

Praise For Adira: Journey to Freedom

Simply put, Lynne's vision for *Adira* is otherworldly. I love everything about it: the creativity, the storytelling, the new spin on an old story—and one of my favorites at that. Highly recommend.

—Dr. Kary Oberbrunner
Wall Street Journal and *USA Today* bestselling author,
CEO Igniting Souls

In *Adira: Journey to Freedom*, Lynne Modranski provides a time machine that transports us to the days of Nehemiah. It is a primer for the “biblical imagination.”

—Michael Card
singer, songwriter, theologian,
and author of The Biblical Imagination series

Lynne Modranski's first novel, *Adira*, is a thoroughly engaging read. Beautifully written, the narrative gave me a picture of life in the Biblical days of the prophet Nehemiah. The dialogue is so true to the times I felt I was present. Her character Adira trusts God to guide her life while she struggles with the meaning of true freedom. 'Now, I would wait for Yawheh's next big move', she says at the end of a chapter. So, I too, as the reader, had to wait and reached a satisfying ending.

—Rita Gerlach
author of the Daughters of the Potomac Series, Wait Until Morning,
and Barbour Books Novella Contributor

Very heartwarming story. I loved being able to go behind the scenes in what may have happened in the Bible. Once I really picked it up, I couldn't put it down.

—*Nikki Kovach, Goodreads member*

This historical fiction book is such a good read. It takes you into Bible times and makes you really think about what people may have had to endure. It is filled with suspense and romance. It will take you on a journey with Adira while she learns to grow up the hard way and finds God along the way.

—*Julia Jenkins, Goodreads member*

Enjoyed the whole storyline and following Adira's family on their journey. Loved all the history that was put into the writing. I felt like I was there.

—*Linda Mader, Goodreads member*

Adira
Journey to Freedom

SAMPLE CHAPTERS

Other Books by this Author

Devotions

Devotions Inspired by Life
Devotions for Church Leaders and Small Groups
A Reflection of the Beauty of God
First Steps for New Christians

Bible Studies

Dive In to a Life of Freedom
Be A Barnabas

Advent Readings

Advent Through the Eyes of Mary
In Search of a Silent Night
A Christmas of Heavenly Peace

Children's Curricula

Jesus, Teach Me How to Pray
Heroes, Heroines, Champs & Chumps
The Fruit of the Spirit is . . .
Journey to Greatness: Lessons from the Life of Joseph
Children of the King: Developing Kids with Noble Character

Adira
Journey to Freedom

LYNNE MODRANSKI



Adira: Journey to Freedom

© 2022 by Lynne Modranski

Published by Mansion Hill Press

Steubenville, Ohio

LynneModranski.com

© 2022 Lynne Modranski

All rights reserved.

No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form
without permission from the publisher,
except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

LCCN: 2022910492

ISBN: 978-1-953374-08-0

E-Book: 978-1-953374-09-7

Thank you to my friend and artist

Rita Warrick

for Adira's cover art

Scripture quoted in this book is taken from
THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®
Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

*Dedicated to
all who've journeyed
into places unknown
and are looking
for a way home*

Table of Contents

Part One Adira

[Chapters 1-9](#)

Part Two Journey to Jerusalem

[Chapters 10-19](#)

