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or into Saul's trap?*

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**Crazy Jacob**

*by Jim Ware*

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## CHAPTER

# 1

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Andrew lay on his back, gasping for air. Between gasps, he wondered if there could possibly be anyone he despised more than Demas. *Maybe Artemas*, he thought.

Artemas was Demas's uncle. He owned large herds of pigs that grazed on the plateau above Lake Kinneret in Galilee. Artemas was a successful, influential businessman. He was as powerful as he was mean-spirited. And Artemas had a bitter grudge against Andrew's father, Jacob.

Demas was nothing but an oversized hulk of a kid who thought being fifteen years old made him something special. Andrew would never understand why his father had taken Demas on as an apprentice in the boat-building trade. Supposedly it had something to do with a request from Demas's father, who had since died of some disease.

Demas was a big problem. He was big in *every* way—big and beefy and stupid. Artemas liked to say Demas was “large-boned.” Demas was cowardly, superstitious, and thick-headed. Worst of all, Demas was, at that very moment, sitting on Andrew's chest, shoving Andrew's tousled brown head into the sand on the shore of Lake Kinneret.

“If my father were here . . .” gasped Andrew.

“Whatcha gonna do when he comes, *Jew boy?*” sneered the curly-headed, pudgy-cheeked bully. “Tattle?”

“No, but . . .”

“Guess you know what's good for you!” The larger boy released his victim and stood up. “Now go get me those smoothing blocks!”

Andrew jumped up, brushed the sand from his homespun tunic, and

wiped an angry tear from his freckled cheek. Then he stumbled up the beach toward the shed where his father and a friend named Stephen kept their tools.

Working with Demas was no fun. They were supposed to be smoothing the hull of a new trading boat. So far at least half their morning had been taken up with bullying and fighting instead. Andrew's father wanted the new boat in the water by the next day. That would be early enough to allow time for the planking to swell before beginning to caulk, when they would fill the cracks with pitch. Now they were behind schedule. *We'd have been finished by now if it weren't for Demas*, grumped Andrew.

Stepping in under the shed's leather awning, he picked up two limestone smoothing blocks from the workbench. As he did so, his eye fell on a number of other tools that lay on the bench or hung on hooks along the walls. The big two-handled saws. The adze and the plane. The bow drill, the hammers, the wooden mallets. Andrew smiled. *One of these days*, he thought, *I'll use these tools to build my own boat. And when I do, I'll sail it as far away from Demas as I can, maybe even clear across the lake to Magdala or Capernaum!*

That was when he heard voices just outside the back wall of the shed. His father's and someone else's—a whiny, nasal voice. The voice of Artemas.

"As for the boy," the voice was saying, "I can put him to work herding my pigs. Why he was ever apprenticed to a boatbuilder, especially a *Jewish* boatbuilder, is beyond me. It was my brother's decision, not mine."

Andrew's heart leaped. Demas leaving to herd pigs? It was too good to be true! He bent beside the wall to listen more closely.

"I'm sorry, Artemas," he heard his father say. "I have no intention of closing up shop. And as long as Stephen and I are in business, we're going to *need* an apprentice. There's too much work for the two of us."

*Closing up shop?*

"But Jacob," intoned the voice, "wouldn't you be more comfortable back among your own kind?"

*Not this again*, thought Andrew. Artemas resented Jacob's Jewishness,

as Andrew knew only too well. It was a subject that had caused him a great deal of personal suffering.

"I'm sure they can use a good boatwright over on the Jewish side of the lake," continued the pig man.

"What exactly are you trying to say, Artemas?" Andrew could hear the rising anger in his father's voice.

"Don't you see? A Jew conducting business on our side of the lake—it sends the wrong message. It tends to . . . well, attract other Jews. And once there's a sizable Jewish community, it puts a businessman like myself in a rather awkward position. No pigs, no pork, and so on and so forth, you understand. All because of that strange Jewish god and those picky Jewish codes and Jewish dietary laws."

*I'd love to see you in an awkward position, thought Andrew. Like on your back in the sand, with a big pig sitting on your head!*

"Artemas," said Jacob quietly, "I'm a craftsman. I didn't come here to teach anyone about the Jewish God. I fear *all* the gods—Jewish or otherwise! And I have no interest in enforcing Jewish dietary laws. That's *not* why I came to Gadara!"

There was a pause. Then Artemas cooed, "Perhaps a little gift will help you see things my way." Andrew heard the clink of coins in a bag. "I beg you to reconsider."

"Good day to you, Artemas!" Jacob answered.

There came a sound of coins scattering in the sand and then a muffled curse and heavy footsteps retreating up the beach. In the next moment Jacob poked his head inside the shed.

"Andrew!" he said, looking surprised. "Have you . . . been here long?"

"Um, no, not really, Father." Andrew blushed. "I only came in to pick up these smoothing blocks."

"Hey! Where are those—?" blurted Demas, jogging up at just that moment. He stopped short when he saw Jacob standing beside his son. "Oh. Good morning, Master Jacob," he finished. "I was just looking for young Andrew here. We have a lot of work to get done."

“You do indeed,” said Jacob, rubbing his bearded chin and frowning thoughtfully. “The merchant expects that boat by the end of the week.”

“Just what I was telling young Andrew!” said Demas. He grabbed the smoothing blocks and headed back toward the unfinished hull.

A knowing look passed between father and son as the older boy hurried away. “Don’t worry,” said Jacob, wrinkling his brow and placing a work-worn hand on Andrew’s shoulder. “Everything’s under control. We’ll show them—all of them”—at this he touched a leather pouch that hung from his belt—“with the help of the gods and spirits.”