

Heavenly  
Lights: Noah's  
Journey

Barbara M. Britton

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**Heavenly Lights: Noah's Journey**  
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## *Dedication*

To all women who go forth with God.



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*The Daughters of Zelophehad:*

Mahlah  
Noah  
Hoglah  
Milcah  
Tirzah

*The Tribes of Israel from Numbers 26:*

Reuben  
Simeon  
Gad  
Judah  
Issachar  
Zebulun  
Manasseh, firstborn of Joseph  
Ephraim, son of Joseph  
Benjamin  
Dan  
Asher  
Naphtali  
Levi, no inheritance of land



# 1

*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ~ James 1:17*

The camp at Gilgal  
In the Promised Land of Canaan  
Near the fortress of Jericho

Noah *bat* Zelophehad tugged her donkey farther from the ram skin tents of her tribe of Manasseh and farther from the stone fortress of Jericho. In the distance, the walls of the Canaanite city rose up, up, up, above the lush plain. How would the army of Israel lay siege to a barricaded city? No one had gone in or come out of Jericho for several Sabbaths. If any of her tribesmen dared to draw near the gates, they would be struck with arrows and rock. Boiling oil awaited warriors who neared the city of the false moon god.

The sooner Jericho fell, the sooner she and her sisters would inherit their father's land. Land where she could watch over her herds and flocks without the oversight of her kinsmen.

Noah squinted in the midday sun. From the hill outside of camp, priests carried the gold-covered Ark of her God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The

glistening seat of her God was hemmed in by warriors from the tribes of Israel. Was this their seventh trip around the pagan city? Seven. God had promised their leader Joshua a victory in battle after the seventh lap on the seventh day. *Adonai* honored all His promises. When this city of idols fell, all the people in Canaan would know her God was the One True God. And her God had bestowed a portion of this land on the daughters of Zelophehad. Five orphaned sisters who dared to ask for a forbidden inheritance.

A long, eerie howl echoed from the priests' ram horn trumpets. The hum vibrated across her skin like a shiver. Soon, with one long blast, that battle horn would call her people to war.

Did the Canaanites not realize it was futile to battle a living God? Surely, the watchmen stationed on Jericho's wall had seen her God separate the waters of the River Jordan. Her people had walked across a flooded river on dry ground. Shouldn't the Canaanites have believed in a blink? They must be blind to miracles. Or they were fools.

She stroked her donkey's damp neck. "At least our fighting men have plenty to drink thanks to your strong back. Now it is time to satisfy your thirst." She led the donkey up a slight incline. Her arms burned from filling waterskins since before dawn.

*Noooooaaaah.* A young goat trotted in her direction. The kid butted her leg with his nubby horns.

"I have no milk for you. Where is your mother?" She gently guided the kid toward the herds of resting livestock." Sheep, goats, and cattle slept in small clusters, forming mounds on the landscape for as far as she could see.

"You are wasting your time with that one." Enid, a

young shepherd boy, rose from the shade of a tall oak. "That goat has bothered me all day."

"Did he nurse?" She scanned the scattered livestock for the pesky goat's mother.

"Yes." Enid motioned toward a boulder. "His mother rests behind the rock."

"*Tovah*. Good. He is an unblemished firstborn." She rubbed the kid's head with her free hand. "Where is Jeremiah?"

Enid cocked his head toward the north. "With the breeding camel. She is laboring"

Heat surged through her body. "We have waited over a year for this birth."

"Go." He indicated the walled city and took hold of the donkey's lead. "I'd rather watch God punish Jericho than gaze upon a bloody calf."

Turning, she noticed the last of the rear guard rounding the east end of Jericho. *Oooh Ahhh*. Another ram's horn blast announced the progression of the fighting men of Israel. Her people were gathered at the edge of camp, nearest the city, waiting to shout when the army completed their final trip. Her sisters' screams would represent the family of Zelophehad well.

*Noooooaaaah*. The persistent kid butted her ankle once more.

"Your mother has food for you, not I."

Urging the young goat toward the boulder where its mother rested, she backed away slowly, and then sprinted to where the camels bedded. Her whip bumped against her hip.

