



A  
VOICE  
IN THE  
WIND

MARK OF THE LION • BOOK I

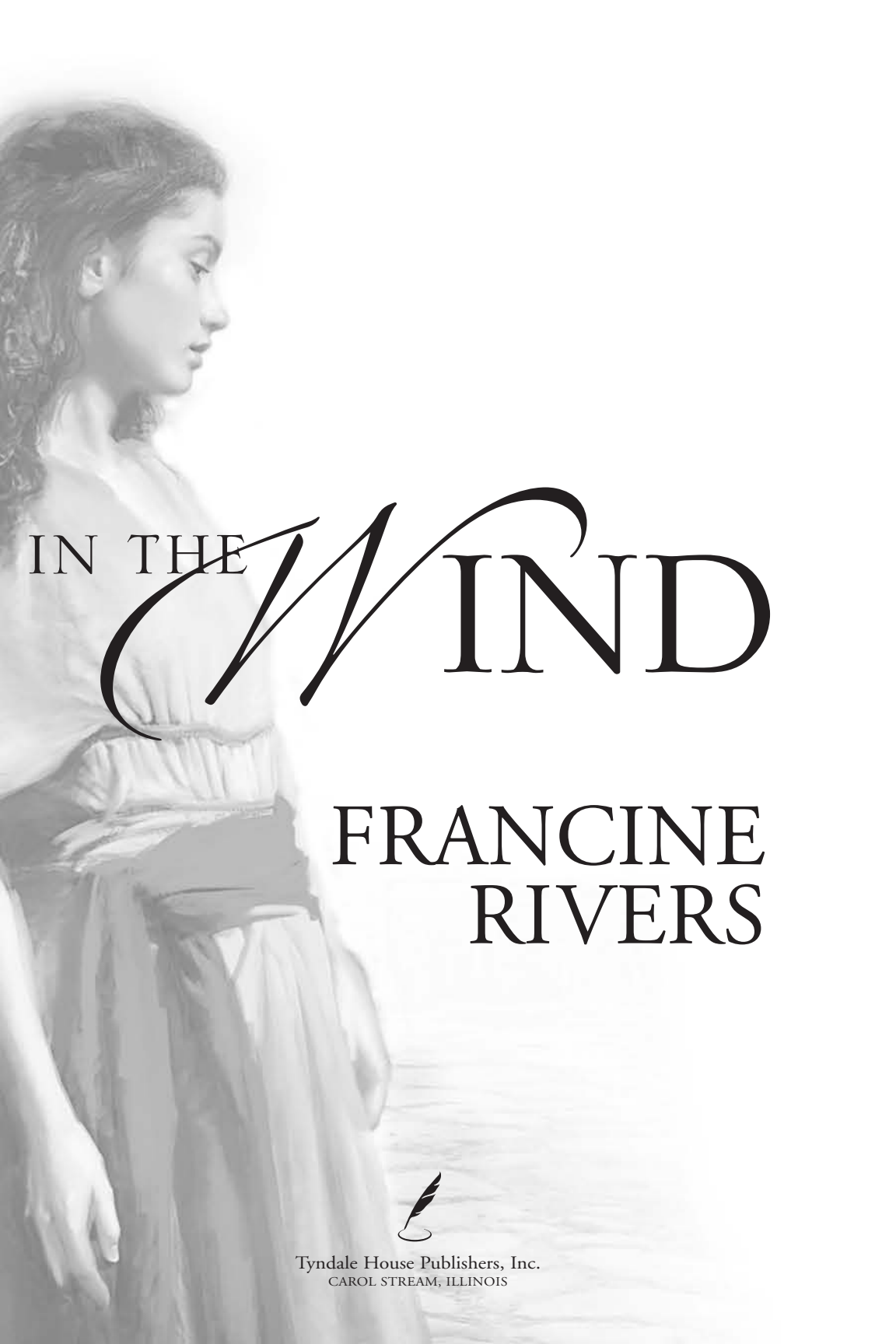
FRANCINE  
RIVERS

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

MARK OF THE LION ✦ BOOK I



A VOICE



IN THE *W*IND

FRANCINE  
RIVERS



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.  
CAROL STREAM, ILLINOIS

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# C O N T E N T S



Foreword by Mark D. Taylor ix

Preface xi

Acknowledgments xiii

PART I: JERUSALEM 1

PART II: GERMANIA 23

PART III: ROME 41

PART IV: EPHESUS 369

Epilogue 497

*An Echo in the Darkness*, chapter 1 499

Glossary of Terms 509

Discussion Guide 521



## F O R E W O R D

In 1992, Tyndale House made a conscious decision to begin publishing excellent fiction that would help us fulfill our corporate purpose—to “minister to the spiritual needs of people, primarily through literature consistent with biblical principles.” Before that time, Tyndale House had been known for many years as a publisher of Bibles and of nonfiction books by well-known authors like Tim LaHaye and James Dobson. We had dabbled in fiction before “Christian fiction” became popular, but it was not a major part of our publishing plan.

We began to recognize, however, that we could carry out our purpose very effectively through fiction, since fiction speaks to the heart rather than to the head.

Fiction is entertaining. Well-written fiction is gripping. As readers, we’ll stay up until 2:00 a.m. to finish a good novel. But Tyndale has a greater goal than simply entertaining our readers. We want to help our readers grow!

We recognize that authors have something of a bully pulpit for communicating their worldview and values to their readers. But with that opportunity comes a danger. Just what worldview and values is an author communicating? At best, most contemporary novelists present a squishy worldview. At worst, they sow negative values and unhealthy attitudes in the hearts of their readers. We wanted to set a whole new standard for fiction.

So we began looking for novelists who had a heart message that would help our readers grow. And we met Francine Rivers.

Francine had been extremely successful as a writer of romance novels for the general market early in her career. But when she became a Christian, she wanted to use her talents to communicate faith values to her readers. One of her early projects was the Mark of the Lion trilogy.

When I read the manuscript for the first book in the series, *A Voice in the Wind*, I was blown away by the power of the story.

## A VOICE IN THE WIND

I was transported back to the first century—to Jerusalem, Germania, Rome, and Ephesus. I lived with Hadassah as she struggled to live out her faith in the midst of a pagan Roman household. I felt the terror of the gladiator as he faced his foes in the arena. Above all, through their experiences I learned lessons in courage.

