next came the early springtime celebration of **Purim**,

SOURCE OR PARALLEL

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the Feast of Esther and of Israel's deliverance through her, with its good cheer and boisterous enjoyments.

the feast of Esther and Israel's deliverance through her.

Although the Passover might call the rest of the family to Jerusalem,

Then followed the solemn Passover, which the adults celebrated in Jerusalem whenever possible,

while at home the children would remember that

the rigid exclusion of all leaven during the whole week could not pass without its impressions.

no leavened bread was to be eaten for the whole week.

Then, after the Feast of Weeks, came bright summer. But its golden harvest and its rich fruits would remind of the early dedication of the first and best to the Lord, and of those solemn processions in which it was carried up to Jerusalem.

Later came the feast of the first-fruits, the harvest ingathering;

[And the feast of harvest, the first-fruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field (Ex. 23:16).]

and last, the most solemn of all,

As autumn seared the leaves, the Feast of the New Year spoke of the casting up of man's accounts in the great Book of Judgment, and the fixing of the destiny for good or for evil.

the feast of the new year,

Then followed the Fast of the Day of Atonement, with its tremendous solemnities, the memory of which could never fade from mind or imagination;

the day of atonement.

While some of these celebrations and observances were difficult for Jesus' young mind to understand, he pondered them seriously and then entered fully into the joy of

and, last of all, in the week of the Feast of Tabernacles,

the feast of tabernacles,

the annual vacation season of the whole Jewish people,

there were the strange leafy booths in which they lived and joyed, keeping their harvest-thanksgiving, and praying and longing for the better harvest of a renewed world (E1 229).

the time when they camped out in leafy booths and gave themselves up to mirth and pleasure.

4. THE SEVENTH YEAR (A.D. 1)

123:4.1 This was, indeed, an eventful year in Jesus' life.

[During January and February snow often falls to a depth of a foot or more, though it may not make its appearance for several years altogether.... In 1818 it was between two and three feet deep. In 1754 a heavy fall took place, and twenty-five persons are said to have frozen to death at Nazareth ("Palestine [Climate]," *Smith's DB* 2317).]

Early in January a great snowstorm occurred in Galilee. Snow fell two feet deep,

the heaviest snowfall Jesus saw during his lifetime and one of the deepest at Nazareth in a hundred years.

XII: JESUS AT PLAY AND AT SCHOOL (Barton 79)

Children then as now played at what they saw older people do (B 79).

[Jesus, in Matt. 11:17,] thus tells us that children played at dancing sometimes. One or more pretended to play the music, while others danced. Dancing was characteristic of occasions of joy, such as weddings. Mourning and wailing were characteristic of funerals (B 79).

When we recall what keen interest children take in all work with tools, how they follow eagerly each process, and what pleasure they derive from using chips, blocks, and shavings as playthings, we may be sure that however humble the carpenter's shop of Joseph, it afforded inexhaustible delight to the child Jesus and his playmates (B 81).

123:4.2 The play life of Jewish children in the times of Jesus was rather circumscribed;

all too often the children played at the more serious things they observed their elders doing.

They played much at weddings and funerals,

ceremonies which they so frequently saw and which were so spectacular.

They danced and sang but had few organized games, such as children of later days so much enjoy.

123:4.3 Jesus, in company with a neighbor boy and later his brother James, delighted to play in the far corner of the family carpenter shop, where they had great fun with the shavings and the blocks of wood.

It was always difficult for Jesus to comprehend the harm of certain sorts of play which were forbidden on the Sabbath, but he never failed to conform to his parents' wishes. He had a capacity for humor and play which was afforded little opportunity for expression in the environment of his day and generation, but up to the age of fourteen he was cheerful and lighthearted most of the time.

II: "LITTLE BOY JESUS" (Norwood 16)

Behind the shop was a little stable for the ass and the cow, and above it, a cote of lattice-work for Mary's doves (N 24).