Part Three Building the Wall

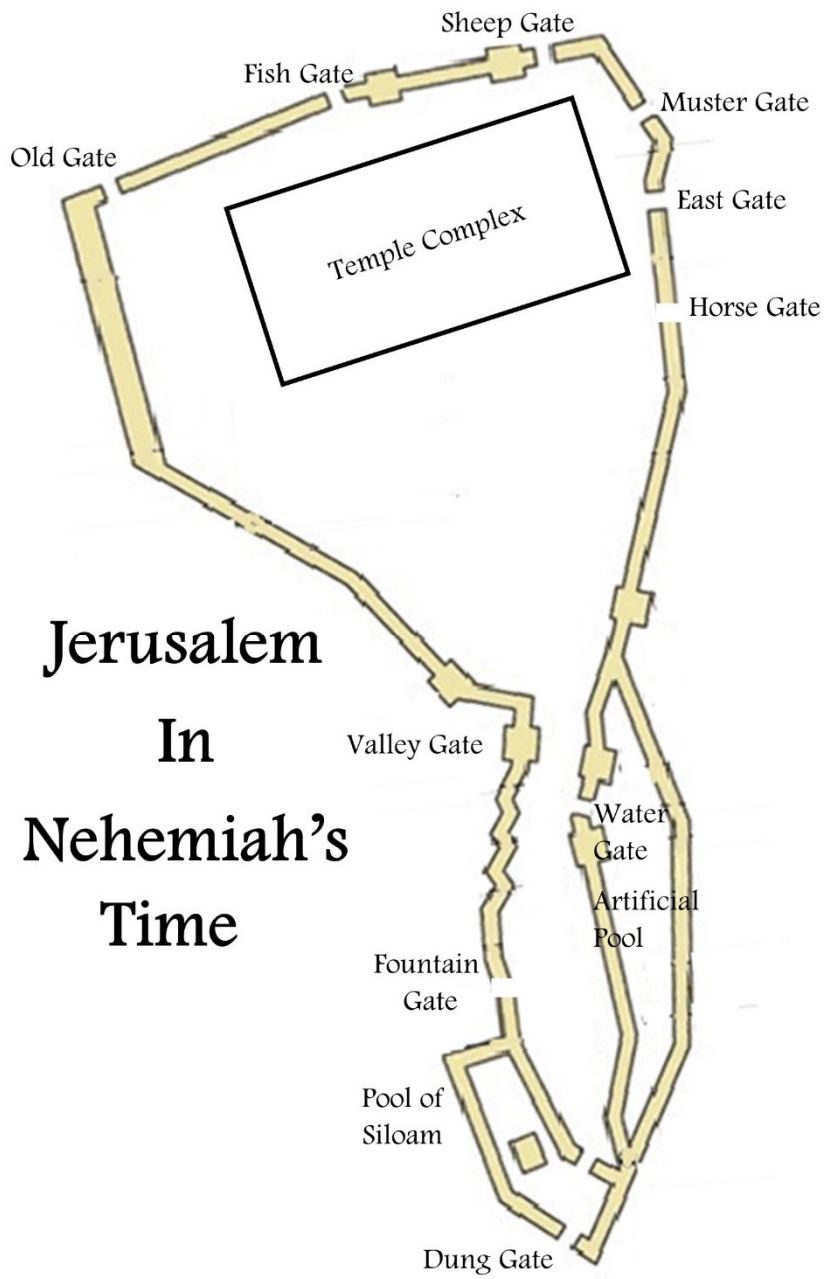
[Chapters 20-40](#)

