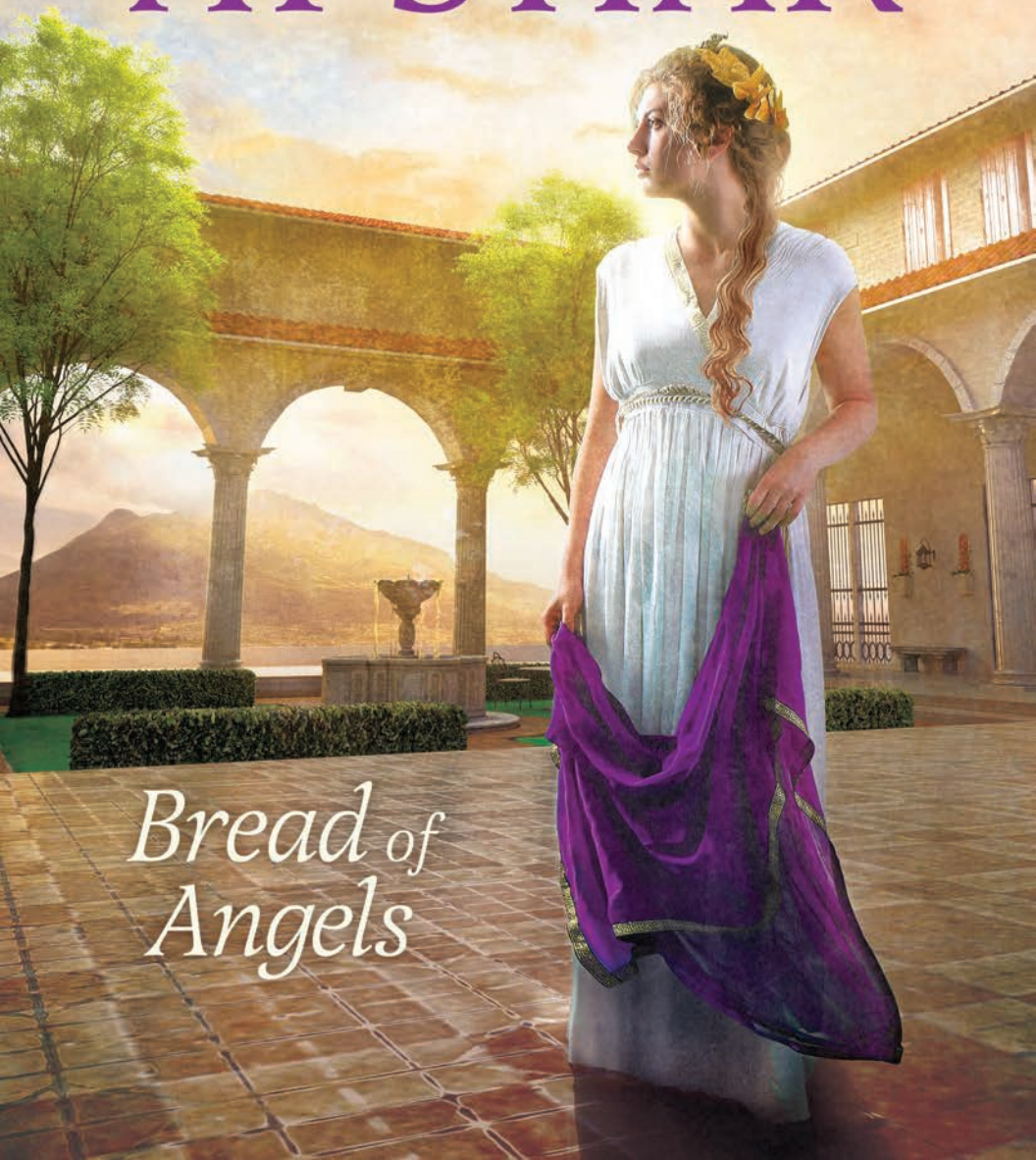


# TESSA AFSHAR

*Bread of  
Angels*



# PRAISE FOR NOVELS BY TESSA AFSHAR

## *Land of Silence*

“Readers will be moved by Elianna’s faith, and Afshar’s elegant evocation of biblical life will keep them spellbound. An excellent choice for fans of Francine Rivers’s historical fiction and those who read for character.”

*LIBRARY JOURNAL*

“Fans of biblical fiction will enjoy an absorbing and well-researched chariot ride.”