In the cool shade of an acacia tree, a camel lay on its side, ankles bound, lest the animal assault Jeremiah with her hooves. Other camels foraged for grass as if

this were any other day. If they only knew that after this birth, they would witness the annihilation of a fortress.

Jeremiah knelt under the shade-giving branches, hunched near the rump of the camel. The mother's grunts and head rears did not distract him from his duty. He would hear neither Noah's calls, the slap of her sandals, nor the trumpet wail. The shrieks of the Canaanites and their judgment would be but a breeze upon his cheek. Perhaps today was not a bad day to be deaf and mute.

As she drew closer, a waft of blood and urine filled her nostrils. Her eyes watered. The air smelled like a slaughter.

She waved her arms to gain her fellow shepherd's attention.

He glanced at her, but in his eyes, the usual glisten of light brown sparks had disappeared.

On the ground, the calf's front legs and head were visible. Hazy, white film covered the babe. The mother craned her neck and snorted. Her calf's head jostled forward but did not shift farther out of the womb. Was the calf stuck?

Kneeling by her fellow shepherd, Noah brushed the thin shield of skin from the babe's nose. The wet sheet clung to her hand. She stretched out her arms and motioned a pull. Her thumb indicated she would be the one to finish the birth. Surely, Jeremiah could see her arms were slighter than a man's and would easily slip into the womb. Would he accept her help or be stubborn?

Jeremiah's brow furrowed, his arms wrapped tight around the babe. He hesitated and tugged once more. Huffing, he released his hold and nodded toward the

camel.

She grabbed the castoff birthing and rubbed it on her arms. Her stomach wretched at the feel and stench of the fluid. The sun's heat did not help the odor either. The sour taste of grain sizzled on her tongue, tightening her jaw.

Staring at her, the babe's brownish-black eyes beheld her as if she were its only hope.

"God is the giver of life. Not me." She brushed the soaked calf's head with her fingers and slipped her hands in the camel's womb. The mother attempted to kick. She mouthed a short prayer. "It will be over soon," she said to the anxious camel. Hopefully, she spoke the truth.

Slickened fur warmed her fingers as she slid her hand down the bone of the babe's back legs. A tiny hoof had burst through the birthing skin. The bend of one knee had wedged against womb and bone. As if peeling a lemon, she released the leg from the thick rind of its mother's muscle. Praise be, the womb had not ruptured.

The mother bucked its head. Jeremiah lunged and comforted his beast.

With a gentle pull, the calf sprung free and slid over Noah's knees, soiling her robe. She would need a good soak in the river to clean her garment. She removed her arms from the womb and helped Jeremiah clean the whitish sack off the calf's body. He whisked the babe to a waiting bed of straw.

New life had been birthed into the herds of the clan of Hopher. She struggled to her feet.

A gush of water and blood drained from the camel and flooded Noah's sandals. Warmth seeped around her toes.

Truly a dip in the Jordan awaited.

"Sorry about my arms." She patted the mother's rump.

Taking a small knife from her belt, she cut the mother's bindings and hopped away from the hooves. The mother stumbled to her feet and plodded after her newborn.

Sweat trickled down the side of Noah's face. She glanced at her soiled hands. Where was the washing jar? Next to the oak. She hurried to clean herself.

A long trumpet howl blasted from the direction of camp and from the direction of Jericho. Before the horn hum ended, an ear-splitting shout rose from her people in obedience to God's instructions.

Beneath her sandals, the ground quaked. The stone wall of Jericho, solid and forbidding, collapsed in a cloud of white dust.

Her knees trembled. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was here fighting for her people—His people—as He had promised.

"Praise Go—" Her heartbeat filled her throat.

A second plume of dust drifted toward her, covering the landscape in a haze. The dirt storm traveled to greet her and Jeremiah and the newborn camel. This plume was not from crumbled stone. Herds stampeded from the direction of the fallen fortress, eyes bulging, nostrils flared. Shouting a warning would be useless for Jeremiah. His ears could not hear her words.

Spooked hooves charged closer.

Her skin tingled as if the dust were fiery embers.