Part Four Truly Slaves

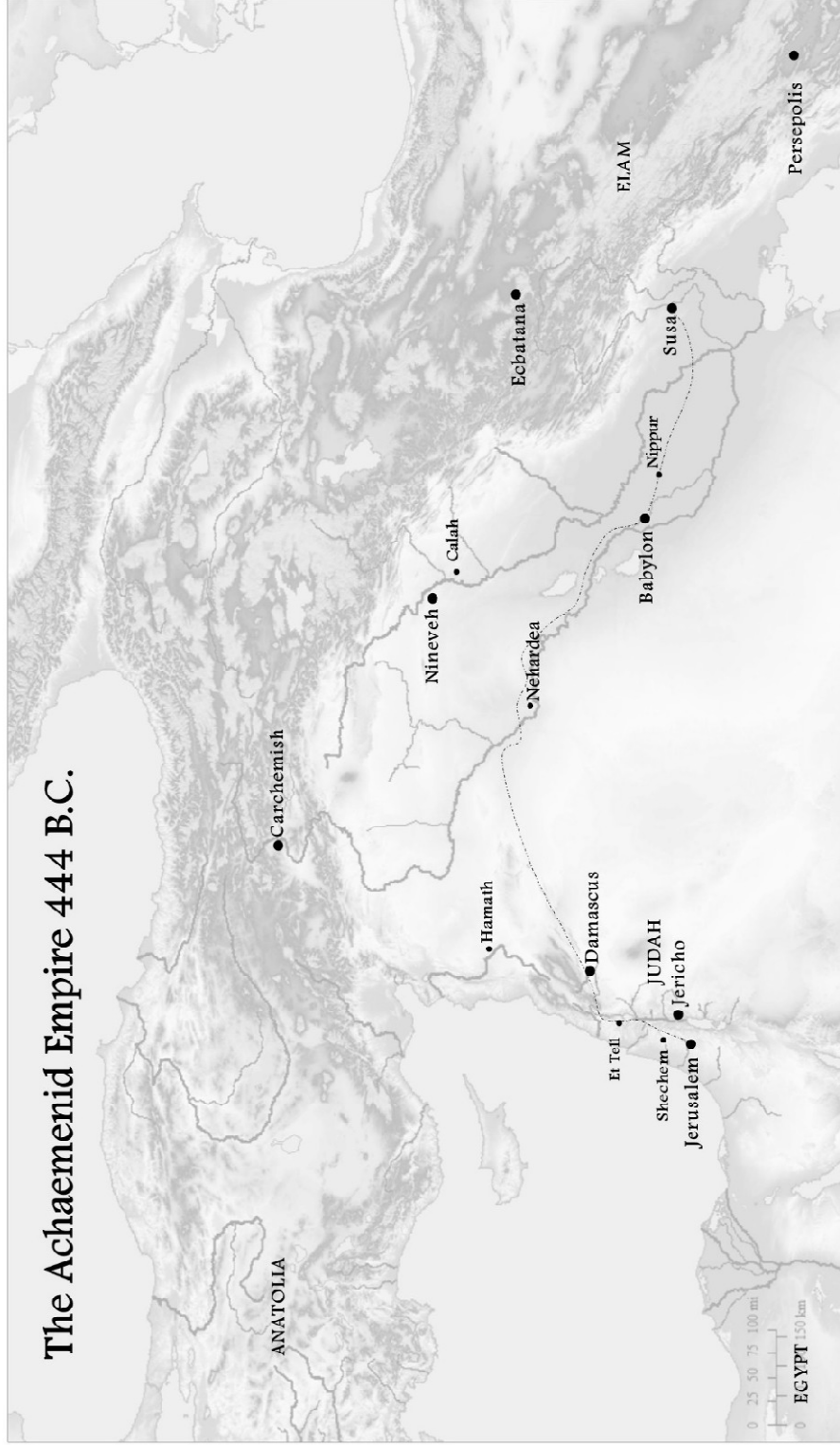
[Chapters 21-91](#)

Part Five Journey to Freedom

[Chapters 92-105](#)



The Achaemenid Empire 444 B.C.



Definitions

This list is a few of the Hebrew words I use
to help put you in Persia with Adira

Ab/Abba	Father/Daddy
Em/Emi	Mother/Mama
Dohd/Dohda	Uncle/Aunt
Sabba/Savta	Grandfather/Grandmother
Mitpachat	Women's Headcovering
Hammam	Bathhouse
G'veret	Mistress
Reebon	Master
Serai	Home or Sleeping quarter
Guest serai/Caravanserai	Like a Hotel

Hebrew Months of the Year

Nisan	March-April
Iyyar	April-May
Sivan	May-June
Tammuz	June-July
Av	July-August
Elul	August-September
Tishrei	September-October
Cheshvan	October-November
Kislev	November-December
Tevet	December-January
Shevat	January-February
Adar	February-March

Adira
Journey to Freedom

Part One

Adira



*I had not been sad in his presence before, so the king asked me,
“Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill?
This can be nothing but sadness of heart.”
I was very much afraid, but I said to the king,
“May the king live forever!*

...

*Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king,
“If it pleases the king
and if your servant has found favor in his sight,
let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried
so that I can rebuild it.”
Nehemiah 2:1-5 (NIV)*

*I didn't know I was a slave
until I found out I couldn't do the things I wanted.
Frederick Douglas*

One



Kislev 6, 445 B.C.

“Adira.” I heard Em’s whisper, but my foggy brain refused to respond.

“Adira, I have news.” The teasing lilt in my mother’s voice made me roll toward her. “News of Ab.”

“Abba?” I sat up. “You’ve heard from Abba!” My father had been gone for more than a year. And while caravans traveled through Susa every day, few brought news from Jerusalem.

In the soft light of the oil lamp, my mother’s face beamed. “He’s home!”

“Home?!”

Em raised her finger to her lips. “You don’t want to wake the twins.”

I lowered my voice again, “But, when?”

“He arrived long after we’d gone to sleep.” Instinctively I turned toward my parents’ mats. “He’s up and gone. You’ll see him soon.”

Where would Abba go before dawn?

Em read my mind. “He went to talk to your uncle. Nehemiah’s day begins as early as mine.” Lifting her mitpachat to cover her head, she bent to kiss the top of mine.