*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*

“In perhaps her best novel to date, Afshar steps out of her typical Old Testament for an exquisitely heartfelt glimpse into the New. Building off one beautiful word in the biblical narrative, she grants a familiar character not only a name, but also a poignant history to which many modern readers can relate. The wit, the romance, and the humanity make Elianna’s journey uplifting as well as soul-touching.”

*ROMANTIC TIMES, TOP PICK REVIEW*

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*CBA RETAILERS + RESOURCES*

“An impressively crafted, inherently appealing, consistently engaging, and compelling read from first page to last, *Land of Silence* is enthusiastically recommended for community library Historical Fiction collections.”

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WORLD MAGAZINE

“No one brings the Bible to life like Tessa Afshar.”

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“*Land of Silence* is a biblical novel in a category all its own. Moving, believable . . . This inspiring, uplifting story encouraged me at a heart level. A wonderful story—not to be missed!”

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CHRIS FABRY, bestselling author of *War Room* and *The Promise of Jesse Woods*

“Tessa Afshar’s novels draw you in so that you’re both captivated and changed by the power of story. *Land of Silence* is no exception. You’re in for a treat with this one—enjoy!”

SUSIE LARSON, national speaker, radio host, and author of *Your Beautiful Purpose*

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ROMANTIC TIMES

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NOVEL CROSSING

“Once again, Tessa’s seemingly effortless talent breathes new life into this beautiful love story and makes it come alive.”

RELZ REVIEWZ

“Tessa Afshar breathes new life into the old, stale story we think we know and cracks the door wide open for a beautiful story of a tragic life turned upside down by forbidden love and immeasurable grace.”

JOSH OLDS, LifeisStory.com

### *Harvest of Gold*

“Afshar has created a treasure of a book. Brilliant characterization, adventure, intrigue, and humor coupled with deep emotional impact garner a solid five stars.”

CBA RETAILERS + RESOURCES

“Engaging. Inspiring. Heart-stopping and heart-rending. A fabulous biblical novel that sent me straight back to God’s Word!”

MESU ANDREWS, award-winning author

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“The Bible’s ancient Near Eastern context is the setting for an engaging story of pluck, friendship, and faith.”

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

“There is so much depth to *Harvest of Rubies* that readers will happily drown in its message of God’s unfailing love and mercy while diving headfirst into the captivating plot and precarious romance. . . . This is a great read!”

BOOKREPORTER.COM

“Afshar brings readers biblical fiction with mysterious twists and turns . . . that fascinate and claim the reader’s full attention. The story will have you laughing and crying.”

*ROMANTIC TIMES*, TOP PICK REVIEW

*Pearl in the Sand*

“This superb debut should appeal to readers who enjoyed Davis Bunn and Janette Oke’s *The Centurion’s Wife* or Anita Diamant’s *The Red Tent*.”

*LIBRARY JOURNAL*, STARRED REVIEW

“A riveting and compelling book. . . . Fantastic research and stellar writing make this one you don’t want to miss!”

*ROMANTIC TIMES*, TOP PICK REVIEW

“*Pearl in the Sand* is a lovely story, vividly written, and is sure to please devotees of biblical fiction.”

TITLETRAKK.COM

*Bread of Angels*

**Also by Tessa Afshar**

*Pearl in the Sand*

*Harvest of Rubies*

*Harvest of Gold*

*In the Field of Grace*

*Land of Silence*

# TESSA AFSHAR

## *Bread of Angels*



*Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.  
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*Bread of Angels*

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*Bread of Angels* is a work of fiction. Where real people, events, establishments, organizations, or locales appear, they are used fictitiously. All other elements of the novel are drawn from the author's imagination.

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## PROLOGUE



AD 51

I HAVE NEVER SERVED as a soldier, yet I have the strange sense that most of my life I have stared down the blade of a sword, the face of my adversary haunting me. My friend General Varus once told me that Roman soldiers prefer to use the single-edged sword they call the *makhaira* for the killing stroke: having a short blade forces them to come close, so that as your body gives way to the thrust of that unforgiving edge, all you can see is the face of your assassin. You forget the world, you forget the ones you love, you forget hope and lose your fragile grasp on any remnant of a fight lingering in your heart. You see only the visage of your adversary.