We are proud to present this new edition of the Mark of the Lion. I trust it will speak to your heart, as it has to mine and to hundreds of thousands of other readers.

MARK D. TAYLOR  
President, Tyndale House Publishers

## P R E F A C E

When I became a born-again Christian in 1986, I wanted to share my faith with others. However, I didn't want to offend anyone and risk "losing" old friends and family members who didn't share my belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior. I found myself hesitating and keeping silent. Ashamed of my cowardice and frustrated by it, I went on a quest, seeking the faith of a martyr. *A Voice in the Wind* was the result.

While writing Hadassah's story, I learned that courage is not something we can manufacture by our own efforts. But when we surrender wholeheartedly to God, he gives us the courage to face whatever comes. He gives us the words to speak when we are called to stand and voice our faith.

I still consider myself a struggling Christian, fraught with faults and failures, but Jesus has given me the tool of writing to use in seeking answers from him. Each of my characters plays out a different point of view as I search for God's perspective, and every day I find something in Scripture that speaks to me. God is patient with me, and through the study of his Word, I am learning what he wants to teach me. When I hear from a reader who is touched by one of my stories, it is God alone who is to be praised. All good things come from the Father above, and he can use anything to reach and teach his children—even a work of fiction.

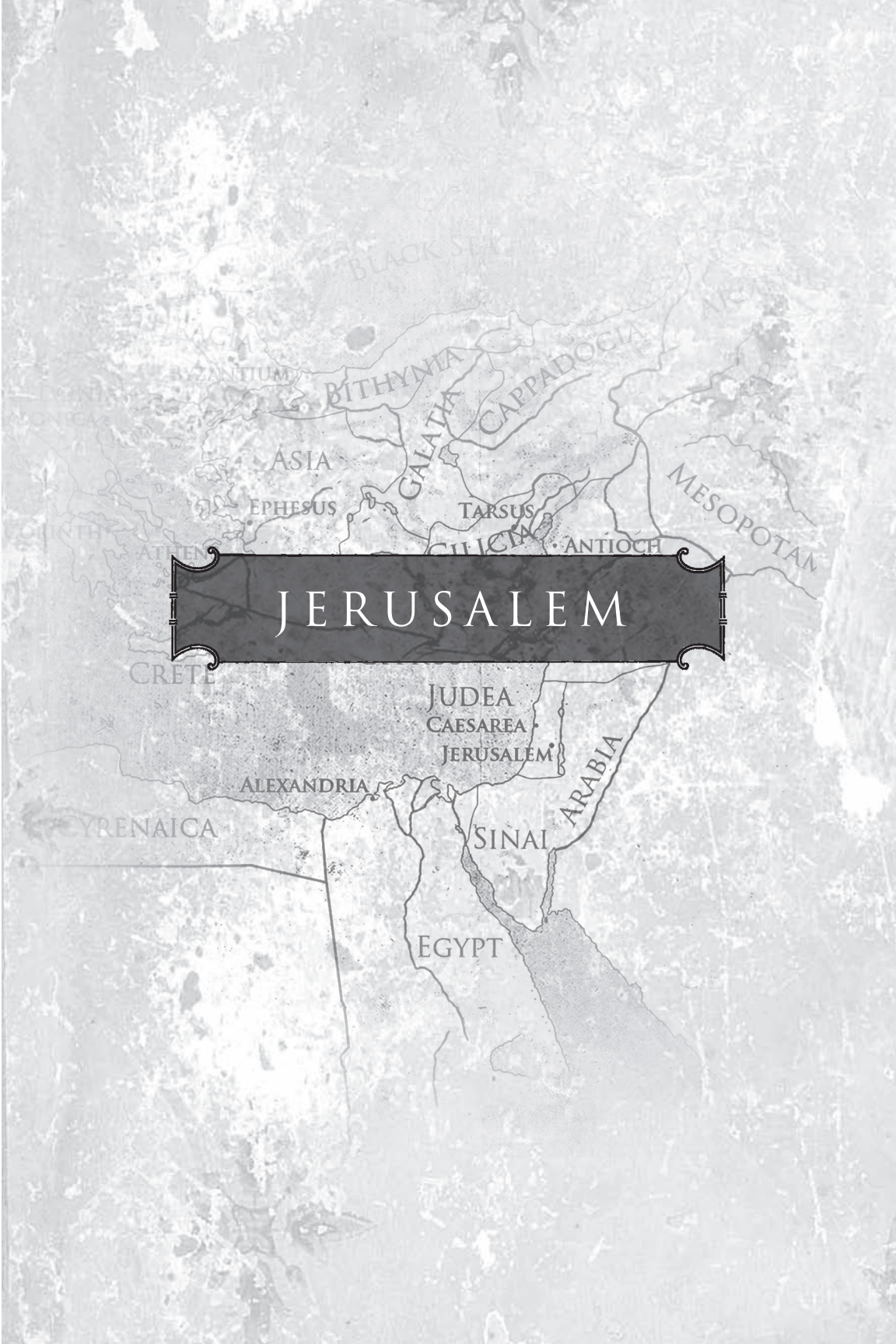
My main desire when I started writing Christian fiction was to find answers to personal questions, and to share those answers in story form with others. Now, I want so much more. I yearn for the Lord to use my stories in making people thirst for his Word, the Bible. I hope that reading Hadassah's story will make you hunger for the real Word, Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life. I pray that you will finish my book and pick up the Bible with a new excitement and anticipation of a real encounter with the Lord himself. May you search Scripture for the sheer joy of being in God's presence.

Beloved, surrender wholeheartedly to Jesus Christ, who loves

## A VOICE IN THE WIND


you. As you drink from the deep well of Scripture, the Lord will refresh and cleanse you, mold you and re-create you through his Living Word. For the Bible is the very breath of God, giving life eternal to those who seek him.

Francine Rivers



JERUSALEM

*The Jerusalem edge design includes a menorah, representing universal enlightenment, and a running rosette design on both sides, representing beauty and fragility. This particular menorah was found incised in one of the walls of the so-called Palatial Mansion in Jerusalem, which has been tentatively identified as the palace of Annas the high priest. This building was destroyed in AD 70.*



# 1

The city was silently bloating in the hot sun, rotting like the thousands of bodies that lay where they had fallen in street battles. An oppressive, hot wind blew from the southeast, carrying with it the putrefying stench of decay. And outside the city walls, Death itself waited in the persons of Titus, son of Vespasian, and sixty thousand legionnaires who were anxious to gut the city of God.