My mother serves the royals each day, trusting me with the three small rooms we call home. The twins don’t wake until sunrise. So, each morning after

I share a barley loaf with my older brother, I roll the sleeping mats and sweep the room I share with my parents.

Today, Ab's early morning visit to see his brother stirred my disdain for Jerusalem. My parents call it home, but they've never lived anywhere except Susa. Well, here and the other royal cities.

King Artaxerxes and his nobles like the change in scenery, and Em oversees the harem's meals. So, while they never travel to Babylon, the queens follow the court to Ecbatana to escape the heat. Several extremely cold winters even took us south to Persepolis.

The gods have blessed my family. Ab and Em both serve the king's household, so we have everything we need. But their homeland often robs me of Abba.

You should hear their stories of my grandparents' trials under the rule of the old Chaldean Kings. Sometimes I wish Abba would keep those tales to himself. Over and over, he shares Israel's history, including Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judah and his great-grandparents being taken to Babylon as slaves more than one hundred fifty years ago. Still, when my parents talk about Jerusalem, you'd think the exile happened in their lifetime. I don't understand the fascination. Yet, despite my dislike for the place, Ab's stories draw me in.

Stories—Abba will have many to tell tonight. I'll save my sewing. If I stay quiet in the corner, they'll allow me to listen late into the night. Twice before he'd gone to Jerusalem and returned. Ab always made his travels sound like a great adventure.

The twins stirring interrupted my thoughts. Time to stop daydreaming. I'll never get my morning chores done if I don't get busy. Plus, I'm sure we'll have company after the evening meal.



Our small home sat on a far corner outside the palace complex near the stables. Just beyond the first row of servants' quarters, a grand courtyard created a beautiful boundary leading to the world of the nobility. Only those with official business passed through the massive archway that opened to the government buildings. Em and my older sister, Natalia, crossed daily as they served the queens and the harem, and Ab reported to the king's staff as one of Persia's chief builders.

I seldom walked this way, but I'd grown impatient. As my brothers and I neared the open area, I saw Abba talking with some men.

Picking up the pace, I motioned Jok and Jon to keep up.

As soon as he turned from his conversation, I called out, "Abba, Abba!"

His face brightened, and when he squatted and opened his arms, I broke into a full run. Abba's strong arms holding me tight erased moons of worry. Though she certainly doesn't need it, I try to help take care of Em when Ab goes to Jerusalem.

My joy was short-lived as my father widened his embrace to include the twins. I wish Abba still pulled me onto his lap and told me stories of the god he called Yahweh. I'd always loved those tales, but during the last four years, he'd spent more time in Jerusalem than Susa, and after I passed my tenth year, Em said I was too old to curl up on Abba's knee.

"What would you like for your welcome home meal, Abba?" I asked as our embrace unfolded.

"Ah yes, my youngest daughter has taken over the household duties since her sister serves Queen Esther. Surprise me, sweet Adira. After the limited food we had the last two days in the wilderness, whatever you prepare will be wonderful. Perhaps you could find some extra fruit and lentils for after the evening meal. My brothers will be visiting. We'll probably talk late into the

night, and the snack will be welcome.”

“Do you have exciting news for my dohds?”

“Nothing to concern yourself with, wee one.”

“Ab, I’m not really a wee one anymore.”

“Precious Adira,” Ab pulled me close one more time, “you will always be my wee one. Now hurry and corral your brothers before they get into mischief.”

I turned to where Ab pointed. The boys were climbing over the half wall that separated this small open area from the main courtyard. Each brother had straddled one of the columns that supported the arched gate. Ab’s proud smile was all I needed to gather the young gymnasts and herd them toward our little living space.

“King Artaxerxes treats us well, but entering the courtyard is a privilege,” I scolded. “Had guards caught you climbing, we’d have been detained. And some of the guards may have enjoyed it a bit too much.”

A snack of apricots and bread kept the boys busy while I prepared the afternoon meal. The family would be gathering soon. Em slipped home for a few hours each day between the queens’ midday and evening meals. So, we’d always eaten late in the afternoon.

Avraham should be waltzing in any moment. My seventeen-year-old brother served in the king’s stables, a coveted job among our people. Most boys his age worked in the fields. Avraham hoped to be noticed by one of the soldiers so he could be trained to drive a battle-ready chariot. Having an uncle who is cupbearer to the king does have advantages.

