

MESU ANDREWS

AUTHOR OF MIRIAM

ISAIAH'S
DAUGHTER

A NOVEL of PROPHETS & KINGS



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ISALAH'S DAUGHTER

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ISAIAH'S DAUGHTER

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This book is a work of historical fiction based closely on real people and real events. Details that cannot be historically verified are purely products of the author's imagination.

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*To my husband, Roy.
Like Hezi and Zibah,
who knew each other since childhood . . .
There is only we.*

CHARACTER LIST

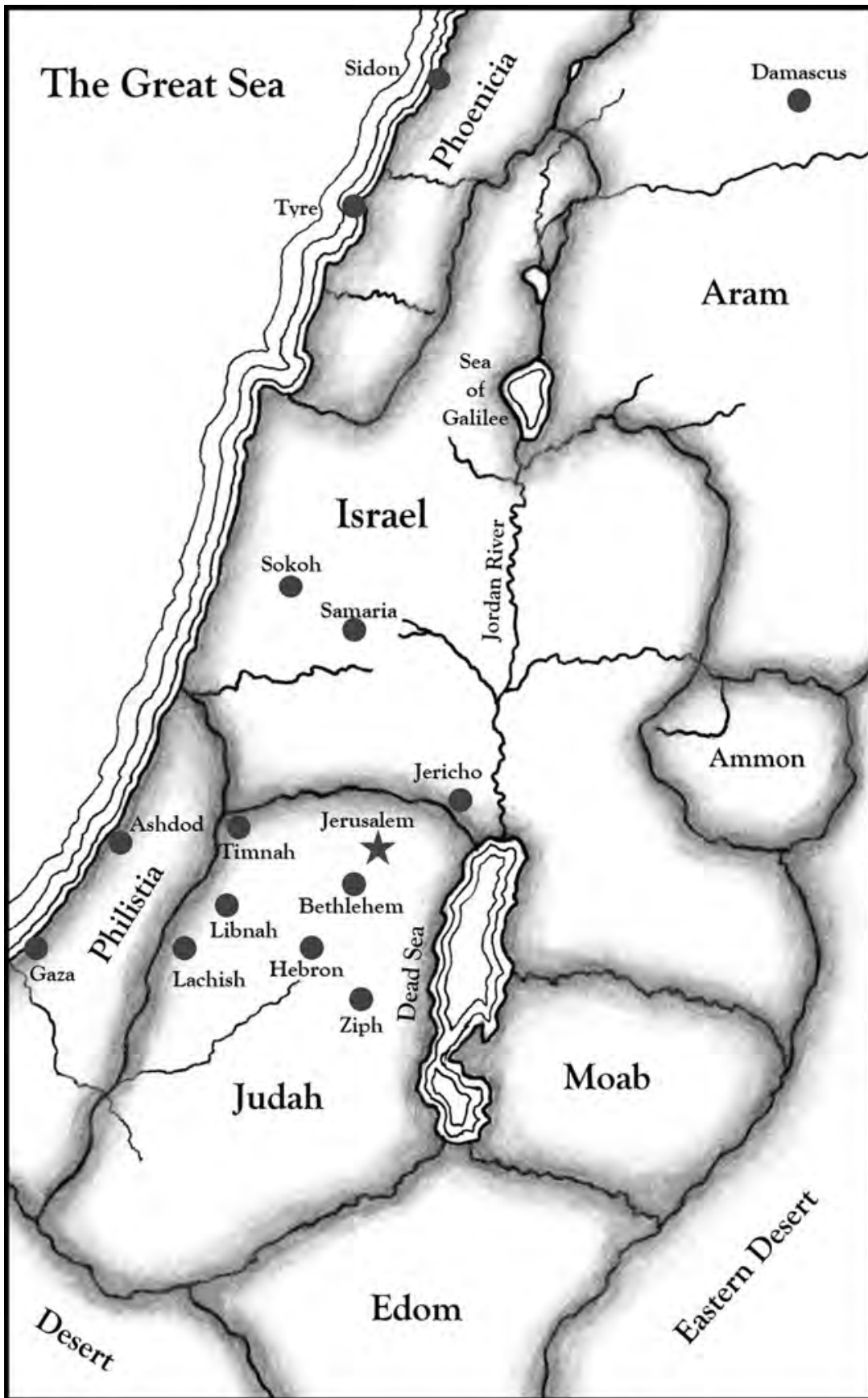
<i>Amram*</i>	<i>One of the king's Mighty Men; Queen Hephzibah's personal guard</i>
<i>Aya*</i>	<i>Isaiah's wife</i>
Azariah	<i>High priest during Hezekiah's reign</i>
<i>Dinah*</i>	<i>Servant girl in Isaiah's household</i>
Eliakim	<i>royal official during Hezekiah's reign</i>
Hephzibah	<i>Hezekiah's wife; Queen of Judah</i>
Hilkiah	<i>Royal treasurer under both Ahaz and Hezekiah*</i>
Isaiah	<i>God's prophet in Judah</i>
<i>Ishma*</i>	<i>Orphan girl who becomes Hezekiah's friend</i>
<i>Jalon ben Enoch*</i>	<i>Commander of forced labor</i>
Jashub (Shear-Jashub)	<i>Isaiah's firstborn son</i>
Joah	<i>Recorder during Hezekiah's reign</i>
<i>Jokim ben Hanan*</i>	<i>Commander of Judah's army</i>
<i>Joseph*</i>	<i>Shebna's abba</i>
<i>Kadmiel*</i>	<i>Isaiah's second son</i>
King Ahaz	<i>11th King of Judah; Hezekiah's abba</i>
King Hoshea	<i>paid Assyria to become 19th King of Israel</i>
King Jotham	<i>10th King of Judah; Ahaz's abba</i>

