

Introduction

My writing life began in the late 1990's while studying *Women of the Bible* by Ann Spangler with a group of women at my local church. Intrigued by the chapter on Solomon's Song of Songs, I began reading that Book of the Bible every day for a year. Yep—all eight chapters, every day. At first, I didn't understand a single verse. After a few months, however, a sort of allegory unfolded. It then morphed into a Bible study, which twelve years later became the novel, *Love's Sacred Song* (Revell, 2012).

If you've read Solomon's Song of Songs, you know he writes about his "Beloved" but never names her. How could I have written an entire novel about a woman with no name? The key word is *novel*. I write FICTION, so I gave her a name with deep meaning: Arielah, Lion of God.

Though I use historical research with creative fiction to form a plot, every novel's firm foundation is always the absolute *Truth* of God's Word. The truth is—the Bible was written during a time and culture when women were devalued. They were traded and treated as little more than property. But the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob moved in the hearts of the writers of Scripture to mention certain women in key parts of His story. Some women are listed by name, some by relationship (mother of, sister of, etc.), while others are described by location or station in life (widow of Zarephath). Think how profound this decision was to include *women* in such an important historical record! The mere mention of a woman—named or unnamed—in a patriarchal record was like an exclamation point for every woman who heard that story read.

Shouldn't someone research and write about *The Nameless Ones*?

In the pages that follow, you'll read about three stories that give a voice to the obscure, forgotten, and/or nameless women who are fictional—but their *roles* in Old Testament history

are very real. All three stories in three different eras of Israelite kings, will reveal one main theme: Though she be quiet, she be mighty. Each story explores a famous (or infamous) Old Testament king and proposes a fictional woman who might have been at work behind the scenes to affect an important biblical event. Meet King Solomon in his old age, King Ahab on Mt. Carmel, and King Hezekiah who desperately needs his best tunnel digger to finish his project before the Assyrians besiege Jerusalem!

For each of the three stories, you'll find a *Note to Reader* that introduces the context and an *Author's Note* at the end to explain the important distinctions between fiction, fact, and Biblical Truth. Happy Reading, my friend!

Note to Reader

Without reading farther than the title, *The 700th Wife*, do you know which of Israel's kings this story is about? Yep, Solomon. In *The 700th Wife*, you'll meet Solomon's last love. As mentioned in the introduction, Solomon's Song of Songs was the reason I started writing, and *Love's Sacred Song* told the story of his *first* love. Both stories are fiction but have been created to explain why he might have written both Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes—two of Scripture's wisdom Books with completely opposite tones.

If you've read *Love's Sacred Song*, you know the epilogue delivers a huge shocker. *The 700th Wife* builds on that surprise ending! If you haven't read *Love's Sacred Song* and would rather not see the spoiler, skip to the second story (or pick up a copy of *Love's Sacred Song* and read it first)!

Here's the good news: You need not have read *Love's Sacred Song* to understand *The 700th Wife*! The story you're about to read stands alone as a tribute to the brave young woman who was the last to enter Solomon's harem. I've imagined her as Eliada, daughter of Yahweh's chief prophet, Ahijah. Solomon believed giving her the inauspicious privilege of becoming his 700th wife would somehow keep Ahijah from stirring sedition in the northern tribes of Israel. But we discover that neither Eliada nor her abba care so deeply for this life *under the sun*.

When Solomon hears that phrase and sees the wisdom springing from this very young Yahweh follower, he enlists her help in recording his ramblings during a time that would normally have been their wedding week. What could possibly happen locked in a wedding chamber with an old king for eight days?

Chapter One

“The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher.

‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.’

What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun?”

Ecclesiastes 1:1-3

Eliada

I waited patiently for my royal groom in his opulent chamber, feasting on the surroundings. A lavish private garden lay beyond the king’s multi-roomed chamber, but I dared not make him search for me on our wedding night. Animals’ stuffed heads covered the walls around me, staring down with ebony eyes. I shivered and tried to ignore them, digging my bare toes into the crimson-and-blue plush rug—the colors of royalty. Looking down at my plain, linen robe, I shook my head and wondered again how I got here.

King Solomon’s chamber—his 700th wife.

The thought of it propelled me off the cushioned couch and toward the double-doored balcony overlooking the Kidron Valley. The view was stunning—except for the hideous altar to Chemosh atop the Mount of Olives. Five days ago, I served stew to my abba and the other Yahweh prophets at Shiloh, living in the shadow of the Tabernacle. I felt God’s presence though His Ark had been taken to Jerusalem before my birth. Rumors said Solomon gave it to Sheba’s queen, but the prophets refused to believe it. I couldn’t believe it. I must trust Yahweh’s presence fills the Temple nearby so I can live in a harem filled with foreign women and their pagan gods.

I know my calling, Yahweh, and I will obey—even if it costs my life.

“There you are.” A deep voice startled me, and I gasped, turning to see Israel’s king at

the balcony's threshold. Tall and broad-shouldered, he held out one hand as if steadying a skittish mare. "I didn't mean to frighten you. I'm sure this has all been very unsettling."

Unsettling? I wanted to rail at him. Instead, I nodded a respectful bow and then boldly met his appraisal. "I'm not frightened, my lord. I am your obedient servant. Do with me as you please." He had every right as my king and husband.

But when he started across the mosaic tiles, my courage faltered. With every step closer, I pressed my back harder against the balcony rail. In one fluid motion, his arm found my waist, and he pulled me against him. "I can't have a bride toppling off my balcony on our wedding day." A slight grin curved his lips. "Surely, becoming my wife isn't worth throwing yourself into the Kidron."

