

The Bronze Bow

Study Guide

by Carole Pelttari

For the novel by
Elizabeth George Speare



About the Author

Elizabeth George Speare was born November 21, 1908, in Melrose, Massachusetts. She says she grew up “exceptionally happy” with her parents, one brother, and many aunts, uncles, and cousins. She remembers a favorite cousin her own age. Every time the families met, the two cousins hurried to a quiet place to “read out loud to each other the latest stories we had written.”

She attended college and began teaching English in 1932 during the Great Depression. She married Alden Speare in 1936 and reported that the first 15 years of her married life were “crowded with piano practice and dancing school and camping and orthodontists and PTA and Cub Scouts and Brownies.”

When her children both entered junior high school she finally found time to write for publication. At first she wrote magazine stories and one-act plays, but later became interested in historical fiction. Her first novel, *Calico Captive*, was published in 1957, and her most well-known novel, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, for which she was awarded the Newbery Medal, was published the following year.

She won a second Newbery Medal for *The Bronze Bow*, a book that began as a need to bring Jesus to life for a Sunday school class that she was teaching. Though she soon felt inadequate to show who Jesus was, she accomplished her second goal for the book: to “show the change wrought in just one boy who came to know the teacher in Galilee.”

In 1989 she was awarded the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award for a distinguished and enduring contribution to children’s literature. Mrs. Speare died of natural causes in November 1994, when she was almost 86 years old.

Background Information

The Jewish nation of Israel came into existence when God called Abraham to worship the one true God instead of the many false gods worshiped by the peoples of his time. Abraham's son and grandsons multiplied. Four hundred years after Abraham's death, three million people followed Moses' leadership to the land of Canaan which they renamed Israel.

The Old Testament of the Bible tells the history of Israel along with God's work in the hearts of people. The events in *The Bronze Bow* are a result of the historical situation at the turning point of history. Around 300 B.C., Rome took over much of the civilized world, finally extending to Israel and beyond. Though the Romans allowed the Jews some religious freedom, the Romans worshiped many gods and could never understand the Jews' love for one God. The Roman and Jewish cultures continually clashed because the Jews would not accept the idea of multiple gods. The Romans even claimed their king, Caesar to be a god. Jews believed that to submit to Caesar's rule would be like worshiping a false god. Many Jews longed for a person to come to save them from Roman rule.

Into this world stepped Jesus. When He talked of God's kingdom many Jews believed He would lead them to overthrow the Romans. However, as *The Bronze Bow* shows, the kingdom of which Jesus spoke far surpassed the political kingdom of Israel.

Chapters 1 & 2

Questions:

1. Why had Daniel run away to the hills?
2. What is Daniel ordered to do when the caravan approaches?
3. When Rosh asks Joel his reason for wanting to see him, what reason does Joel give? What is Rosh's response?

Thinking About the Story:

4. Why do you think Joel helps Daniel in the skirmish?

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5. What is Rosh's main requirement for those who wish to join his band? What is your opinion of this requirement?

6. What does the slave do when Daniel breaks his shackles? What do you think this gesture means?

7. To *compare* means to show how two things are alike. To *contrast* means to show how they are different. How does Malthace's opinion about the Roman occupation compare to Joel's and Daniel's view? How does her opinion contrast?

Dig Deeper:

8. Joel says,

“I used to think [the Messiah] would come with a great host of angels. Now I know it must be men, real men, trained and armed and ready—”

Many Old Testament scriptures predicted the coming of the Messiah. Read the four passages listed below. Would the descriptions found in these verses fit Joel's view of the Messiah? Put **Y** in the blank for yes, or **N** for no.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| a. ____ Isaiah 41:1–2 | c. ____ Isaiah 53:4–9 |
| b. ____ Isaiah 42:2 | d. ____ Jeremiah 50:33–40 |

Chapters 3–5

Questions:

1. Why does Simon come to visit Daniel?
2. Simon tells Daniel, “I’m a Zealot, yes. Rosh and I work for the same end, but we don’t exactly see eye to eye.” What is the “same end” toward which Simon and Rosh are working? How do they not see eye to eye?
3. What is Daniel’s first reaction when Jesus begins speaking at the synagogue in Ketzah? Why is Daniel disappointed with Jesus by the end of the service?
4. Why does Daniel walk away from Jesus and the crowd at the beach?

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5. What does Daniel dislike about the Capernaum synagogue?