I know what it's like to have a *makhaira* at my throat. I know my enemy's face. I know the scent of his breath, the stinging quality of his speech, the poison of his taunts. He has cut me more than once with his short sword. I know his name.

He is called Fear.

He has hounded me from the time he first found me in a

meadow, clinging to my father's hand. My enemy has a singular talent for hounding.

Do you remember what you whispered in my ear that day by the river? When I bent my head to straighten the strap of my shoe, you leaned over and said, "No one shall separate you from the love of God. Not trouble or hardship or danger. Not even the *makhaira*."

I almost broke your nose, I sat up so fast; do you remember?

How did you know? How did you know that I saw the image of Fear more vividly than I did the face of God? That he always seemed more real, more powerful, more immediate than the creator of the sun and the moon? That I could only perceive God from behind the shadow of Fear, that I always felt a little separated from his love?

You have asked me what made me trust God with such alacrity, so ready to jump into that river to die. To leave behind the old, tired self and rise up new.

I think it started with your words. The notion that God's love could overcome the *makhaira*, so that even the thrust of Fear's sword could not rob me of God's healing presence.

Or perhaps I mistake the matter. Perhaps my journey began long before that, when I still lived in Thyatira and believed my future firmly planted in that dear soil. Perhaps I would never have stepped into that river if God had not first stripped me of home and hope. My future had to be destroyed before I would be willing to set foot on the path that led to a new future. A better one than I could ever have thought or imagined.

Do you remember, dear Paul, telling me of your frustration before coming to Philippi, when you sat in Troas, bewildered by the doors God had closed in your face? You were ready to crumple

your maps and forget your intentions; your journey had wrecked your careful arrangements more than once. First the Spirit forbade you to enter the province of Asia so that you were forced to abandon the comfort of a good paved road in exchange for the challenges of a narrow dirt track, and then, when you tried to push through into Bithynia, once again he prevented you from following your plans.

So you sat in Troas, twice thwarted, studying your maps and scratching your head, wondering where you were supposed to go next.

If you had gone into the province of Asia as you intended, you would have come upon my old home. But you would not have found me there, for I had left Thyatira long before. It was your vision that brought you to me on that riverbank. Was it only a year ago?

God in his grace drove you to me by the force of his Spirit. How laughable our plans sometimes seem in the light of eternity. How blessed when they are destroyed!

The moon shines too bright this night and I cannot sleep. My head is full of distant memories—shadows and ghosts of what once was. They make me smile and weep. They make me see the hand of God.

I will never send you this letter, which does not even have the courtesy of a proper greeting. But thoughts of you fill my heart, dear Paul, and since you are too far away, I find solace in speaking to you through this epistle.

I lost everything when I was scarcely a woman. I lost everything and found God. But it wasn't until you came into my life and told me the Truth that I found peace.

# ONE



TWENTY-SIX YEARS EARLIER

AD 25

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*Their clothing is violet and purple;  
they are all the work of skilled men.*

JEREMIAH 10:9

PURPLE YARN HUNG from thin trees, swaying in the breeze like odd-shaped fruit; dark-lavender fabric the color of old bruises spread over two rough-hewn stone benches, drying in the sun; a large plum-colored mosaic of geometric designs dominated the otherwise-plain garden. In the shade, a massive vat the size of a diminutive Roman bath sloshed with purple dye so dense it looked black except when a ray of sunlight found its way over the surface, illuminating its true color.

The mistress of this purple kingdom, a young woman in loose, patched clothing, hunched in front of the vat, her forehead damp with perspiration. She had prepared the formula as her father had taught her. It was time to soak the linen. Her father usually conducted this part of the process. His was the genius that had created

the dye in the first place; his the skill that turned ordinary yarn into lush, purple beauty. Lydia had never gone through the process of dyeing without his help. Her father was the dye master. She merely acted as his assistant, a role she relished. The thought of dyeing the wool alone made her grit her teeth.

Eumenes was late. He should have arrived over an hour ago.

Lydia wiped the sweat trickling down her temple and stared into the vat. She thought about the unusually large order they had to fill within the next two weeks. There was no time for delay. Every hour counted if they were to make a prompt delivery.

Her stomach churned as she considered their narrow schedule. Most of their local clients suffered from a strange inconsistency. They had no qualms being late in their payments to an honest merchant, but if their merchandise arrived a few days after the promised date, they acted as if the world were ending. Demanding all manner of reparations, they threatened to blight the merchant's truest treasure: his reputation.