123:4.4 Mary maintained a dovecote on top of the animal house adjoining the home,

and they used the profits from the sale of doves as a special charity fund, which Jesus administered after he deducted the tithe and turned it over to the officer of the synagogue.

123:4.5 The only real accident Jesus had up to this time was a fall down

[Joseph's house] had a walled garden from which a stone stair climbed to a second story, used for bedrooms, and set within a parapet enclosing a pavement of rush-covered slates (N 23).

the back-yard stone stairs which led up to the canvas-roofed bedroom.

It happened during an unexpected July sandstorm from the east. The hot winds, carrying blasts of fine sand, usually blew during the rainy season,

[The Khamsin blows during February, March, and April (Wildenbruch). It is most oppressive when it comes from the east, bearing the heat and sand of the desert with it, and during its continuance darkening the air and filling everything with fine dust ("Palestine [Climate]," *Smith's DB* 2317).]

especially in March and April.

It was extraordinary to have such a storm in July.

When the storm came up, Jesus was on the housetop playing, as was his habit, for during much of the dry season this was his accustomed playroom. He was blinded by the sand when descending the stairs and fell. After this accident Joseph built a balustrade up both sides of the stairway.

123:4.6 There was no way in which this accident could have been prevented. It was not chargeable to neglect by the midway temporal guardians, one primary and one secondary midwayer having been assigned to the watchcare of the lad; neither was it chargeable to the guardian seraphim. It simply could not have been avoided. But this slight accident, occurring while Joseph was absent in Endor, caused such great anxiety to develop in Mary's mind that she unwisely tried to keep Jesus very close to her side for some months.

123:4.7 Material accidents, commonplace occurrences of a physical nature, are not arbitrarily interfered with by celestial personalities. Under ordinary circumstances only midway creatures can intervene in material conditions to safeguard the persons of men and women of destiny, and even in special situations these beings can so act only in obedience to the specific mandates of their superiors.

123:4.8 And this was but one of a number of such minor accidents which subsequently befell this inquisitive and adventurous youth.

If you envisage the average childhood and youth of an aggressive boy, you will have a fairly good idea of the youthful career of Jesus, and you will be able to imagine just about how much anxiety he caused his parents, particularly his mother.

123:4.9 The fourth member of the Nazareth family, Joseph, was born Wednesday morning, March 16, A.D. 1.

5. SCHOOL DAYS IN NAZARETH

HIS CHILDHOOD (Smith2 23)

In His sixth or seventh year, according to the Jewish ordinance, He would enter the elementary school attached to the local synagogue.

Since the manual was the Book of the Law, it was denominated *beth ha-sepher*, “The House of the Book”; and there until His tenth year

He learned the rudiments

123:5.1 Jesus was now seven years old,

the age when Jewish children were supposed to begin their formal education in the synagogue schools.

Accordingly, in August of this year he entered upon his eventful school life at Nazareth. Already this lad was a fluent reader, writer, and speaker of two languages, Aramaic and Greek. He was now to acquaint himself with the task of learning to read, write, and speak the Hebrew language. And he was truly eager for the new school life which was ahead of him.

123:5.2 For three years—until he was ten—he attended the elementary school of the Nazareth synagogue.

For these three years he studied the rudiments of the Book of the Law as it was recorded in the Hebrew tongue.

SOURCE OR PARALLEL

and then for the next two years was instructed in the Sacred Law,

committing its precepts to memory after the Jewish method of *mishnah* or “repetition” (S2 24).

In August 7 A.D., He attained His thirteenth year, the age when a Jewish boy became *bar mitzvah*, “a son of the commandment,”

a responsible citizen of the Commonwealth of Israel;

and at the ensuing Passover, which fell that year on April 9, He accompanied Joseph and Mary on the annual pilgrimage to the Holy City (S2 26).