King Pekah	<i>18th King of Israel</i>
King Sargon	<i>King of Assyria (722–705 BCE); completed Samaritan siege and Israel’s exile during Ahaz’s reign</i>
King Sennacherib	<i>King of Assyria (705–681 BCE); besieged Judean fortified cities, including Jerusalem during Hezekiah’s reign</i>
King Shalmaneser	<i>King of Assyria (727–722 BCE); began the siege on Samaria during Ahaz’s reign</i>
King Tiglath-Pileser	<i>King of Assyria (747–727 BCE); destroyed Damascus and attacked Samaria when Ahaz paid tribute</i>
<i>Leah*</i>	<i>Servant girl in Isaiah’s household</i>
Maher (Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz)	<i>Isaiah’s third-born son (Scripture names only two sons)</i>
Micah	<i>God’s prophet in Judah; Yaira’s brother*</i>
Oded	<i>God’s prophet in Samaria</i>
<i>Prince Bocheru*</i>	<i>Ahaz’s firstborn son</i>
Prince/King Hezekiah	<i>Ahaz’s son—second-born* (Bible doesn’t order Ahaz’s sons)</i>
<i>Prince Mattaniah*</i>	<i>Ahaz’s third-born son</i>
Queen Abijah	<i>Ahaz’s wife; daughter of Zechariah, the high priest</i>
Rabshakeh, the	<i>Assyrian general during Sennacherib’s reign</i>

<i>Rizpah*</i>	<i>Ahaz's second wife</i>
<i>Samuel*</i>	<i>One of the king's Mighty Men; Hezekiah's personal guard</i>
<i>Selah*</i>	<i>Ahaz's youngest widow</i>
Shebna	<i>Royal official during Hezekiah's reign</i>
Tirhakah	<i>General of Egypt's (Cush's) army</i>
Uriah	<i>Priest in Jerusalem Temple</i>
<i>Yaira*</i>	<i>orphaned caregiver of Ishma; Micah's younger sister</i>

BOLD names are mentioned in the Bible and/or historical documents

* Denotes fictional character or description



SNEAK PEEK  **SAMPLE ONLY**

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Songs are written of sons, but daughters are left to whispers.

So gather near, friend, to hear of a daughter beyond imagining. She had the heart of a lion. Braver than a soldier. Wiser than a king. She was queen in Judah long after King David's bones had turned to dust. Long after the arrogance of Solomon's son split Israel into two nations.

When the northern tribes seized the name Israel, the southern tribes called their new nation Judah and placed David's descendants on their throne. Judah's capital was the city of Jerusalem and its God was named Yahweh. But Israel bowed to pagan gods and even led some of Judah's kings astray.

Yahweh's prophets spewed warnings, and Judah's brave daughter, the lion-hearted queen, dared ask the prophets why? When? And how will Yahweh's judgment fall?

One incomparable prophet answered, foretelling Assyria's cruelty as Yahweh's weapon of wrath. Isaiah, a man born to royalty, shouted at kings and comforted beggars. The records proclaim him husband to a prophetess and father of two sons. This is recorded, detailed, written.

But what of his daughter?

Her story begins when the northern kingdom of Israel joins forces with Aram, a neighboring nation. They attack Judah in retribution for refusing to join their coalition against Assyria. Isaiah prophesies to Judah's King Ahaz—a promise and a warning. Ahaz ignores both. His decision forever changes the life of Isaiah's daughter.

PART I



Now [Ahaz, King of Judah] was told, “Aram has allied itself with [Israel]”; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken . . .

Then the LORD said to Isaiah, “Go out, you and your son [Jashub], to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool. . . . Say to him, . . . ‘Don’t be afraid . . . because of the fierce anger of . . . Aram and [Israel]. . . . This is what the Sovereign LORD says:

“‘It will not take place . . .
[but] if you do not stand firm in your faith,
you will not stand at all.’”

Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, “Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

But Ahaz said, “I will not ask . . .”

Then Isaiah said, “. . . The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since [Israel] broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria.”

❧ Isaiah 7:2–4, 7, 9–13, 17 ❧

I

The men of Israel took captive from their fellow Israelites who were from Judah two hundred thousand wives, sons and daughters. They also took a great deal of plunder, which they carried back to Samaria.

—2 Chronicles 28:8

732 BCE (Spring)

Judean Wilderness

My friend Yaira said to be brave—but why? Brave or scared, we kept marching. She told me to be a big girl, not to cry, but I’m only five, and I’ve seen big men crying. The raw brand on my arm throbbed and smelled like burning meat. I lost count of the days we’d been marching in the desert. Long enough that the sun baked blisters all over me.

These Israel-soldiers called us “captives.” They whipped the ones who walked too slowly or cried too much. The woman in front of me kept crying for her dead children. I guess one of them looked like me because she grabbed me sometimes, as if I belonged to her. She didn’t seem to care if we were whipped for slowing the march to wherever we’re going—somewhere in Israel. Yaira would help me push her away, but it wasn’t always quick enough, and then we were all beaten. The woman was whipped until she couldn’t fight anymore. She screamed for her children until she had no voice.

I haven’t had a voice since the Israel-soldiers attacked us in Bethlehem.

When soldiers came through the city gates, I screamed to my *abba*, but my words didn't save him. I ran into the house, crying, but my words didn't save Yaira from the soldiers who took her into the stable. They hurt her. More soldiers branded me even though I begged them to stop.

After all that, my words were gone.

"Ishma." Yaira nudged me from behind. "Eat this." My friend laid her hand on my shoulder, a small piece of bread hiding in her fist.

I shook my head. She needed it more than me.

"Take it," she whispered louder. "Before they see."

Yaira was twelve so I did what she said. I took the morsel and I ate it. The crumbs stuck in my mouth. We'd had no water since yesterday. *Please, Yahweh, give us water when we stop tonight.*

Sometimes my prayers worked. Sometimes they didn't. Mostly they didn't.

As if she knew what I was thinking, Yaira whispered again. "Every day I pray for Micah to rescue us." Her voice sounded dry like my throat. "He'll come, Ishma. I promise. He'll come. Yahweh will tell him and the other prophets where to find us."

I kept walking, glad I had no words. Yaira wouldn't like my questions. Why didn't Yahweh stop the soldiers before they killed my family? Who could ever find us among so many captives? Still, Yaira had as much faith in her brother, Micah, as she did in Yahweh. Micah was her only family because their parents died a long time ago. When he couldn't take care of her because he lived with the other prophets at their camp in Tekoa, Abba heard about Yaira and said she could live with us and serve as *Ima's* maid. Yaira said Yahweh and Micah took care of her, but it seemed to me that my family did.

My face felt prickly when I thought too much about Ima and Abba. My tummy hurt too. I missed them. Who would make my favorite bread now that Ima was gone? Who would tickle me and make me giggle like Abba did?

Back in Bethlehem I held Ima's head in my lap and watched the light leave her eyes after the soldiers speared her through. I didn't see what they did to Abba. When the soldiers dragged me out of the house, Abba was lying by the stable with the same empty eyes as Ima. The soldiers wouldn't let me say good-bye.

“Ishma, look!” Yaira pointed toward a gleaming white palace with black trimmings. It sat on a tall hill.

I’d never seen anything like it. Our house had been the nicest in Bethlehem because Abba was the chief elder, but it seemed tiny compared to the palace on the hill.

“That must be Samaria, Israel’s capital,” Yaira whispered. “Micah told me that he prophesied here with Hosea.” Her breaths rumbled loud and fast as we climbed the steep hill. We kept walking, walking, walking toward the gates of the white city.

My legs ached and I stumbled, but Yaira tugged on my arms. “Don’t stop, Ishma. We’re almost there.”

I was too tired. My legs felt like water.

“Think of something else, little one,” she said. “What was Micah wearing the last time we saw him?”

That was a silly question. Micah always wore the same thing—a dirty brown robe. Abba said all prophets wore camel-hair robes, and I asked if all prophets were as serious as Micah. Abba laughed. Micah was kind but always frowning—especially on his last visit. He shouted at Abba that we must leave Bethlehem and go to Jerusalem where we would be safe behind its high walls. Ima took Yaira and me into the courtyard, but I could still hear them shouting. Abba was angry and told Micah to leave. Yaira started to cry. I hid against Ima’s legs and wrapped her cloak around me.

I wish Abba had taken us to Jerusalem.

Finally, the captive train slowed to a stop halfway up the hill, and I fell against Yaira. I covered my face with both arms, bracing for the soldier’s whip. But they didn’t beat me.