6. What does Hezron say is stronger than all the power of Rome? How has time proven Hezron correct?

Thinking About the Story:

7. Why did Daniel feel that “everything he cared about and worked for was threatened by” Leah?

8. Why is Daniel homesick while at home with his Grandmother and Leah?

9. Why do you think Thacia refuses to greet Daniel?

Chapters 6–8

Questions:

1. Why does Daniel give the soldier's horse water without arguing?
2. What does Joel read to Daniel and Thacia?
3. What does Joel's father, Hezron, believe about the establishment of God's kingdom? What different opinion about God's Kingdom do Joel and Daniel share?
4. In Chapter 7, the reader finally learns what has happened to Daniel's parents. Briefly summarize the events that led to Daniel's father being crucified.
5. How did Daniel's mother die? What happened to Daniel's sister?
6. Why does Daniel go to find Jesus?

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7. What was Simon hoping to do when he first went to be with Jesus? What does he hope for now?

8. Why does Joel think Jesus is not a true rabbi?

Thinking About the Story:

9. What vow did Daniel make after his father died? What is your opinion of Daniel's vow? Is it a good vow to have? Explain your answer.

10. Many times in this section of reading, Daniel wonders if Thacia is for him or against him. List two things that make Daniel think Thacia is against him. List three things that make Daniel think Thacia is on his side.

What finally convinces Daniel that Thacia is not against him?

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11. Do you think spending time with Joel and Thacia is beginning to cause a change in Daniel? Explain your answer using examples from the story.

12. What effect do Jesus' eyes have on Daniel when Daniel first comes face to face with Jesus? Why do you think Daniel feels this way?

Dig Deeper:

13. The three young people make a vow to do whatever they can for "God's Victory." What does this vow mean to:

Daniel:

Joel:

Thacia:

What would it mean to you to make a vow like this today?

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14. Joel, Daniel, and Thacia discuss the meaning of the sentence, “He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.” (This sentence is found in Psalm 18.) Thacia says,

“I think David meant a bow that a man couldn’t bend—that when God strengthens us we can do something that seems impossible.”

What “impossible” thing are Joel, Daniel, and Thacia hoping to do?

Read Philippians 4:12, 13. Is there something that you have done that you feel you were only able to do with God’s help?

Or, is there something that you hope to do that you feel you will only be able to do with God’s help?

15. Joel and Daniel leave the house of Simon with many unanswered questions about Jesus. List some of the questions they might have based on the story so far.

Do you have any unanswered questions about Jesus? Who do you think He is? List a few questions here. You may wish to discuss them later with a teacher or classmate.

Chapters 9–12

Questions:

1. Why does Daniel feel uneasy while waiting for the man Rosh had sent him to rob? List several reasons.
2. What message from Simon causes Daniel to leave the mountain?
3. In the mountains when Daniel recalled the village, he remembered poverty, despair, quarreling and meanness. What incidents show Daniel that there is more to the village than these memories of his? List three or four incidents.
4. What three things is Daniel amazed to discover that Leah knows how to do?
5. Describe the first person Daniel recruits for his band of Zealots. Why is this person eager to join Daniel?

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6. What does Daniel dream of presenting to Rosh?

Thinking About the Story:

7. Who does Daniel think of while he considers that Rosh might be right about the softness in him? What do these people have to do with Daniel's "softness"? Rosh calls softness a weakness. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.

8. What struggle is going on within Daniel at the end of chapter nine? How does the author illustrate this struggle through Daniel's actions? In other words, how do Daniel's actions on the outside help illustrate the struggle on the inside?

What words of Jesus does Daniel recall during this struggle? Would Jesus have called softness a weakness?

9. While sitting near his dying Grandmother, Daniel feels an intense fear. The author writes:

That devil of fear that held his sister helpless—was it cunning enough to find out his weakness? If he could run, out into the street, back to the mountain, it could never overtake him. But he could not run. He could only sit, while the fear reached closer and closer, . . .

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What is it that Daniel fears?

10. Daniel suspects that the Roman soldier is beginning to make excuses to stop in at Daniel's shop. Why do you think the Roman soldier keeps coming around?

Dig Deeper:

11. Rosh says, "What loss would it have been—one old man more or less?" What did Rosh think was more important than the life of the old miser? Do you think every person is important or are only certain people important? Explain your answer.

Read Luke 12:6, 7. What did Jesus say in these verses about the value of human life?

12. How does Daniel react when Simon tells him he must do work for the Romans if he takes over Simon's shop? Later, how does Daniel react when Rosh calls him soft for returning to the village? Does this indicate any change or growth in character on Daniel's part? Explain your answer.

Chapters 13–15

Questions:

1. Why has Joel been going to listen to Jesus?
2. Why does Daniel visit the cave? When he visits the cave, what does Daniel miss most after the greetings are over?
3. Where had Samson gone the day Daniel arrived at the cave? Why does this anger Rosh? Why doesn't Rosh punish him?
4. Daniel notices a difference between the meal he shares with the men at the cave and the meal he shared with Jesus and the men at Simon's house. What is this difference?
5. What began to make Daniel's life seem less burdensome?