Even before the Romans crossed the Valley of Thorns and camped on the Mount of Olives, warring factions within Jerusalem's city walls had prepared the way for her destruction.

Jewish robbers, who now fled like rats before the Roman legions, had recently fallen upon Jerusalem and murdered her prominent citizens, taking over the holy temple. Casting lots for the priesthood, they turned a house of prayer into a marketplace of tyranny.

Fast behind the robbers came rebels and zealots. Directed by rival leaders—John, Simon, and Eleazar—the warring factions raged within the three walls. Swollen with power and pride, they sliced Jerusalem into bloody pieces.

Breaking the Sabbath and the laws of God, Eleazar stormed Antonia Tower and murdered the Roman soldiers within it. Zealots rampaged, murdering thousands more who attempted to bring order back to a maddened city. Unlawful tribunals were set up and the laws of man and God mocked as hundreds of innocent men and women were murdered. Houses full of corn were burned in the chaos. Famine soon followed.

In their despair, righteous Jews prayed fervently for Rome to come against the great city. For these Jews believed that then, and only then, would the factions within Jerusalem unite in one cause: *freedom* against Rome.

Rome did come and, their hated ensigns held high, their war cry rang across all of Judea. They took Gadara, Jotapata, Beersheba, Jericho, Caesarea. The mighty legions marched in the very footsteps of devout pilgrims who came from every corner of the Jewish nation to worship and celebrate the high holy days of



the Feast of the Unleavened Bread—the Passover. Innocent tens of thousands poured into the city and found themselves in the midst of civil war. Zealots closed the gates, trapping them inside. Rome came on until the sound of destruction echoed across the Valley of Kidron against the walls of Jerusalem itself. Titus laid siege to the ancient Holy City, determined to end Jewish rebellion once and forever.

Josephus, the Jewish general of fallen Jotapata who had been taken captive by the Romans, wept and cried out from atop the first wall defeated by the legionnaires. With Titus' permission, he pleaded with his people to repent, warning them that God was against them, that the prophecies of destruction were about to be fulfilled. Those few who listened to him and managed to evade the zealots in their escape reached the greedy Syrians—who dissected them for the gold pieces they had supposedly swallowed before deserting the city. Those who didn't heed Josephus suffered the full fury of the Roman war machine. Having cut down every tree within miles, Titus built siege engines that hurled countless javelins, stones, and even captives into the city.

From the Upper Market Place to the lower Acra and the Valley of Cheesemongers between, the city writhed in revolt.

Inside the great temple of God, the rebel leader John melted down the sacred golden vessels for himself. The righteous wept for Jerusalem, the bride of kings, the mother of prophets, the home of the shepherd king David. Torn asunder by her own people, she lay gutted and helpless, awaiting her death blow from hated Gentile foreigners.

Anarchy destroyed Zion, and Rome stood ready to destroy anarchy . . . anytime . . . anywhere.

Hadassah held her mother, tears blurring her eyes as she stroked the black hair back from her mother's gaunt, pale face. Her mother had been beautiful once. Hadassah remembered watching her take her hair down until it lay, glistening in thick waves, against her back. Her crowning glory, Papa called it. Now, it was dull and coarse, and her once-ruddy cheeks were white and sunken. Her stomach was swollen with malnutrition, the bones of her legs and arms clearly outlined beneath a gray overdress.

Lifting her mother's hand, Hadassah kissed it tenderly. It was like a bony claw, limp and cool. "Mama?" No response. Hadassah looked across the room at her younger sister, Leah, lying on a dirty

pallet in the corner. Thankfully, she was asleep, the agony of slow starvation briefly forgotten.

Hadassah stroked her mother's hair again. Silence lay upon her like a hot shroud; the pain in her empty belly was almost beyond endurance. Only yesterday she had wept bitterly when her mother had uttered thanks to God for the meal Mark had been able to scavenge for them: shield leather from a dead Roman soldier.

How long before they all died?

Grieving in the silence, she could still hear her father speaking to her in that firm but gentle voice. "It is not possible for men to avoid fate, even when they see it beforehand."

Hananiah had spoken these words to her scant weeks ago—though now it seemed like an eternity. He had prayed all that morning, and she had been so afraid. She had known what he was going to do, what he had always done before. He would go out before the unbelievers and preach about the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

"Why must you go out again and speak to those people? You were almost killed the last time."

"Those people, Hadassah? They're your kinsmen. I'm a Benjaminite." She could still feel his gentle touch on her cheek. "We must seize every opportunity we can to speak the truth and proclaim peace. Especially now. There's so little time for so many."

She had clung to him then. "Please, don't go. Father, you know what'll happen. What'll we do without you? You can't bring peace. There is no peace in this place!"

"It is not the world's peace I speak of, Hadassah, but God's. You know that." He had held her close. "Hush, child. Do not weep so."

She wouldn't release him. She knew they wouldn't listen—they didn't want to hear what he had to tell them. Simon's men would slash him to pieces before the crowd as an example of what became of those who spoke for peace. It had happened to others.

"I must go." His hands had been firm, his eyes gentle, as he had tipped her chin. "Whatever happens to me, the Lord is always with you." He'd kissed her, hugged her, then put her away from him so he could embrace and kiss his other two children. "Mark, you will remain here with your mother and sisters."

Grabbing and shaking her mother, Hadassah had pleaded, "You can't let him go! Not this time!"

"Be silent, Hadassah. Who are you serving by arguing so against your father?"



Her mother's reprimand, though spoken gently, had struck hard. She had said many times before that when one did not serve the Lord, they unwittingly served the evil one instead. Fighting tears, Hadassah had obeyed and said no more.

Rebekkah had laid her hand against her husband's gray-bearded face. She had known Hadassah was right; he might not return, probably wouldn't. Yet, perhaps, if it was God's will, one soul might be saved through his sacrifice. One might be enough. Her eyes had been full of tears and she could not—dared not—speak. For if she had, she was afraid she would join Hadassah in pleading that he stay safe in this small house. And Hananiah knew better than she what the Lord willed for him. He had placed his hand over hers and she had tried not to weep.