The crowd’s spreading whispers made me curious, so I lowered my arms to get a better look at Samaria’s palace on the hill. I couldn’t see over the captives and soldiers, but they all asked the same question. “Why are they closing the city gates?” The sun hadn’t set, and we needed food, water, and clothes.

One of the captives pointed to a tall tower casting a long shadow over us. A gray-haired man dressed like Micah stood at the top and looked over the edge. He began shouting at the Israel-soldiers, and they shouted back. The

captives huddled together while the soldiers' faces got redder and they beat their fists against the air.

I curled into a ball, trying to make myself smaller. Yaira leaned over and covered me, like an imma bird covering her babies with its wings. Some of the soldiers began throwing stones at the watchtower. A sudden rumble of thunder boomed from a clear sky and shook the ground. Yaira and I trembled even after the rumbling stopped. I peeked up to the sky from beneath Yaira's arms and wondered, *Was that Yahweh's voice?*

Very slowly, she lowered her arms, knelt beside me, and grinned a little. "Yahweh fought for us, Ishma."

All around us soldiers dropped their rocks. Some guards even fell to their knees. Others backed away from the captives as if touching us might hurt them.

I tapped Yaira's arm and pointed at the man in the watchtower, shrugging my shoulders.

"His name is Oded," she whispered. "He's a prophet of Yahweh in Israel. He said the soldiers treated us shamefully and must free us or face Yahweh's wrath. The city elders will lead us to Jericho where we'll reunite with our families." She kissed the top of my head. "We must pray the soldiers listen to Yahweh and that Micah finds us in Jericho."

Soldiers rose from their knees. Some still looked angry, but many stumbled like newborn calves on unsteady legs. They slashed ropes from the captives' waists and unlocked shackles from their necks and feet. When the soldiers freed Yaira and me, she pulled me to my feet and hugged me gently, careful not to break open our wounds or sun blisters.

"We're free," she said, glancing around us. "I think we're really going to be free."

All the captives moved away from the guards—slowly, like they were drinking a bowl of hot soup, testing each sip. Could we really be released at the word of a single prophet and a rumble of thunder?

The soldiers unpacked clothing, food, and bandages they'd stolen from Judean towns, and they began passing it out to all us captives. Even the sad

woman who had lost her children smiled. Celebration spread, and one word floated on the evening breeze. “Free . . . free . . . free.”

I’d heard that word many times before, but I understood it better now. A bird flew over, and I watched it circle and play in the sky. The bird was free—like us. No ropes or chains to bind it. No soldiers to burn or beat it. But when the bird settled into its peaceful nest at the fork of two branches, I knew we weren’t the same at all. My peace died in Bethlehem, and my home had been burned.

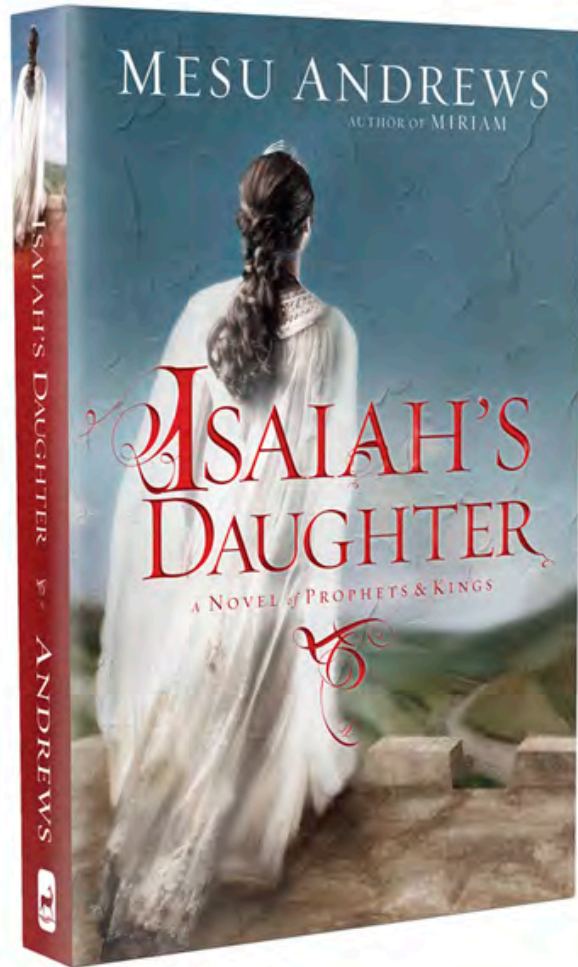
“Ishma, what is it?” Yaira tilted my chin and dried my tears. “There’s no need to cry, little one. I’m sure Micah will find us in Jericho.”

I stared into her sparkly dark eyes. She was so happy about being free, but didn’t she know? Freedom didn’t matter if we had no nest to call home. She pulled me back into a hug.

I closed my eyes and pretended to be a bird.

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