Thinking About the Story:

6. Why do you think Leah allows Thacia to visit her when she hasn't let another person see her in years?

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7. The author writes, “Thacia’s visit caused Daniel to look at his sister with new eyes, . . .” How does Daniel view his sister differently after the visit? What does he do as a result?

8. What does Leah say about the Roman soldier who came to Daniel’s shop? How do you think Leah knows anything about the soldier?

9. How do Leah’s many questions unleash all the rebellion in Daniel?

10. Why do people in the crowd fear Jairus? Why might Joel fear Jairus?

11. Read the story of Jairus’ daughter in Mark 5:21–43. Why do you think Jesus told those present not to tell others about this incident?

Chapters 16–18

Questions:

1. What do Joel and Daniel think is the reason Rosh wants names of those who will be at the banquet? What is the real reason Rosh wants to know the names of those at the banquet?
2. What plan do Joel and Thacia devise so that Joel can get the information he needs without being suspected?
3. The author writes, “. . . the man didn’t live who could make [Daniel] shoulder a Roman pack.” Why, then, does he do it?
4. At first Daniel is angry with Thacia for carrying the Roman pack. Why does his anger turn to shame?
5. How does Daniel’s view of Rosh change by the end of Chapter 18? Why?

Chapters 19–21

Questions:

1. What does Daniel expect to lose to gain Joel's freedom?
2. Who dies in the battle to set Joel free? How does Daniel feel about this sacrifice?
3. What is Joel prepared to give up for the cause? Why does Daniel say Joel needs to continue his studies?
4. Why do Daniel's cheeks grow hot when Joel says he has a message from Thacia? Why does he grasp a hammer so hard that his knuckles whiten around the handle?
5. What are two reasons that Daniel feels he could never marry Thacia?
6. Why does Joel think Jesus needs to be warned?
7. What is Daniel's real reason for wanting to take Joel's warning to Jesus?

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8. What does Jesus say is the true enemy? What can conquer this enemy?

Thinking About the Story:

9. Daniel recalls Jesus' words, "They who live by the sword will perish by the sword." What had Daniel thought when he first heard these words? What does he think now?
10. Why do you think Joel's father opens his home to Daniel when he learns the boys have been working for Rosh and using the secret passageway?

Dig Deeper:

11. Daniel tells Jesus he lives for one thing: freedom for his people and vengeance for his father's death. Jesus says they are two different things. Daniel says, "They are the same. I will strike for both at once." Why does Daniel see these two things as being the same? How does Jesus see them as being different?

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12. Jesus tells Daniel,

“An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth. It is so written. We must repay in kind. But Samson has given you all that he had. In what kind can you repay him?”

What is Daniel’s immediate response? What does Jesus suggest? Why does Daniel have a hard time doing what Jesus suggests?

13. Read Leviticus 24:19, 20 to see what it says about “an eye for an eye.” Then read what Jesus said about the same thing in Matthew 5:38–48. Briefly summarize Jesus’ teaching in these verses.
14. Is it difficult for you to obey Jesus’ words? Write about a situation in which you had difficulty loving someone who didn’t love you. What did you do? What happened as a result? Was there something you could have done differently to show love for that person?
15. Samson gave his life for Daniel. Jesus calls it an act of love. Read John 15:13. How did Jesus show love for us with a similar act?

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16. What is Daniel's vow? What does he think it requires of him? At the end of chapter 21, Jesus says "That is not a vow of hate." Why isn't it?

According to Deuteronomy 23:21, 23, a vow is something sacred. Read those verses, then tell how you think Daniel can fulfill his vow without fighting or hatred.

Chapters 22–24

Questions:

1. Why does Daniel feel out of place at the celebration in the vineyards? Why does he walk away while the girls are dancing?
2. How does Thacia feel about Daniel? How do you know?
3. What surprise did Leah have for Daniel? How does Daniel react? Why does Daniel react that way?
4. What does Daniel's outburst of anger do to Leah?
5. Why does Daniel send a message to Thacia?

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11. The author writes,

[Daniel] heard Thacia catch her breath, and turned and looked into her eyes. He knew he was not worthy of the gift he saw there, but he knew that at last he was free to offer her all that he had in return. In that one brief look they made a new vow together.

What “gift” is in Thacia’s eyes? Why is Daniel now free to accept it?

Dig Deeper

12. The real instance of Jesus performing the miracle of feeding 5,000 people is recorded in John 6:1–15. After he fed the multitude, what did the people want Jesus to do? What did Jesus do? Why do you think he did this?
13. With what act does Daniel show that he understands Jesus’ words about loving one’s enemies? Is there something you can do to put Jesus words into action? Explain your answer.