"Remember the Lord, Rebekkah," he had said solemnly. "We are together in him."

He had not returned.

Hadassah leaned down over her mother protectively, afraid she would lose her, too. "Mother?" Still no response. Her breathing was shallow, her color ashen. What was taking Mark so long? He had been gone since dawn. Surely the Lord would not take him as well. . . .

In the silence of the small room, Hadassah's fear grew. She stroked her mother's hair absently. *Please, God. Please!* Words wouldn't come, at least not any that made sense. Just a groaning from within her soul. Please what? Kill them now with starvation before the Romans came with swords or they suffered the agony of a cross? *Oh, God, God!* Her plea came, inarticulate and desperate, helpless and full of fear. *Help us!*

Why had they ever come to this city? She hated Jerusalem.

Hadassah fought against the despair inside her. It had become so heavy, it felt like a physical weight pulling her into a dark pit. She tried to think of better times, of happier moments, but those thoughts wouldn't come.

She thought of the months long ago when they'd made the journey from Galilee, never expecting to be trapped in the city. The night before they had entered Jerusalem, her father set up camp on a hillside within sight of Mount Moriah, where Abraham had almost sacrificed Isaac. He told them stories of when he was a boy living just outside the great city, speaking far into the night of the laws of Moses, under which he had grown up. He spoke of the prophets. He spoke of Yeshua, the Christ.

Hadassah had slept and dreamt of the Lord feeding the five thousand on a hillside.

She remembered that her father had awakened the family at dawn. And she remembered how, as the sun rose, light had reflected off the marble and gold of the temple, turning the structure into a blazing beacon of fiery splendor that could be seen from miles away. Hadassah could still feel the awe she had felt at the glory of it. "Oh, Father, it is so beautiful."

"Yes," he had said solemnly. "But so often, things of great beauty are full of great corruption."

Despite the persecution and danger that had awaited them in Jerusalem, her father had been full of joy and expectation as they entered the gates. Perhaps this time more of his kinsmen would listen; more would give their hearts to the risen Lord.

Few believers of the Way remained in Jerusalem. Many had been imprisoned, some stoned, even more driven away to other places. Lazarus, his sisters, and Mary Magdalene had been driven out; the apostle John, a dear family friend, had left Jerusalem two years before, taking the Lord's mother with him. Yet, Hadassah's father had remained. Once a year, he had returned to Jerusalem with his family to gather with other believers in an upper room. There they shared bread and wine, just as their Lord Jesus had done the evening before his crucifixion. This year, Shimeon Bar-Adonijah had presented the elements of the Passover meal:

"The lamb, the unleavened bread, and the bitter herbs of the Passover have as much meaning for us as for our Jewish brothers and sisters. The Lord fulfills each element. He *is* the perfect Lamb of God who, though without sin himself, has taken the bitterness of our sins upon him. Just as the captive Jews in Egypt were told to put the blood of a lamb on their door so that God's wrath and judgment would pass over them, so Jesus has shed his blood for us so that we will stand blameless before God in the coming Judgment Day. We are the sons and daughters of Abraham, for it is by our faith in the Lord that we are saved through his grace. . . ."

For the following three days they had fasted and prayed and repeated Jesus' teachings. On the third day, they sang and rejoiced, breaking bread together once more in celebration of Jesus' resurrection. And every year, during the last hour of the gathering, her father would tell his own story. This year had been no different. Most had heard his story many times before, but there were



always those who were new to the faith. It was to these people that her father spoke.

He stood, a simple man with gray hair and beard, and dark eyes full of light and serenity. There was nothing remarkable about him. Even as he spoke, he was ordinary. It was the touch of God's hand that made him different from others.

"My father was a good man, a Benjaminite who loved God and taught me the law of Moses," he began quietly, looking into the eyes of those who sat about him. "He was a merchant near Jerusalem and married my mother, the daughter of a poor husbandman. We were not rich and we were not poor. For all we had, my father gave glory and thanks to God.

"When the Passover came, we closed our small shop and entered the city. Mother stayed with friends and prepared for the Passover. My father and I spent our time at the temple. To hear God's Word was to eat meat, and I dreamed of being a scribe. But it would not come to pass. When I was fourteen, my father died and, with no brothers and sisters, it was necessary for me to take over his business. Times were very hard, and I was young and inexperienced, but God was good. He provided."

He closed his eyes. "Then a fever took hold of me. I struggled against death. I could hear my mother weeping and crying out to God. *Lord, I prayed, don't let me die. My mother needs me. Without me, she is alone, with no one to provide for her. Please do not take me now!* But death came. It surrounded me like a cold darkness and took hold of me." The hush in the room was almost tangible as his listeners awaited the ending.

No matter how many times Hadassah had heard the story, she never tired of it nor lost the power of it. As her father spoke, she could feel the dark and lonely force that had claimed him. Chilled, she wrapped her arms around her legs and hugged them against her chest as he went on.

"My mother said friends were carrying me along the road to my tomb when Jesus passed by. The Lord heard her weeping and took pity. My mother didn't know who he was when he stopped the funeral procession, but there were many with him, followers, as well as the sick and crippled. Then she recognized him, for he touched me and I arose."

Hadassah wanted to leap up and cry out in joy. Some of those around her wept, their faces transfixed with wonder and awe. Others wanted to touch her father, to lay hands on a man who

had been brought back from death by Christ Jesus. And they had so many questions. How did you feel when you arose? Did you speak with him? What did he say to you? What did he look like?

In the upper room, with the gathering of believers, Hadassah had felt safe. She had felt strength. In that place, she could feel the presence of God and his love. *“He touched me and I arose.”* God’s power could overcome anything.

Then they would leave the upper room and, as her father walked the family back to the small house where they stayed, Hadassah’s ever-present fear would rise again. She always prayed her father wouldn’t stop and speak. When he told his story to believers, they wept and rejoiced. To unbelievers, he was an object of ridicule. The euphoria and security she felt with those who shared her faith dissolved when she watched her father stand before a crowd and suffer their abuse.

“Listen to me, O men of Judah!” he would call out, drawing people to him. “Listen to the good news I have to tell you.”