II, IX: THE CHILD-LIFE IN NAZARETH. (Edersheim 217)

But the children were gathered in the Synagogues, or in School-houses, where at first they either stood, teacher and pupils alike, or else sat on the ground in a semicircle, facing the teacher, as it were, literally to carry into practice the prophetic saying: ‘Thine eyes shall see thy teachers’ (E1 231).

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For the following three years he studied in the advanced school

and committed to memory, by the method of repeating aloud, the deeper teachings of the sacred law.

He graduated from this school of the synagogue during his thirteenth year and was turned over to his parents by the synagogue rulers as

an educated “son of the commandment”—

henceforth a responsible citizen of the commonwealth of Israel,

all of which entailed his attendance at the Passovers in Jerusalem;

accordingly, he attended his first Passover that year in company with his father and mother.

123:5.3 At Nazareth the pupils sat on the floor in a semicircle,

Thus, encircled by his pupils, as by a crown of glory (to use the language of Maimonides), the teacher—generally the *Chazzan*, or *Officer of the Synagogue*—should impart to them the precious knowledge of the Law; with constant adaptation to their capacity, with unwearied patience, intense earnestness, strictness tempered by kindness, but, above all, with the highest object of their training ever in view (E1 231).

The study of the Bible commenced with that of the *Book of Leviticus*.

Thence it passed to the other parts of the Pentateuch;

then to the *Prophets*; and, finally, to the Hagiographa (E1 232).

Roughly classifying the subjects of study it was held, that, up to ten years of age, the Bible exclusively should be the text-book; from ten to fifteen the Mishnah, or traditional law; after that age, the student should enter on those theological discussions which occupied time and attention in the higher Academies of the Rabbis (E1 232).

Care was taken not to send a child too early to school, nor to overwork him when there. For this purpose the school-hours were fixed, and attendance *shortened* during the *summer-months* (E1 232).

while their teacher, the *chazan*, an *officer of the synagogue*, sat facing them.

Beginning with the *Book of Leviticus*,

they passed on to the study of the other books of the law,

followed by the study of the *Prophets* and the Psalms.

The Nazareth synagogue possessed a complete copy of the Scriptures in Hebrew.

Nothing but the Scriptures was studied prior to the twelfth year.

In the *summer months* the hours for school were greatly *shortened*.

123:5.4 Jesus early became a master of Hebrew, and as a young man, when no visitor of prominence happened to be sojourning in Nazareth, he would often be asked to read the Hebrew scriptures to the faithful assembled in the synagogue at the regular Sabbath services.

VII: THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN
(Barton 41)

123:5.5 These synagogue schools, of course, had no textbooks.

The method of teaching was this: The teacher would utter a sentence and the pupils would repeat it in concert after him. This would be continued and repeated until the tradition had been thoroughly memorized (B 44).

In teaching, the chazan would utter a statement while the pupils would in unison repeat it after him.

When having access to the written books of the law, the student learned his lesson by reading aloud and by constant repetition.

123:5.6 Next, in addition to his more formal schooling, Jesus began to make contact with human nature from the four quarters of the earth as men from many lands passed in and out of his father's repair shop. When he grew older, he mingled freely with the caravans as they tarried near the spring for rest and nourishment. Being a fluent speaker of Greek, he had little trouble in conversing with the majority of the caravan travelers and conductors.

[See 121:2.2, 121:2.12.]

123:5.7 Nazareth was a caravan way station and crossroads of travel and largely gentile in population;

[See 123:5.12, below.]

at the same time it was widely known as a center of liberal interpretation of Jewish traditional law. In Galilee the Jews mingled more freely with the gentiles than was their practice in Judea. And of all the cities of Galilee, the Jews of Nazareth were most liberal in their interpretation of the social restrictions based on the fears of contamination as a result of contact with the gentiles.

And these conditions gave rise to the common saying in Jerusalem,

[The Judæans despised Nazareth. “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” was a proverb (B 10).]

“Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”

123:5.8 Jesus received his moral training and spiritual culture chiefly in his own home. He secured much of his intellectual and theological education from the chazan. But his real education—that equipment of mind and heart for the actual test of grappling with the difficult problems of life—he obtained by mingling with his fellow men. It was this close association with his fellow men, young and old, Jew and gentile, that afforded him the opportunity to know the human race. Jesus was highly educated in that he thoroughly understood men and devotedly loved them.

123:5.9 Throughout his years at the synagogue he was a brilliant student, possessing a great advantage since he was conversant with three languages.

[Jesus was no ordinary child, and we shall not be far wrong, if we picture the old Nazarene *Khazzan* as often driven into a corner by the searching questions of the marvelous boy, and as doubtfully wagging his head over what such thoughts and questions might signify (B 85).]

The Nazareth chazan, on the occasion of Jesus’ finishing the course in his school, remarked to Joseph that he feared he “had learned more from Jesus’ searching questions” than he had “been able to teach the lad.”

VI: THE TEMPLE AND SYNAGOGUE
(Barton 36)

After [the *Shema* and some prayers] a lesson was read from the Pentateuch and one from the Prophets.... After this a sermon generally was delivered, often based on one of the lessons of the day.

The preacher was not always the same person. Any one had the right to explain the Scriptures. If an important-looking stranger were present he would be asked to speak (B 39-40).

II, IX: THE CHILD-LIFE IN NAZARETH.
(Edersheim 217)

Later on, tradition ascribes to Joshua the son of Gamla the introduction of schools in every town, and the compulsory education in them of all children above the age of six (E1 231).

Very early the child must have been taught what might be called his birthday-text—some verse of Scripture beginning, or ending with, or at least containing, the same letters as his Hebrew name.

123:5.10 Throughout his course of study Jesus learned much and derived great inspiration from

the regular Sabbath sermons in the synagogue.

It was customary to ask distinguished visitors, stopping over the Sabbath in Nazareth, to address the synagogue.

As Jesus grew up, he heard many great thinkers of the entire Jewish world expound their views, and many also who were hardly orthodox Jews since the synagogue of Nazareth was an advanced and liberal center of Hebrew thought and culture.

123:5.11 When entering school at seven years

(at this time the Jews had just inaugurated a compulsory education law),

it was customary for the pupils to choose their "birthday text,"

This guardian-promise the child would insert in its daily prayers (E1 230).

a sort of golden rule to guide them throughout their studies,

one upon which they often expatiated at their graduation when thirteen years old.

The text which Jesus chose was from the Prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me;

to preach good tidings unto the meek;

he has sent me to bring good news to the meek,

he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,

to bind up the brokenhearted,

to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are* bound; (Is. 61:1)

to proclaim liberty to the captives, and to set the spiritual prisoners free.”

II, IV: THE ANNUNCIATION OF JESUS THE MESSIAH, AND THE BIRTH OF HIS FORERUNNER. (Edersheim1 144)

It has already been indicated that the Priesthood was divided into **twenty-four** ‘courses,’ which, in turn, ministered in the Temple.... Now **Nazareth was one of these Priest-centres**, and although it may well have been, that comparatively few in distant Galilee conformed to the Priestly regulations—some must have assembled there in preparation for the sacred functions, or appeared in its Synagogue (E1 147).

123:5.12 **Nazareth was one of the twenty-four priest centers** of the Hebrew nation.

The cast of Judaism prevalent in Nazareth would, of course, be the same as in Galilee generally. We know, that there were marked divergences from the observances in that stronghold of **Rabbinism, Judæa**—indicating greater simplicity and freedom from the constant intrusion of **traditional ordinances** (E1 148).

But the Galilean **priesthood** was more liberal in the interpretation of the **traditional laws** than were the **Judean** scribes and **rabbis**.

And at Nazareth they were also more liberal regarding the observance of the Sabbath.

I: THE ENVIRONMENT OF JESUS' BOYHOOD (Bowie 29)

About the valley on the slope of which the village lies, on three sides stand the hills. It is an easy climb from Nazareth to the top of these. From these hills unfolds a **panorama** of varied and extraordinary beauty (B 37).