She needed cover. In the open fields, there was no escape from a stampede of crazed animals.

*Noooooaaah.*

## 2

Jeremiah *ben* Abishua scrubbed a hand over the tiny camel's head as its hooves rustled a bed of straw. He wished to comfort the newborn with a voice he did not have. *Why Adonai? Why have you caged my speech like a fang-toothed panther? Do I not understand most of what is spoken from the lips of others? My mind is able even if my ears are worthless save to itch in the rain.*

He glanced through the branches of the acacia tree and blinked at the sunlight. *You know my heart, Lord. Uncage me if for a day. Is it a sin to desire to be worthy in the eyes of men? In the eyes of one woman? Can't I do something noble to bring honor to my father's name besides birth a camel?* His brow furrowed. Even Noah had helped with that.

The stone barricade around Jericho loomed far from the fields. His brothers marched somewhere in the mass of men waiting to attack the city and bestow God's wrath. Warriors younger than he were allowed to fight the Canaanites while his own strength was ignored. God had promised a victory, so why couldn't he bring honor to his family in battle? His older brothers had grown wise and muscular over the years as he, too, filled his height with muscle. Yet, while now they would never challenge him to wrestle, they still treated him like a weak, unweaned child.

The babe's mouth opened as its mother licked its head. The odor of straw and wet fur filled the air under the acacia tree. He should reassure the mother camel and keep her calm, but he had no words to speak. Why couldn't he shout, "Blessed are we that Noah has thin arms."

Noah.

His chest burst to sing her name to the heavens and to sing praises to his father, Abishua, and to her eldest sister, Mahlah. Was he even worthy to ask for a betrothal? Would children from his loins be as silent as he? He scrubbed a hand through his hair. Could he bear to pass on such a burden?

The mother camel nuzzled her babe's head. The newborn scrambled to rise from the straw. Did it need to nurse?

His sandals slid as though he walked on pebbles. Had he been in the heat too long? No, he'd birthed the calf in the shade. The earth was moving under his leather soles.

Jericho? The wall.

He turned to see if the city still stood. A storm of dust covered where the fortress wall had loomed. The haze clouded the air near the outskirts of camp. Had the wind surged? His mouth gaped and filled with grit.

Livestock charged the tree line.

He grabbed the newborn camel and set it behind the tree trunk. The mother followed without a slap.

Picking up his wooden shepherd's staff, he lunged and whipped the long piece of wood in front of his position. *Whoosh. Whack.* His father's camels would not be trampled. Nor would he. *Whack.* With all his commotion, animals scattered. He would retrieve them later with—

Noah! He glimpsed her in the flatlands near the large rock.

Inside his head, he imagined her lively, smiling face. His lips parted, but he could not call to warn his shepherdess. He didn't even know the sounds to make.

*Whack!* One arm flapping like a startled crow, the other wielding his narrow-hooked staff, he raced into the chaos. The pound of his heart reverberated in his dead ears. If only the pounding inside his chest was loud enough to scare the closest beast.

Pushing frightened sheep out of his way, he coughed as dust filled his nostrils. He spat dirt from his mouth and hastened onward. He had to save the woman who made life worth living.

He had to save Noah.

### 3

Noah's ears thrummed with the thunder of hoof falls. Dusty air strangled her words. *Cover*. She must find a fortress of her own so as not to get trampled. Sheep and cows galloped in a mass of panic, eyes bulging as if possessed. Their jaws hung open, emitting clipped cries.

She yanked her whip from her belt and let it hang from her fingertips. The boy, Enid, stood like a sculpted idol near the boulder. Why wasn't he diving behind the rock?

Jeremiah rushed toward the stampede. He lashed his carved staff, diverting the rush of livestock from the camels.

He would never reach her, or Enid, with all the chaos. With his strength, he could fend off stragglers heading toward the acacia grove, but he could not stop a crazed herd.

"Enid," she shouted, dust settling on her lips. "The rock."

The boy did not flinch.

*Noooooaaah.*

Her kid's bleat was but a whisper in the beat of hooves. He, too, needed to shift behind the boulder and closer to his mother stationed behind the large stone.