They listened at first. He was an old man and they were curious. Prophets were always a diversion. He was not eloquent like the religious leaders; he spoke simply from his heart. And always people laughed and mocked him. Some threw rotten vegetables and fruit; some called him mad. Others became enraged at his story of resurrection, shouting that he was a liar and blasphemer.

Two years ago he had been so badly beaten that two friends had to help carry him back to the small rented house where they always stayed. Elkanah and Benaiah had tried to reason with him.

“Hananiah, you must not come back here,” Elkanah had said. “The priests know who you are and want you silenced. They are not so foolish as to have a trial, but there are many evil men who will do another’s will for a shekel. Shake the dust of Jerusalem from your shoes and go somewhere that the message will be heard.”

“And where else can that be but here where our Lord died and arose?”

“Many of those who witnessed his resurrection have fled imprisonment and death at the hands of the Pharisees,” Benaiah had said. “Even Lazarus has left Judea.”

“Where did he go?”

“I was told he took his sisters and Mary of Magdala to Gaul.”

“I cannot leave Judea. Whatever happens, this is where the Lord wants me.”



Benaiah had grown silent for a long moment and then he nodded slowly. "Then it shall be as the Lord wills it."

Elkanah had agreed and laid his hand on her father's. "Shelemoth and Cyrus are remaining here. They will give you aid when you are in Jerusalem. I am taking my family away from this city. Benaiah is coming with me. May God's face shine upon you, Hananiah. You and Rebekkah will be in our prayers. And your children, too."

Hadassah had wept, her hopes of leaving this wretched city dashed. Her faith was weak. Her father always forgave his tormenters and attackers, while she prayed they would know all the fires of hell for what they had done to him. She often prayed that God would change his will and send her father to a place other than Jerusalem. Someplace small and peaceful where people would listen.

"Hadassah, we know that God uses all things for good to those who love him, to those who are called according to his purpose," her mother said often, trying to comfort her.

"What good is there in a beating? What good in being spit upon? Why must he suffer so?"

In the peaceful hills of Galilee, with the blue sea stretched out before her and lilies of the field at her back, Hadassah could believe in God's love. At home, in those hills, her faith was strong. It warmed her and made her heart sing.

In Jerusalem, though, she struggled. She clung to her faith, but still found it slipping away from her. Doubt was her companion, fear was overwhelming.

"Father, why can we not believe and remain silent?"

"We are called upon to be the light of the world."

"They hate us more with each passing year."

"Hatred is the enemy, Hadassah. Not the people."

"It is people who beat you, Father. Did not the Lord himself tell us not to cast pearls before the swine?"

"Hadassah, if I am to die for him, I will die joyfully. What I do is for his good purpose. The truth does not go out and come back empty. You must have faith, Hadassah. Remember the promise. We are part of the body of Christ, and in Christ we have eternal life. Nothing can separate us. No power on earth. Not even death."

She had pressed her face against his chest, the rough woven tunic he wore rubbing against her skin. "Why can I believe at home, Father, but not here?"

“Because the enemy knows where you are most vulnerable.” He had put his hand over hers. “Do you remember the story of Jehoshaphat? The sons of Moab and Ammon and Mount Seir came against him with a mighty army. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel and God said through him, ‘Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s.’ While they sang and praised the Lord, the Lord himself set ambushes against their enemies. And in the morning, when the Israelites came to the lookout of the wilderness, they saw the bodies of the dead. No one escaped. The Israelites had not even raised a hand in battle, and the battle was won.”

Kissing her head, he had said, “Stand firm in the Lord, Hadassah. Stand firm and let him fight your battles. Do not try to fight alone.”

Hadassah sighed, trying to ignore the burning in her stomach. How she missed her father’s counsel in the silent loneliness of this house. If she believed everything he had taught her, she would rejoice that he was now with the Lord. Instead she ached with grief, which swelled and spilled over her in waves, spreading with it a strange, confused anger.

Why did her father have to be such a fool for Christ? The people didn’t want to hear; they didn’t believe. His testimony offended them. His words drove them mad with hatred. Why couldn’t he, just once, have remained silent and stayed within the safe confines of this small house? He’d still be alive, here in this room, comforting them and giving them hope instead of leaving them to fend for themselves. Why couldn’t he have been sensible this one time and waited out the storm?

The door opened slowly and Hadassah’s heart leapt in fright, snapping her back to the grim present. Robbers had broken into the houses down the street, murdering the occupants for a loaf of hoarded bread. But it was Mark who entered. She let out her breath, relieved to see him. “I was so afraid for you,” she whispered with feeling. “You’ve been gone for hours.”

He pushed the door closed and sank down, exhausted, against the wall near their sister. “What did you find?” She waited for him to take whatever he had found from his shirt. Whatever food was found had to be secreted or someone would attack him for it.

Mark looked at her hopelessly. “Nothing. Nothing at all. Not a worn shoe, not even shield leather from a dead soldier. Nothing.” He started to cry, his shoulders shaking.

“Shhh, you’ll awaken Leah and Mama.” Hadassah gently laid



her mother back against the blanket and went to him. She put her arms around him and leaned her head against his chest. "You tried, Mark. I know you tried."

"Maybe it's God's will that we die."

"I'm not sure I want to know God's will anymore," she said without thinking. Quick tears came. "Mama said the Lord will provide," she said, but the words sounded empty. Her faith was so weak. She was not like Father and Mother. Even Leah, young as she was, loved the Lord wholeheartedly. And Mark sounded so accepting of death. Why was she always the one who questioned and doubted?

*Have faith. Have faith. When you have nothing else, have faith.*

Mark shuddered, drawing her out of her gloomy thoughts. "They are throwing bodies into the Wadi El Rabadi behind the holy temple. Thousands, Hadassah."

Hadassah remembered the horror of the Valley of Hinnom. It was there that Jerusalem disposed of the dead and unclean animals and dumped the night soil. Baskets of hooves, entrails, and animal remains from the temple were carried there and dumped. Rats and carrion birds infested the place, and the stench frequently was carried in hot winds across the city. Father called it Gehenna. "It was not far from here that our Lord was crucified."

Mark pushed his hand back through his hair. "I was afraid to go closer."

Hadassah shut her eyes tightly, but the question rose stark and raw against her will. Had her father been cast into that place, desecrated and left to rot in the hot sun? She bit her lip and tried to force the thought away.