Two



Kislev 6, 445 B.C. late afternoon

By the time Em returned, our afternoon meal covered the low table. While we waited for Ab, she sent Avraham for an extra jar of water and dabbed on one of her precious perfumes. I forget my strong, independent Em misses her husband terribly when he travels.

Rounds of hugs gave the stew a chance to cool when Ab made his appearance, but finally, everyone found a cushion. As we ate, Ab talked about the weather in Jerusalem and his sandals wearing out in the desert. Avraham caught him up on news from the soldiers, and we discussed Sabba Hacialiah's failing health. I started to ask about his adventures, but Em's wink reminded me those stories would come tonight after his brothers arrived.

Em rushed out to finish the queen's evening meal, and Avraham took Jok and Jon to help clean stalls. My trip to the market would be easier without the rambunctious boys. I might even have time to slip over to the hammam—late afternoons were usually quiet in the bathhouse.



The mid-winter sun set long before Em returned from serving the harem's evening meal. She brought Natalia with her. My fifteen-year-old sister usually stayed in a room off Queen Esther's chamber, but when the generous

queen heard Ab had returned, she'd given Natalia leave to visit with us until early tomorrow morning.

It had been so long since our entire family had gathered for a meal. I felt thankful as the room grew silent so Abba could pronounce the evening blessing.

My father's deep calming voice filled the room and calmed my soul. Even though I couldn't understand my parent's attraction to this singular God who'd sent my great-great-grandparents into exile, Abba's strong and steady timbre brought a tremendous sense of comfort and peace. Avraham did His best to reproduce our father's blessings when Ab traveled, but his recitation of the memorized prayer lacked the warmth of Abba's.

As we cleared the remnants of our meal, Ab's brothers began to arrive—each oil lamp adding to the warm glow in our small space. Natalia and I sat out snacks and filled several wooden goblets with wine before retreating to a corner to mend our brothers' robes and listen in on Ab's adventures.

Dohd Nehemiah arrived last. His duties as cupbearer kept him confined to the king's quarters most of the time. Even here, the king's chief steward would know where to find him. As he lowered himself onto a worn, red cushion, he redirected the conversation, "So, Hanani, give us the details. What's going on in the homeland?"

Ab took a deep breath and shook his head, "It's distressing, brother. No one would know Cyrus let the first of our people return a hundred years ago. Rubble still marks her boundaries, and massive piles of burned wood lie where the twelve gates should stand. Jerusalem is in trouble, and though the king allows a few to return with every caravan, those who traveled with me the last time just added to the burden. The city sits in disgrace."

As Abba continued to describe the city and his trip, my mind wandered. My family's obsession with Jerusalem once again confounded me. I loved my

life. Other Jews in our station wished they had it so good.

As my attention returned to the conversation, Dohd Nehemiah's countenance troubled me. His anguished face made it look like he heard nothing his brothers were saying. After a few moments, silent tears began to fall. Ab had everyone's attention, so no one else seemed to notice until Em interrupted, "Nehemiah, what is it?"

The focus turned to Ab's youngest brother. I doubt anyone had ever seen him so distressed.

The room stayed quiet waiting for Dohd to speak. Finally, my uncle rose from his reclining position and fell to his knees. He reached his hands toward the heavens and began to pray. No one could understand his tear-filled mumbling, but we all bowed our heads with him until he emptied his heart before Yahweh.

Three



Kislev 11, 445 B.C. before sunrise

My mother's hushed voice invaded my slumber. "Hanani, you just got back."

"I know, Chava, but Nehemiah has a plan, a grand plan. We won't leave right away. Nehemiah needs the king's permission, and there's no predicting storms this time of year."

Dohd Nehemiah's duties required him to stay close to the king. Like Natalia, he had a small chamber in the quarters of his charge. Though his schedule seldom let him visit, he and Ab had talked late into the night every evening since his return, even after Em went to bed.

"That won't be an easy conversation."

"Nehemiah's already started praying."

My heart sank. I loved having Abba home. Everything felt right. I pulled the blanket tight as quiet tears soaked my mat. I could only grant my grief a few minutes. Em would leave for the harem soon, and I'd need to get something ready for Avraham and the boys to break their fast.

Avraham rose with me each morning. And though normally the task of the women, my brother filled the water jars while I prepared the morning meal. Today I'd need a little of the cold liquid to freshen my swollen eyes.

Before I could check the water bucket, Ab spotted me. He held a steaming cup in his hand. Em had prepared him something before she left. “My sweet Adira looks as if she’s been crying.” Even though only one candle lit the room, Ab could tell.