When the two orders had arrived, one on top of another, Lydia had objected to her father, demanding that he delay at least one. "It is too much," she had said. "We cannot accomplish it all in such a short time."

He had laughed at her objections. "You despair when we have no orders, imagining that we will grow impoverished and lose our home. When we do receive two perfectly good requests, you worry that it is too much and we will fail to meet expectations. You must make up your mind, Daughter. Which is it to be? Shall we starve or perish of overwork?"

Lydia found that she had no problem dreading either eventuality, which did not help her present situation. Where was her father?

She fetched several of the hefty baskets overflowing with linen yarn from their workshop, located in the eastern end of the garden. The baskets were heavy—too heavy for a sixteen-year-old girl. Lydia gritted her teeth and half dragged, half carried them, one shuffling step at a time, until they were within easy reach of the dyeing vat.

On the other side of the garden, a three-minute walk from the workshop, lay their modest home with its three rooms, its crooked walls, the leaking ceiling that her father never had time to fix, and the fading furniture that no amount of purple could transform into a semblance of riches. But it was theirs, and she never felt so secure anywhere in the world as when she was nestled within the safety of its walls with her father nearby.

Lydia set the baskets of prepared linen in neat order near the vat, like naked babies ready to be bathed. In truth, she knew what to do. More than once her father had given her permission to complete the task without him. “Your problem is not lack of knowledge,” he had said again and again. “It is lack of confidence. You fear you might fail. I trust you will succeed.”

She cringed every time he suggested it. “In my ignorance, if I make a mistake and ruin a batch of dye or yarn or a perfectly good length of fabric, who will pay for my error? You know we cannot afford costly mistakes like that.”

He never insisted. Her father was too gentle for that. She wondered now if this was some test, this delay. Had he chosen to stay away from home to force her hand and leave her no choice but to embark on the process alone?

She chewed on dry lips. Nausea clawed at her belly as she contemplated the mounds of yarn. Intentional or not, she needed to make a decision. Once she started soaking the linen, there would

be no going back. She would have to see the dyeing of the linen through to the end. Stopping at the wrong moment would ruin the batch.

Reaching for a fat wad of yarn, she began to unwind it so that it could be immersed into the liquid properly. Too many dyers filled their vats with an excess of yarn, thinking to save their dye. But that meant the yarn would not soak up enough color and would emerge patchy, without the steadfastness that her father's process produced.

When the linen was ready, she took a deep breath, her outstretched hands shaking as she crouched by the vat, poised to begin the process. An unexpected noise made her grow still. Just outside, along the narrow path that ran adjacent to their land, a man's groan followed by the sound of heavy, shuffling steps broke the silence. Without warning, the door leading to the garden crashed open, hitting the wall with a great noise. Lydia jumped.

Clutching the forgotten linen to her breast, she sprang to her feet. A man she did not recognize burst into the courtyard, half carrying someone slumped against his shoulder, one leg dragging with each step.

She noticed two things before she began to run. First, blood. A great deal of blood clinging to the slumping man so that his hair, face, and leg were covered with it. And second, with dawning horror, she realized that the face so covered in seeping scarlet belonged to none other than her father.

"Oh gods." Her voice emerged as an indistinguishable croak. "Father! What has happened?" The yarn fell unheeded from her nerveless fingers to the stone-paved ground.

Her father roused himself enough to give a weak smile. "It looks worse than it is. This young fellow saved my life."



Lydia spared the man who held her father in a tight grip a brief glance. She had an impression of light-green eyes and a face that Apollo would be happy to own before she returned her attention to her injured parent.

With trembling fingers, she touched his warm cheek and quelled her desire to snatch him away from the strong, supportive arms of the young Apollo. Carrying her father into the house alone was not a realistic option. She would collapse under the burden of his sinking weight.

“This way. Follow me. We must set him down so that I can see to his wounds,” she said. The young man trailed her into the house without comment.

Her father’s thin mattress sat on the floor of his chamber, his blankets neatly folded at the bottom. “Settle him on the bed,” she said, her voice a thread. “Please,” she added, trying to remember manners in the midst of terror.

“It’s a small injury, Lydia,” Eumenes panted. “Don’t worry yourself.” The loud groan of pain that escaped his lips as Apollo laid him down on the mattress did little to support his claim.