"I saw Titus," Mark said dully. "He rode over with some of his men. When he saw the bodies, he cried out. I could not hear his words, but a man said he was calling out to Jehovah that it was not his doing."

"If the city surrendered now, would he show mercy?"

"If he could contain his men. They hate the Jews and want to see them destroyed."

"And us along with them." She shivered. "They will not know the difference between believers of the Way and zealots, will they? Seditious or righteous Jew or even Christian, it will make no difference." Her eyes blurred with tears. "Is this the will of God, Mark?"

"Father said it is not God's will that any should suffer."

“Then why must we?”

“We bear the consequences for what we have done to ourselves, and for the sin that rules this world. Jesus forgave the thief, but he didn’t take him down off the cross.” He pushed his hand back through his hair. “I’m not wise like Father. I haven’t any answers to why, but I know there is hope.”

“What hope, Mark? What hope is there?”

“God always leaves a remnant.”

The siege wore on, and while life within Jerusalem ebbed, the spirit of Jewish resistance did not. Hadassah remained within the small house, hearing the horror of what was just beyond their unbolted door. A man was screaming and running down the street. *“They’ve ascended the wall!”*

When Mark went out to find out what was happening, Leah became hysterical. Hadassah went to her sister and held her tightly. She felt near to hysteria herself, but tending her young sister helped calm her.

“Everything will be all right, Leah. Be still.” Her words sounded meaningless in her own ears. “The Lord is watching over us,” she said and stroked her sister gently.

A litany of comforting lies, for the world was crumbling around them. Hadassah looked across the room at her mother and felt the tears coming again. Her mother smiled weakly as though trying to reassure her, but she felt no reassurance. What would become of them?

When Mark returned, he told them of the battle raging within the walls. The Jews had turned it and were driving the Romans back.

However, that night, under the cover of darkness, ten legionnaires sneaked through the ruins of the city and took possession of Antonia Tower. The battle had come to the very entrance of the holy temple. Though driven back again, the Romans countered by overthrowing some of the foundations of the tower and laid open the Court of the Gentiles. In an attempt to divert them, zealots attacked the Romans at the Mount of Olives. Failing, they were destroyed. The prisoners taken were crucified before the walls for all to see.

Stillness fell again. And then a new, more devastating horror spread through the city as word passed of a starving woman who had eaten her own child. The flame of Roman hatred was fanned into a blaze.



Josephus cried out again to his people that God was using the Romans to destroy them, fulfilling the prophecies of the prophets Daniel and Jesus. The Jews gathered all the dry materials, bitumen, and pitch they could find and filled the cloisters. The Romans drove forward, and the Jews gave ground, luring the Romans into the temple. Once inside, the Jews set their holy place on fire, burning many of the legionnaires to death within it.

Titus regained control of his enraged soldiers and ordered the fire put out, but no sooner had they succeeded in saving the temple than the Jews attacked again. This time all the officers of Rome couldn't restrain the fury of the Roman legionnaires who, driven by a lust for Jewish blood, once again torched the temple and killed every human being in their path as they began plundering the conquered city.

Men fell by the hundreds as flames engulfed the Babylonian curtain, embroidered with fine blue, scarlet, and purple thread. High on the temple roof, a false prophet cried out for the people to climb up and be delivered. People's screams of agony as they burned alive carried across the city, mingling with the horrifying sounds of battle in the streets and alleys. Men, women, children—it made no difference, all fell to the sword.

Hadassah tried to shut it out of her mind, but the sound of death was everywhere. Her mother died on the same hot August day that Jerusalem fell, and for two days, Hadassah, Mark, and Leah waited, knowing the Romans would find them sooner or later and destroy them as they were destroying everyone else.

Someone fled down their narrow street. Others screamed as they were cut down without mercy. Hadassah wanted to jump up and run away, but where could she go? And what of her sister and her brother? She pressed farther back into the darkening shadows of the small rooms and held Leah.

More men's voices. Louder. Closer. A door was smashed open not far away. The people inside screamed. One by one, they were silenced.

Weak and gaunt, Mark struggled to his feet and stood before the door, praying silently. Hadassah's heart beat heavily, her empty stomach tightening into a ball of pain. She heard men's voices in the street. The words were Greek, the tone scornful. One man gave orders to search the next houses. Another door was smashed in. More screams.

The sound of hobnailed shoes came to their door. Hadassah's heart jumped wildly. "Oh, God . . ."

“Close your eyes, Hadassah,” Mark told her, sounding strangely calm. “Remember the Lord,” he said as the door crashed open. Mark uttered a harsh, broken sound and dropped to his knees. A bloody sword tip protruded from his back, staining the gray tunic red. Leah’s high-pitched scream filled the small room.

The Roman soldier kicked Mark back, freeing his sword.

Hadassah could not utter a sound. Staring up at the man, his armor covered with dust and her brother’s blood, Hadassah couldn’t move. His eyes glittered through his visor. When he stepped forward, raising his bloody sword, Hadassah moved swiftly and without conscious thought. She shoved Leah down and fell across her. *Oh, God, let it be over quickly*, she prayed. *Let it be swift*. Leah fell silent. The only sound was that of the soldier’s rasping breathing, mingled with screams from down the street.

Tertius gripped his sword harder and glared down at the emaciated young girl covering an even smaller girl. He ought to kill them both and have done with it! These bloody Jews were a blight to Rome. Eating their own children! Destroy the women and there would be no more warriors birthed. This nation deserved annihilation. He should just kill them and be done with it.

What stopped him?

The older girl looked up at him, her dark eyes full of fear. She was so small and thin, except for those eyes, too large for her ashen face. Something about her sapped the killing strength of his arm. His breathing eased, his heartbeat slowed.

He tried to remind himself of the friends he had lost. Diocles had been killed by a stone while building the siege works. Malcenas had been fallen upon by six fighters when they had breached the first wall. Capaneus had burned to death when the Jews had set fire to their own temple. Albion still suffered wounds from a Jew’s dart.

Yet, the heat in his blood cooled.