“Did you overhear me talking to Em?”

My eyes burned as I nodded. Abba stood and pulled me close. His strong arms temporarily chased the fear away. What would I do without him for another year?

“Come, sit with me.”

I poured a glass of goat’s milk and joined him.

“Adira, you know I have to go, right?”

Words couldn’t get past the catch in my throat.

“Wee one, it’s time for our people to go home, but until the city is secure, it won’t be safe. During this visit, I plan to build a real home for our family. One where my beautiful daughters each have their own room. We’ll finally be free.”

No amount of blinking and steady breathing would hold back the tears now.

“But Abba, I don’t understand why we can’t just stay in Susa. My friends live here. We have a good life. We live near the palace and travel with the king and queens. Many of those free Persians in the market aren’t dressed as well as you and me.”

My father grew quiet as his own tears threatened.

“Adira, no matter how good you think we have it, here in Susa, we are slaves. Yahweh created us to be free. Our great ancestor, Father Avraham freely followed Yahweh. He started not far from here, but God led him to the Promised Land. Yahweh chose Yaacov over his brother Esau and gave the younger twin the name Israel. We are Yahweh’s chosen people, wee one.’

“Yahweh has rescued our people many times. You’ve heard the stories. He raised Joseph from slave to second-in-command to save the patriarchs from famine. And He rescued Moses so he could lead our people through the Red Sea and deliver them from Egypt.’

“My sweet daughter, have I not told you of the grand victories of Joshua and the grace Yahweh showed when our people rebelled during the time of the judges? Don’t you remember the history of King David? He had great success because his heart chased after Yahweh. For hundreds of years, Adonai blessed Judah and Jerusalem. But our ancestors failed Him. Evil kings came to power, and our people chased after them and their false gods instead of our Creator.’

“That’s why we’re here, Adira. More than one hundred fifty years ago, after many warnings, God allowed all of Jerusalem, including my great-grandfather, to be drug into slavery. This is why the sons of Aaron remind us of the law. If we turn our hearts to Yahweh, He will deliver our people once more. Since the time of Cyrus, these Achaemenian kings have helped with our deliverance.”

Abba’s face radiated as he spoke. I nodded, but my lips refused to smile. I knew the history, but Abba talked of traveling far away to a place broken down and burned, all to follow a single God. Hadn’t he noticed the wealth Ahura Mazda gave to these Persians? I wanted to share his dream, but he saw something beyond my imagination.

“Adira.” Ab’s voice broke into my thoughts.

“Adira, what are you thinking?”

Not even the songbirds broke the dark silence. I finally spoke the only words I believed wouldn’t cause him pain, “I just don’t want you to go away again, Abba.”

His loving smile drew me to him even before his strong arms. He held

my chin as he released me, “It’s time for me to get to work. I’m expected at the new construction site on the other side of the palace, but don’t let this worry you, wee one.”

My wrinkled brow and half-smile conveyed my thoughts.

“I know, I know, you aren’t my wee one, anymore.” His hearty laugh lifted my spirits. “But there’s no need to worry. I’ll be here a few more moons.”

Abba opened the door just in time for Avraham to enter with two more pots of water. Jok and Jon would be rising soon, and my busy day would be underway. I knew it would be full of silent tears and confused thoughts.

Four



Kislev 13, 445 B.C.

Life had a predictable routine. We rose early, mother tended to the harem, father built the king's grand structures, and I took care of my six-year-old brothers and looked after our cozy space.

I often overheard Avraham and his friends talk about getting out of this peasant slave life and returning to Judah, but I never understood. Why did they say, 'returning' when they'd never lived there? And why go to a city with no walls—a place that has rubble for houses? Even worse, Abba said wild animals are just one of Jerusalem's many enemies.

I missed Natalia. She and I once shared every secret, but since her move into Queen Esther's quarters, I seldom had time alone with her. She slipped away for a meal with us once or twice each week, but Queen Esther and the harem lived on the other side of the palace complex. Em walked the round trip twice a day, but no one needed her after they finished their meals. Natalia and the other maids were at Queen Esther's beck and call day and night.

Today, she slipped away for an early midday meal. Avraham took the twins to the stables, so I walked her back as far as the courtyard.

"I feel so blessed to live in Queen Esther's quarters."

I frowned. "Not living at home makes you feel blessed?"