“What happened?” she asked again, parting his tunic where it lay shredded against his leg. She winced, feeling queasy as she saw the long gash that ran the length of his thigh. The smell of blood, the sight of the wound, the heat of the room made her feel short of breath.

Time seemed to recede, to double in on itself.

For a moment she felt the world shift as if she were no longer in this room but in a chamber of dreams, kneeling next to a woman whose face was hidden in shadows. Blood covered everything—the woman’s clothing, the sheets—and dripped in fat drops on the stone-gray floor. Lydia took a shivery breath, trying to clear her

mind of this strange overlap until her gaze returned to the bedside of her father and her thinking regained its focus.

Eumenes squeezed his eyes shut. Gritting his teeth he said, “Crazy horse.”

“A horse did this to you?”

“Not entirely,” Apollo said. “I saw what happened. A man was leading a horse by its bridle when the animal began rearing up. Something must have spooked it. The beast pulled away from the hold of its master and continued to balk and rear on its hind legs. Your father was standing in the wrong place at the wrong moment. The horse’s hooves knocked him sideways. I happened to be on hand and managed to calm the horse and pull him back.”

“He was like Hercules, bringing that monster under control with a touch,” her father said.

Apollo grinned. “Your father began to regain his balance. His injuries would have been minor if not for the unfortunate coincidence that he was standing near the top of a hill. His foot slipped at the last moment, and he went over the edge. He cut himself on some jutting rocks and brambles as he rolled down. Most of these injuries are from his fall, not the horse.”

## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR



SOME LIVES SEEM TO burn with a transcendent light, leaving an inexorable mark on history. Lydia's was such a life. The first convert in Europe, she succeeded in the realm of commerce where men dominated and ruled. Her home became the first church on the continent, one that yielded great influence in the spread of the gospel for centuries. The world changed, you might say, because of Lydia's intrepid generosity and leadership.

A few notes on this novel. The Bible is silent on the issue of Lydia's citizenship. However, while the ancient world was deeply impressed by Roman citizenship, biblical authors remained indifferent to it and only seemed to mention it when it became a relevant detail in a particular story of faith. We never hear about Paul's citizenship, for example, until he is unjustly beaten. I felt, therefore, that it was not unlikely for Lydia to have been a citizen of Rome, given her level of success.

A historical person named Antiochus, a seller of purple, really

did live in Philippi around this time period. The city officials liked him so much that they dedicated a plaque in his honor. Beyond these facts, however, the whole story surrounding Antiochus is fictional.

My apologies to Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25) and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2) for usurping their unknown stories and coloring them with my imaginary pen. One day in heaven I will have a lot of explaining to do.

Some additional explanations on locations are in order. The Agora in Philippi may not have been built by AD 50, though we have evidence of its completion not too long after this period.

The ruins of Thyatira lie under a modern Turkish city and have never been properly excavated. There is little written about the city, and the narrow information we possess comes to us courtesy of limited archaeological finds. However, there is some indication that a thriving Jewish community lived in Thyatira at this time.

The use of the terms *Lady*, *mistress*, *lord*, and *sir* are inaccurate, as the Latin language does not commonly use such terminology. But the titles of esteem used by Romans—such as *excellent* Antonios or *very strong* Silvanus—sound awkward to modern readers, so I chose to use more common honorifics that capture differences in station.

The first recorded mention of tree rings was in the third century BC, by a Greek botanist named Theophrastus. But not until Leonardo da Vinci's treatise in the fifteenth century do we come across written evidence of the significance of the rings. So Marcus's discourse on the matter may be anachronistic. Similarly, the legend of the patient stone, though a story I personally heard as a child, is most likely not as old as the first century.

As I always do, I have used a couple of quotes in the writing

of this book, although this time I veered from my usual practice of using material from classical writers. In chapter 7, I quoted Theodore Roosevelt. His exact words were:

The credit belongs to the man . . . who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.

Paul's words "There is nothing in the world so damaged that it cannot be repaired by the hand of Almighty God" in chapter 45 are a quote from "Appointment with Death," a television production based on Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot as portrayed by David Suchet.

For Elianna's full story, please refer to my novel *Land of Silence*.

While the Bible provides profound inspiration for novels like this, the best way to study it is not through a work of fiction but simply by reading the original. This story can in no way replace the transformative power that the reader will encounter in the Scriptures. For Lydia's story, please read Acts 16.