Shaking, Tertius lowered his sword. Still alert to any movement the girl made, he glanced around the small room. His vision cleared of the red haze. It was a boy he had killed. He lay in a pool of blood beside a woman. She looked peaceful, as though she merely slept, her hair carefully combed, her hands folded on her chest. Unlike those who had chosen to dump their dead in the wadi, these children had lain out their mother with dignity.

He had heard the story of a woman eating her own child and it had fed his hatred of Jews, gained from ten long years in Judea.



He had wanted nothing more than to obliterate them from the face of the earth. They had been nothing but trouble to Rome from the beginning—rebellious and proud, unwilling to bend to anything but their one *true* god.

One true god. Tertius' hard mouth twisted in a sneer. Fools, all of them. To believe in only one god was not only ridiculous, it was uncivilized. And for all their holy protestations and stubborn persistence, they were a barbaric race. Look what they had done to their own temple.

How many Jews had he killed in the last five months? He hadn't bothered to count as he went from house to house, driven by bloodlust, hunting them down like animals. By the gods, he had relished it, accounting each death as a small token payment for the friends they had taken from him.

Why did he hesitate now? Was this pity for a foul Jewess brat? It would be merciful to kill her and put her out of her misery. She was so thin from starvation that he could blow her over with a breath. He took another step toward her. He could kill both girls with one blow . . . tried to summon the will to do so.

The girl waited. It was clear she was terrified, yet she did not beg for mercy as so many had done. Both she and the child beneath her were still and silent, watching.

Tertius' heart twisted, and he felt weak. He drew a ragged breath and exhaled sharply. Uttering a curse, he shoved his sword into the scabbard at his side. "You will live, but you will not thank me for it."

Hadassah knew Greek. It was a common language among the Roman legionnaires and so was heard all over Judea. She started to cry. He grasped her arm and yanked her to her feet.

Tertius looked at the little girl lying on the floor. Her eyes were open and fixed on some distant place to which her mind had escaped. It was not the first time he had seen such a look. She would not last long.

"Leah," Hadassah said, frightened at the vacant look in her eyes. She bent down and put her arms around her. "My sister," she said, trying to draw her up.

Tertius knew the little girl was as good as dead already and it would make more sense to leave her. Yet, the way the older girl tried to gather the child in her arms and lift her, roused his pity. Even the child's slight weight was too much for her.

Brushing her aside, Tertius lifted the tiny girl easily and gently

slung her over his shoulder like a sack of grain. Grasping the older girl by the arm, he pushed her out the door.

The street was quiet, the other soldiers having moved on. Distant cries rang out. He walked quickly, aware that the girl was struggling to keep up.

The air of the city was foul with death. Bodies were everywhere, some slain by Roman soldiers pillaging the conquered city, others dead of starvation, now bloated and decaying from days of being left to putrefy. The look of horror on the girl's face made Tertius wonder how long she had been cooped up in that house.

"Your great Holy City," he said and spat into the dust.

Pain licked up Hadassah's arm as the legionnaire's fingers dug into her flesh. She stumbled over a dead man's leg. His face was crawling with maggots. The dead were everywhere. She felt faint.

The farther they walked, the more horrifying the carnage. Decaying bodies lay tangled together like slaughtered animals. The stench of blood and death was so heavy Hadassah covered her mouth.

"Where do we take captives?" Tertius shouted at a soldier separating the dead. Two soldiers were lifting a Roman comrade from between two Jews. Other legionnaires appeared with plunder from the temple. Wagons were already loaded with golden and silver sprinkling bowls, dishes, wick trimmers, pots, and lampstands. Bronze shovels and pots were piled up, as well as basins, censers, and other articles used in temple service.

The soldier looked up at Tertius, casting a cursory glance over Hadassah and Leah. "Down that street and around through the big gate, but those two don't look worth bothering with."

Hadassah looked up at the temple's once pristine marble, the marble that had appeared as a snow-covered mountain in the distance. It was blackened, chunks had been gouged out by siege stones, the gold melted away. Whole sections of wall were broken down. The holy temple. It was just another place of death and destruction.

She moved sluggishly, sickened and terrified at all she saw. Smoke burned her eyes and throat. As they walked along the wall of the temple, she could hear a rising, undulating sound of horror coming from within it. Her mouth was parched and her heart pounded harder and faster as they approached the gate to the Women's Court.



Tertius gave the girl a shove. "You faint and I'll kill you where you drop, and your sister with you."

Thousands of survivors were within the court, some moaning in their misery and others wailing for their dead. The soldier pushed her ahead of him through the gate, and she saw the ragged multitude before her. They crowded the courtyard. Most were gaunt with starvation, weak, hopeless.

Tertius lowered the child from his shoulder. Hadassah caught hold of Leah and tried to support her. She sank down weakly and held her sister limply across her lap. The soldier turned and walked away.

Thousands milled around, looking for relatives or friends. Others huddled in smaller groups weeping, while some, alone, stared at nothing—as Leah did. The air was so hot Hadassah could hardly breathe.

A Levite rent his worn blue and orange tunic and cried out in an agony of emotion, "My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken us?" A woman near him began to wail miserably, her gray dress bloodstained and torn at the shoulder. An old man wrapped in black-and-white striped robes sat alone against the court wall, his lips moving. Hadassah knew he was of the Sanhedrin, his robes symbolizing the desert costume and the tents of the first patriarchs.

Mingled among the crowd were Nazirites with their long, braided hair, and zealots with dirty, ragged trousers and shirts over which they wore short sleeveless vests with a blue fringe at each corner. Divested of their knives and bows, they still looked menacing.

A fight broke out. Women began screaming. A dozen Roman legionnaires waded into the multitude and cut down the adversaries, as well as several others whose only offense was to be in close proximity. A Roman officer stood on the high steps and shouted down at the captives. He pointed out several more men in the crowd and they were dragged away to be crucified.

Hadassah managed to draw Leah up and move to a safer place by the wall, near the Levite. As the sun went down and darkness came, she held Leah close, trying to share her warmth. But in the morning, Leah was dead.

Her sister's sweet face was free of fear and suffering. Her lips were curved in a gentle smile. Hadassah held her against her chest and rocked her. Pain swelled and filled her with a despair so deep she couldn't even cry. When a Roman soldier came over,

she scarcely noticed until he tried to take Leah away from her. She held her sister tighter.

“She’s dead. Give her to me.”