To the northwest, the **long ridge of Carmel** juts into the sea—

clothed for Jesus with its memories of **Elijah**,

first of the mighty succession of the prophets,

who struggled there with **Ahab** and the **priests of Baal**.

To the north, **filling the sky-line**, rises the majestic peak of **Hermon**,

with three thousand feet of its upper slopes **gleaming white with snow**.

To the east, the eyes of Jesus saw—as one may see to-day—the edges of the **Jordan valley**,

It was therefore the custom for Joseph to take Jesus out for walks on Sabbath afternoons, one of their favorite jaunts being to climb the high hill near their home,

from which they could obtain a **panoramic** view of all Galilee.

To the northwest, on clear days, they could see the **long ridge of Mount Carmel** running down to the sea;

and many times Jesus heard his father relate

the story of **Elijah**,

one of the first of that long line of Hebrew prophets,

who reproved **Ahab** and exposed the **priests of Baal**.

To the north Mount **Hermon** raised its snowy peak in majestic splendor and **monopolized the skyline**,

almost 3,000 feet of the upper slopes **glistening white with perpetual snow**.

Far to the east they could discern the **Jordan valley**

and beyond, a range of hills, leading up and on to the scarred and rocky heights of Gilead and of Moab:

but also he could see, when the morning sunlight shone upon their marble,

the Græco-Roman cities of the Decapolis, builded in new splendor there high upon the hills to the east of the Jordan,

with their amphitheatres and temples where now are crumbled stones.

Or if at evening he climbed the heights of Nazareth,

he could see the sun go down into the flaming Mediterranean spread wide before him to the west; and through the golden pathways of the sunset he might see the distant sails of Roman triremes bringing the legionaries to the cities of the coast (B 38).

On the north and west and south the hills girdle the valley; in the southeast and east they dip down to the plain. It is the Plain of Esdraelon to which they open, most fertile of all the regions of Palestine, stretching green and gentle from the Jordan river to the sea; but to the eyes of Jesus the plain must have suggested else than cultivation (B 37).

and, far beyond, the rocky hills of Moab.

Also to the south and the east, when the sun shone upon their marble walls,

they could see the Greco-Roman cities of the Decapolis,

with their amphitheaters and pretentious temples.

And when they lingered toward the going down of the sun,

to the west they could make out the sailing vessels on the distant Mediterranean.

123:5.13 From four directions Jesus could observe the caravan trains as they wended their way in and out of Nazareth,

and to the south he could overlook the broad and fertile plain country of Esdraelon,

stretching off toward Mount Gilboa and Samaria.

123:5.14 When they did not climb the heights to view the distant landscape, they strolled through the countryside and studied nature in her various moods in accordance with the seasons. Jesus' earliest training, aside from that of the home hearth, had to do with a reverent and sympathetic contact with nature.

123:5.15 Before he was eight years of age, he was known to all the mothers and young women of Nazareth, who had met him and talked with him at

II: "LITTLE BOY JESUS" (Norwood 16)

[Joseph] had chosen for the site of his house a plot of ground near a spring which still bubbles in Nazareth.

In Joseph's day this spring was the social centre of Nazareth. Thither came the mothers and maids at the dawn and the twilight to fill their water jars. At such times there was much gossiping ... (N 23).

the spring, which was not far from his home,

and which was one of the social centers of contact and gossip for the entire town.

This year Jesus learned to milk the family cow and care for the other animals. During this and the following year he also learned to make cheese and to weave. When he was ten years of age, he was an expert loom operator. It was about this time that Jesus and the neighbor boy Jacob became great friends of the potter who worked near the flowing spring; and as they watched Nathan's deft fingers mold the clay on the potter's wheel, many times both of them determined to be potters when they grew up. Nathan was very fond of the lads and often gave them clay to play with, seeking to stimulate their creative imaginations by suggesting competitive efforts in modeling various objects and animals.