“Let’s face it, I stayed home with you and the boys a lot longer than most girls my age. Sometimes I wonder if Em hid me away knowing the queen’s former maid was aging.”

My sister was right, she could have ended up scrubbing palace floors.

“Queen Esther is so kind, and I love to hear her stories. She’s told us all about Xerxes and his battles, but Queen Esther’s own story is the best. Did you know she is a Jew?”

“I think Ab mentioned that.”

“Oh, probably, but his stories always bore me.”

Perhaps our differences kept us close. I loved Ab’s stories.

Natalia continued, “When Queen Esther was my age, King Xerxes started looking for a new queen. His first wife had done something to make him angry—I can’t remember what exactly. Anyway, Queen Esther—she wasn’t queen then—came to live at the palace. Actually, she wasn’t even called Esther then. Her cousin, Mordecai . . .”

“Wait. Esther isn’t the queen’s real name?”

“Nope.”

I waited a moment for Natalia to reveal her name, but she just kept going.

“Hold up. What was her name?”

“Oh yeah,” Natalia chuckled, “Hadassah. Isn’t that pretty?”

“It sounds weird, Queen Hadassah.” I laughed. “So, you mean when she was your age, she chose to leave her family?”

“Her parents had died, so she lived with her cousin. But she didn’t get to talk with him much after she moved into the palace. She came to the palace with dozens of other girls. Each one spent a year preparing to meet the king.”

“A year? You’re kidding.”

“Truly. Then after a full year of beauty treatments, she had exactly one

night to impress the king.”

Abba had never told us this part of Queen Esther’s story. Did he even know?

“Queen Esther laughs about it. She says for her the year of preparation wasn’t for one night; it was for a lifetime because the king married her.”

“What a perfect story.”

“Oh, there’s more, but I have to get back. I’ll tell you the rest the next time.”

“Come on, Natalia. You can’t leave me hanging!”

“No, I asked for a short break while the maids served lunch and the queen took her nap. She’ll be ready for her afternoon walk when she wakes. Two of us go with her each day. But I can’t wait until you hear how Yahweh answered her prayer.”

And with that, Natalia headed back toward the queens’ quarters.

So, Queen Esther worshipped the God of Israel. I assumed after forty years in an Achaemenid palace she’d embraced Ahura Mazda.

I had so many questions for Natalia. I wanted to talk to her about Abba leaving.

Natalia was right, I needed to get home, too. The evening meal wouldn’t prepare itself. As I turned my back on the courtyard, I wished I could be more like my sister. She seemed so content. She could probably find a blessing in Ab’s return to Jerusalem.

Five



Kislev 13, 445 B.C. late evening

Dohd Lemuel and Dohd Reuben arrived just after sunset. Sabba Hacialiah hobbled in with them. My grandfather had grown so thin in the last few moons. Ab had just helped him settle his frail bones when an exhausted-looking Dohd Nehemiah came in.

“Thank you for fasting with me, brothers.” Dohd took a cushion next to his father.

“You said it was important, Nehemiah,” Dohd Lemuel spoke for the brothers.

How had I missed Abba not eating? I guess refereeing Jok and Jon distracted me more than I realized.

“I believe we can build that wall.”

What was Dohd talking about?

“If I were twenty years younger. . .”

Abba interrupted Sabba, “Nehemiah, I think you underestimate the damage. Not one inch of the wall remains. Besides that, Sanballat and Tobiah will do everything they can to stop it. Jerusalem’s neighbors have created obstacles for every rebuild in the Holy City since Cyrus sent the first exiles back. It took forty years and a second edict from King Darius to get work on the

temple moving, and it's still not finished.”

“We can do this, Hanani. I have fasted and prayed since your return.”

I could feel anger rise from deep within. Dohd had orchestrated this need to go back to Jerusalem. *How could he take Abba from me so soon? How could Abba agree to go?* Sitting in the corner, I concentrated on my mending to keep from screaming. Obviously, I had missed some important conversations after that first evening.

As the four men discussed the pros and cons of the trip, I moved my needle quietly until my little lamp went out. Then the winter darkness allowed me to sit unnoticed. The longer they talked the more grief I saw on Dohd's face. Or perhaps the flicker of the lamps tricked my weary eyes. No, Dohd Nehemiah's grief had led to tears.

“Hanani, the burden on my heart for Jerusalem is great, more than I can bear. I believe Yahweh wants me . . .” Uncle took a deep breath. “No, He demands I go.”