She had to shift the lead animals away from Enid and save her clansman.

Her whip shot out. *Crack.*

Rearing, a lead ram briefly slowed his charge. Sheep scurried around the ram.

She darted toward Enid.

*Crack. Whoosh. Crack.*

Animals closest to the whip veered east, except a stupid ox. The plow beast barreled straight toward her, undeterred by the pack's swerve.

"Move." She shoved Enid in back of the boulder and stooped to rescue her confused goat. Her sandal caught in a divet of dirt. She stumbled. Her heart stuttered so fast, she thought it would soar out of her robe and thump onto the soil.

The sound like a *hish* of wind rushed at her side.

*Thump.*

"Ahh." Falling backward, she almost turned right around. A sting radiated from her hip to her thigh as she willed herself to stay standing.

"Stupid ox." The animal wouldn't move when she wanted him to, and now he was sprinting like a rabbit. She set her goat, wide-eyed and death-still, onto the ground and grasped her whip-wielding arm. Praise God. At least she had been knocked behind shelter. Hah! Laughter threatened to spill from her lips. Mad laughter. She might be safe, but where were the herds? How would she manage livestock for her sisters if their best breeding animals were lost, killed, or captured?

Pressing a hand to her hip, she rose to her full height and surveyed the outskirts.

"You're hurt?" Enid leapt from his crouch behind the mother goat.

She shaded her eyes from the unrelenting sun.

“The blood is from the birth. I believe I’m bruised. That is all. I am blessed that ox is old, and I am fast on my feet.”

Another riveting hum reverberated through the air close to the crumbled wall of Jericho. Few livestock remained to be frightened by the horn. Or perhaps the bravest beasts were the ones wandering calmly in the shade. Since most of the animals had stampeded past, danger waned in the fields, but the fighting men of Israel were beginning their assault on the city.

Though, today, fighting Canaanites might be simpler than fighting four-legged beasts. God’s army went before the tribes of Israel into the city. A victory over Jericho was certain. The outskirts were deserted except for a few shepherds, and God was not rounding up her livestock.

“We should pray for our fighting men, for the siege has begun. Our kinsmen battle swords and arrows, not sheep.”

Enid nodded and closed his eyes.

Lifting her arms to the sky, Noah prayed. “Lord, protect our warriors, Your warriors. May Your judgment be swift upon the city.” Why did conquering God’s Promised Land have to be so difficult? Taking possession of her father’s land couldn’t come soon enough.

Jeremiah stomped toward the rock with his shepherd’s staff raised shoulder-high. His dark eyes surveyed the area around the boulder. When his gaze fell upon her, his brow furrowed. She could plant wheat in those grooves. He halted and tapped his leg.

She held up her hands and then secured her whip. “I am bruised.” She shook her head. “Nothing more.” As she shifted, pain coursed through her thigh. Curse

that ox.

Her brooding shepherd scrubbed a hand over his stubbled chin. Every flicker of brown in his eyes beheld her. She forced a smile to fill his stare.

"Truly. I am tougher than an ox." She flexed her arm.

He pressed his lips together and studied her leg.  
*Don't flinch or falter.*

A soft bellow sounded from the direction of the acacia tree.

Jeremiah could not hear it, nor could he see the babe at his back.

His newborn camel stumbled as it attempted to walk. That burden of an ox waited not far off. Had it charged the trees? She fisted her hand.

*God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, may it be a sore limb on the babe and not a broken bone.*

If the camel's leg was broken, Abishua would blame his son. The mute. The shepherd. His warrior sons could do no wrong.

Blame would also befall Zelophehad's strong-willed shepherdess. A girl whispered to be too weak to handle feisty livestock. Her father never believed she was too feeble for her position. She waved her hand at Jeremiah to catch his attention and then pointed at the camels.

Jeremiah turned and flinched. He sprinted toward the tree.

"Enid, see that the animals which are left behind are safe." Her voice shot out loud and definite.

"Now?" The boy's question was but a squeak.

Her young kinsman had been tending livestock for two years, but at ten years of age, he still needed his ability praised.