For an excruciating moment, I had no words. His dark-brown eyes appraised me, and I took in his salt-and-pepper hair, gold crown, and kind expression. His heartbeat raced beneath the hands I pressed on his chest—a heart no longer devoted to Yahweh.

I pushed him away. "Thank you for your concern, my king, but I assure you, I won't harm myself. I'm here in obedience to my abba and to Yahweh." I hurried into the chamber and walked straight to a curtained area, slipped past the sheers, and sat on his soft mattress. "May I assume since we had no betrothal or formal wedding," I fairly shouted while he dawdled at the balcony, "that we will also dispense with the wedding week and the feast?" The prophets' wives at Shiloh had prepared me for my wedding night.

Through the sheer fabric, I saw him leave the balcony and walk toward me, hands clasped behind his back. He approached as if strolling through a garden, but my nerves wound tighter as he came near.

You're being ridiculous, Eliada. I was sixteen, not a child. I'd faced hardship before. My

ima had died giving me life, so Abba—Shiloh’s chief prophet—raised me to confront adversity with Yahweh in my heart and a chip on my shoulder. Israel’s king could take my body, but Yahweh alone held my heart.

The king pulled back a curtain with a single finger. My neck and face felt like they caught fire, and my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth.

“I’ve encountered a vast array of women’s emotions on a wedding night,” he said, “but I must say I’m intrigued by your relative calm.” He emerged through the curtains and climbed the two steps to his bed. Fluffed a few pillows. Flopped on his side. Propping his head on one hand, he said, “You mentioned obedience to Yahweh and your abba as your reasons for being here. How much of our agreement did Ahijah share with you?”

I heard the censure in his voice and stared at a king whose power reached into Egypt, Sidon, Ammon, Edom, Moab, and beyond. “If I tell you, will you try to have him killed as you did Jeroboam?”

His brows lifted, and a slow smile made him dangerously handsome. “So, you’re beautiful *and* intelligent. Should a king not defend his throne against a man like Jeroboam who incites sedition?”

“My abba anointed Jeroboam at Yahweh’s command. He *will* someday rule over ten of Israel’s tribe.”

His smile changed to clenched teeth. “What else have they told you in that prophets’ camp?”

Was I signing Abba’s death warrant by confiding my knowledge? But he’d told me to let honesty be my guide and Yahweh my Protector. I straightened my spine and rolled my shoulders back. “I know I’m your seven hundredth wife and that you have three hundred concubines. I

know you've married women from the nations with which Yahweh specifically commanded Israel not to intermarry, and that both they and their gods have seduced you into idolatry. I also know Yahweh is raising up strong enemies against you."

The king shifted from his repose to sit beside me. He'd seemed less intimidating lying down. Now, towering over me, eyes narrowed, he was terrifying. "And what of our marriage, little Eliada? Did your abba tell you why I demanded to marry the daughter of Yahweh's chief prophet?"

I refused to look away. "He said you gave no reason, but Yahweh affirmed your request, so I am here—at your mercy." Emotion warbled my last word, and I turned away, ashamed of my weakness.

The king's finger curled around my chin, drawing my eyes back to his. "Since my reason for wanting you seems the only information you lack, let me tell you. Though I would never willingly harm you, Eliada, the Yahweh prophets have become a thorn in my sandal. With you a willing hostage in my harem, I suspect they'll think twice before anointing another king to steal my throne."

Now, it was my turn to smile. Even chuckle.

He released my chin. "Do I amuse you?"

"I'm willing but not a hostage, my king. The prophets—including my abba—knew that our goodbye could be the last time we spoke under the sun."

His expression was part shock, part fury. "An abba can't offer his only child to a king and just walk away. I have many daughters, and I would kill any man who threatened a single one of them."

"Then you have no understanding of how utterly meaningless this life is, King Solomon."

His eyes rounded, but I continued before he could reply. “Your threats have no effect on me or Yahweh’s prophets because nothing in this world is as glorious as the life that awaits us in Yahweh’s presence.”

Mouth agape, the king’s silence unnerved me more than his threats. When he suddenly lifted his hand, I winced and waited for the blow. Instead, he reached for a bell and shouted, “Steward!” Then he sprang off the bed and began pacing. “Meaningless. Utterly meaningless. What do we gain from our endless toil?” He stopped and looked at me. “What was that phrase you used?”

“Your threats mean nothing—”

“No, no. When describing the last time you spoke to the prophets—our current state?” He circled his hand as if pulling the words from my lips with an invisible thread.

“Under the sun?”

“Yes, yes, that’s it! Beautiful!” He clapped as the steward appeared, and the king whirled on him. “Bring me blank scrolls—many of them—with my reeds and pigments.” The man scurried back through the door from which he’d come, and King Solomon returned his attention to me. “*Under the sun*—it describes the human condition. You are young, my little Eliada, but I find in you a deep well of wisdom.” He knelt and cradled my hand in his own. “You will help me explain for my descendants how I’ve used the wisdom Yahweh gave me to build this kingdom, yet He still raised up enemies against me.”

“I will not!” I said, pulling my hand away. “Will you blame Yahweh for your poor choices?” His small gasp and rounded eyes made him appear almost . . . vulnerable. He stood and turned his back but didn’t walk away.

What am I to do with him, Yahweh? My heart softened toward this mere man who

pleaded innocence to sins others saw so plainly. *Yahweh, give me Your love for the one You named Jedediah—beloved of the Lord—at his birth.*

I descended the elevated bed and walked around to face my husband and king. I rested my hands on the arms folded over his chest like a shield, but he refused to look at me. I whispered my plan anyway. “We will discover together how your God-given wisdom has been veiled to what truly matters, and we will write it down for your descendants who reign after you.”