Hadassah pressed her face into the curve of her sister’s neck and moaned. The Roman had seen enough death to become hardened by it. He struck Hadassah once, breaking her hold, and then kicked her aside. Dazed, her body laced with pain, Hadassah stared helplessly as the soldier carried Leah to a wagon stacked with the bodies of others who had died during the night. He tossed her sister’s fragile body carelessly onto the heap.

Shutting her eyes, Hadassah drew up her legs and wept against her knees.

The days ran together. Hundreds died of starvation, more of despair and lost hope. Some of the able-bodied captives were taken to dig mass graves.

Rumors spread that Titus had given orders to demolish not only the temple but the entire city. Only the Phasaelus, Hippicus, and Mariamne towers were to be left standing for defensive purposes, and a portion of the western wall. Not since the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed Solomon’s temple had such a thing happened. Jerusalem, their beloved Jerusalem, would be no more.

The Romans brought in corn for the captives. Some Jews, still stiff-necked against Roman rule, refused their portions in a last and fatal act of rebellion. More grievous were the sick and weak who were denied food because the Romans did not wish to waste corn on those who would not likely survive the coming march to Caesarea. Hadassah was one of the latter, and so received no food.

One morning, Hadassah was taken with the others outside the city walls. She stared with horror at the scene before her. Thousands of Jews had been crucified before the crumbling walls of Jerusalem. Scavenging birds feasted upon them. The ground on the siege work had drunk in so much blood it was as red-brown and hard as brick, but the land itself was beyond anything Hadassah had expected. Other than the great, gruesome forest of crosses, there was not a tree, nor a bush, nor even a blade of grass. A wasteland lay before her, and at her back was the mighty city even now being reduced to rubble.

“Keep moving!” a guard shouted, his whip hissing through the air near her and cracking on a man’s back. Another man ahead of her groaned deeply and collapsed. When the guard drew his



sword, a woman tried to stop him, but he struck her down with his fist, then with one swift stroke, opened an artery in the fallen man's neck. Taking the twitching man by his arm, he dragged him to the edge of the siege bank and pushed him over the side. The body rolled slowly to the bottom, where it took its place in the rocks amongst other corpses. Another captive helped the weeping woman to her feet, and they went on.

Their captors sat them within sight and sound of Titus' camp.

"It would seem we must suffer through a Roman triumph," a man said bitterly, the blue tassels on his vest identifying him as a zealot.

"Be silent or you will be crow bait like those other poor fools," someone hissed at him.

As the captives watched, the legions formed and marched in tightly drilled units before Titus, who was resplendent in his golden armor. There were more captives than soldiers, but the Romans moved as one great beast of war, organized and disciplined. To Hadassah, the rhythmic cadence of thousands of men marching in perfect formation was terrifying to watch. A single voice or signal could make hundreds move as one. How could any people think they could overcome such as these? They filled the horizon.

Titus gave a speech, pausing now and then as the soldiers cheered. Then the awards were presented. Officers stood before the men, their armor cleaned and gleaming in the sunlight. Lists were read of those who had performed great exploits in the war. Titus himself placed crowns of gold on their heads and golden ornaments about their necks. To some he gave long golden spears and silver ensigns. Each was awarded the honor of removal to higher rank.

Hadassah looked around at her fellows and saw their bitter hatred; having to witness this ceremony poured salt in their open wounds.

Heaps of spoils were distributed among the soldiers; then Titus spoke again, commending his men and wishing them great fortune and happiness. Jubilant, the soldiers cried out their acclamations to him time and time again as he came down among them.

Finally, he gave orders that the feasting begin. Great numbers of oxen were held ready at the altars to the Roman gods, and at Titus' command they were sacrificed. Hadassah's father had told her Jewish law required the shedding of blood as an atonement for sin. She knew priests within the holy temple performed the

sacrifices daily, a constant reminder of the need for repentance. Yet her father and mother had taught her from birth that Christ had shed his blood as an atonement for the sins of the world, that the law of Moses had been fulfilled in him, that animal sacrifices were no longer needed. So she had never seen animals sacrificed. Now she watched in grim horror as one ox after another was killed as a thank offering. The sight of so much blood spilling down over stone altars sickened her. Gagging, she closed her eyes and turned away.

The slain oxen were distributed to the victorious army for a great feast. The tantalizing aroma of roasting beef drifted to hungry captives across the night air. Even had they been offered some, righteous Jews would have refused to eat it. Better dust and death than meat sacrificed to pagan gods.

At last, soldiers came and ordered the captives to line up for their rations of corn, wheat, and barley. Weakly, Hadassah rose and stood in the long line, sure she would again be denied food. Her eyes blurred with tears. *Oh, God, God, do as you will.* Cupping her hands as her turn came, she waited to be shoved aside. Instead, golden kernels spilled from the scoop into her palms.

She could almost hear her mother's voice. *"The Lord will provide."*

She looked up into the young soldier's eyes. His face, weathered from the Judean sun, was hard, devoid of any emotion. "Thank you," she said in Greek and with simple humility, without even a thought as to who he was or what he might have done. His eyes flickered. Someone shoved her hard from behind and cursed her in Aramaic.

As she moved away, she was unaware the young soldier still watched her. He dipped the scoop into the barrel again, pouring corn into the hands of the next in line without taking his eyes from her.

Hadassah sat down on the hillside. She was separate from the others, alone within herself. Bowing her head, she tightened her hands around the corn. Emotion swelled. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies," she whispered brokenly and began to weep. "Oh, Father, forgive me. Amend my ways. But gently, Lord, lest you reduce me to nothing. I am afraid. Father, I am so afraid. Preserve me by the strength of your arm."

She opened her eyes and opened her hands again. "The Lord provides," she said softly and ate slowly, savoring each kernel.



## A VOICE IN THE WIND

As the sun went down, Hadassah felt oddly at peace. Even with all the destruction and death around her, with all the suffering ahead, she felt God's nearness. She looked up at the clear night sky. The stars were bright and a wind blew softly, reminding her of Galilee.

The night was warm . . . she had eaten . . . she would live. "*God always leaves a remnant,*" Mark had said. Of all the members of her family, her faith was weakest, her spirit the most doubting and the least bold. Of all of them, she was least worthy.

"Why me, Lord?" she asked, weeping softly. "Why me?"