Then, as he'd done on the night of Abba's return, Dohd moved from his seated position to his knees, this time with his face to the ground.

“Yahweh, God of heaven.” Uncle's voice broke as he prayed. “You who are great and awesome, who has promised to love those who show You love and keep Your commands, please hear the words of your servant and see my distress.”

Dohd's tears had turned to sobs, and everything else grew silent. Even sounds from outside the window ceased. One by one, each adult joined Dohd in his humble position. I watched the full moon rise high in our small window as we waited for him to rein in his weeping enough to continue.

“Yahweh, Mighty God, I confess the sins of Your people, the sins of my people, the sins of the sons of Hacialiah. Our nation acted wickedly before You.

We neglected Your commands and ignored the words of Moses.”

The essence of Dohd’s prayer filled the room. Abba joined the weeping, and Em cried out, “Forgive us.” Tears fell from my uncles and grandfather, and one by one they added their voices to the prayer.

From my corner, I watched in fear. I’d never seen such a display of emotion from my family. I considered waking Avraham—perhaps he could protect me or help me understand.

Dohd Nehemiah finally gained some composure, and the room grew quiet again. Though no one moved from their semi-prostrate position, I thought the spectacle must finally be over until Dohd took up his prayer again.

“Yahweh, we plead with you to remember the promise you made to Moses. You told him that when your people sin, You would scatter us among the nations, but when we returned to You and obeyed your commands, You would bring us out of exile and return Your people to the land you gave to our fathers, to Avraham, Itzhak, and Yaacov, the land you chose for the dwelling of Your Name.”

Sobbing raised and subsided once more until only sniffles broke the silence. I wished I had my blanket as the flames on the lamps began to dance in the cool Kislev breeze. Still, my family remained quiet before their God.

Dohd’s prayer weighed heavy on everyone in the room. I almost slipped out to the safety of my sleeping mat, but even if I could’ve found a path through my uncles, the Presence in the room paralyzed me with a weight I couldn’t comprehend.

Just when I felt like I could breathe again, Uncle continued, “Yahweh, we are your servants.”

Ab, Em, and the others raised their voices in affirmation. Then Dohd Nehemiah finished, “Yes, Yahweh, we are your servants, the people you

redeemed by your great strength and mighty hand. Adonai, hear the prayer of your servant. Attend to the cries of your servants who delight in bringing reverence to your Holy Name. Grant your servant success and favor when he stands before the king.”

Dohd Nehemiah remained in his kneeling position. Dohd Rueben rose first and helped Sabba up, then each family member exited quietly. I retreated to my mat in my parent’s room leaving Dohd and Ab to their prayers.

Dohd’s occasional mumblings continued through much of the night. And while I’d like to blame them for keeping me awake, processing the evening’s events was the real culprit. If only Natalia still shared my sleeping space. She would help me understand my feelings or at least listen while I tried to sort it out. The heaviness I’d felt as Dohd prayed had been uncomfortable, but ever since it lifted, I longed for it. There had been something soothing in that Presence that far outweighed the fear it brought.

My family revered Yahweh, but I felt torn. Thanks to my Elamite friends, I’d been enlightened years ago to the folly of limiting my worship to one God. I might be young, but I’m old enough to see the power of Ahura Mazda and his array of lesser deities, each possessing one or more of a variety of powers. How could I limit myself to a single God who had deserted the nation of Israel for 175 years?

Our people had more integrity than any others I’d encountered. So, if Yahweh was truly so powerful, and Jerusalem His city, why did He let the Babylonians drag the grandparents of these good people into slavery? Why didn’t He protect His precious Jerusalem? Putting all my eggs in Yahweh’s basket made no sense.

A barrage of emotions stirred within. Dohd said Yahweh compelled him. How can that be? I’d never heard anyone talk that way about the god of Elam,

not Ahura Mazda or any of his underlings. And, if this was true, if Yahweh pressed Uncle to this decision . . .

I will never understand this God my father embraces.

If Yahweh forced Dohd, will He force me to do something?

Abba said Yahweh was different, but if He makes His people do things against their will . . .? Well, I certainly don't see any good difference.

Confusion turned to fear and then anger, each emotion on repeat as they took turns feeding the silent sobs that rose from deep within until I finally fell into a restless, fit-filled sleep.

Read more at LynneModranski.com/adira