

Jerusalem  
Rising: Adah's  
Journey

Barbara M. Britton

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**Jerusalem Rising: Adah's Journey**  
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Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

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[www.pelicanbookgroup.com](http://www.pelicanbookgroup.com) PO Box 1738 \*Aztec, NM \* 87410

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**Publishing History**

First Harbourlight Edition, 2017

Electronic Edition ISBN 978-1-61116-938-6

Paperback Edition ISBN 978-1-61116-940-9

**Published in the United States of America**

## *Dedication*

To my parents, who love me and encourage me. I am blessed to have such wonderful role models.

## *Acknowledgements*

This book would not have been possible without the help of so many people. My family has been my cheering section throughout my publishing journey. I am blessed to have their love and encouragement.

A big thank you goes to my editor, Megan Lee, who corrects my mistakes, and champions my stories, and to Nicola Martinez for her continuing support of my writing and for her wise Christian leadership at Pelican.

My marvelous critique partner, Betsy Norman, was at it again. She makes me a better writer and she is a wonderful friend. The Barnes & Noble Brainstormers keep me focused on my stories and are a highlight of my week. Thank you, Jill Bevers, Liz Czukas, Sandy Goldsworthy, Karen Miller, Betsy Norman, Liz Steiner, Sandee Turriff, and Christine Welman.

My Mo's Crew friends encourage me along this writing journey. Thank you, Justen Hisle, Mary Hughes, Leigh Morgan and Edie Ramer.

I have a huge support system within the WisRWA community. Thank you, Carla Cullen, Brenda Nelson-Davis, Tricia Quinnies, and Maureen Welli. Likewise, I am grateful for my friends in my SCBWI community, and the ACFW community. My church family in Wisconsin and countrywide has been a huge blessing to me as always.

And last, but definitely not least, to the Lord God Almighty, for giving me the gift of creativity and breath each day to write these stories. I am a cancer survivor, and not a day goes by that I don't praise the Lord for his healing. To God be the glory.

*Also Available*

*Providence: Hannah's Journey*  
*Building Benjamin: Naomi's Journey*



# 1

*How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations!*  
*Lamentations 1:1*

Seventeen-year-old Adah *bat* Shallum breathed deep. Deep enough to carry the pomegranate, cassia, and aloe scents from the length of her nose to the depths of her lungs. Was this fragrance a treasure or a stench? She trusted her senses. Her patience had produced a precious perfume worth several silver coins. Possibly some gold ones too. Careful not to spill a single drop, she poured her afternoon's labor into small glazed jars, and lined them one finger length from the edge of the shelf and one thumb width apart. A piece of whittled poplar closed every opening and kept her fragrance captive.

"Adah. Judith." The summons echoed down the street. A harsh inflection deepened her father's voice.

She peeked through a hole in the wall—a rough-edged reminder of Nebuchadnezzar's siege—and spied her father's forward-leaning march. Wiping her hands on a clean rag, she scurried around the acacia wood table, a centerpiece to the small space she recently called her own. She crossed the threshold of her storeroom and hastened into the dirt lane.

Judith stood across the street in the doorway to

their home, forehead furrowed, hands clasped. Did her sister think the booming call was Adah's fault?

She fingered the beads of her necklace. Her months of worries had worn the sandalwood orbs slick as sapphires.

"Girls," her father huffed, scarlet-faced. "Dress your mother. The governor is on the outskirts of the city with an escort of cavalry. We must be ready to receive him."

How could this be? Her father had not mentioned a visit, and he ruled a half-district of Jerusalem. "Did the governor not send word of his arrival?"

Her father shook his turban-wrapped head. "Make haste. I must set up a banquet." He kissed her forehead and stumbled as he approached Judith.

Adah reached out to steady him. "Stay a moment and have something to drink. Preparations can wait."

Judith rushed to aid their father. "A few sips of water and you will be ready to return."

Dashing into the cooking courtyard, Adah located a pitcher and poured water into a cup. Her father was too old to be racing across the city in such heat. A servant or neighbor could have relayed the message. But then she would not have seen the importance her father placed on the governor's visit.

She found her father in the shade of the overhang and offered him the cup. He drank as if a fire raged in his throat.

"*Shalom*, my daughters." With a deep breath and a reluctant sigh, her father gathered his robe and trudged in the direction of the temple. "Do not be idle."

What happened to the governor's messenger? A nobleman did not travel without preparations being



made for his arrival. And if her father had no knowledge of the governor's journey then he had no time to prepare an offering. Let no one say the household of Shallum was inhospitable.

Adah grasped her sister's arm. "You must tend to Mother. I have an errand in the marketplace."

"Where are you running off to now? You have been absent all day." Judith scowled. "Bread does not bake itself."

Adah wiggled her oil-infused fingers close to her sister's face. "If I had helped cook with these scents in my skin, the food would have been spoiled." *And I would have no gift to uphold our family's honor.*

Judith stilled Adah's wave and sniffed the fragrance wafting from her hand. "This is new. Pour me a small jar of your perfume and all is forgiven."

"As you wish." Adah backed across the street toward her storeroom. "And do not forget mother's embroidered sash. It was a gift from the governor."

Judith rolled her shoulders as if an insult had escaped her sister's lips. "Mother will not know one adornment from another."

"Oh, yes she will. The weaves are stored up here." Adah tapped her temple. "And arrange a robe for me. *Toda raba, sister.*"

Adah hurried up the straightest street in Jerusalem toward the temple. She passed the rubble of homes abandoned by her people. Waist-high walls and roofless dwellings marred the landscape of the City of David.

Running at a messenger's pace, she raced through a maze of streets and alleys before arriving at a small marketplace. Booths, nestled near the Horse Gate, served the priests and visitors who had coins to buy

artisan wares. Zipporah's corner station stood empty. Where was the bartering woman? Why would a merchant be absent before afternoon prayer?

She sprinted down the hill by the battered city wall to Zipporah's home and knocked on the door with an irreverent fervor. Later she would ask to be forgiven for her rudeness.

No answer came forth. Adah slumped against the worn lumber, huffing like a slave girl. Sweat pooled beneath her head covering.

"My mother is not home. She has gone to the well," said a familiar male voice.

*Praise God.* She scrambled to her feet. "Othniel, you are a vision. Hurry and help me. I have coins today."

Othniel slung his satchel near the door. The little storm of unsettled dust rising from the ground almost matched the amount clinging to his dark, curly hair. "What kind of greeting is this?"

"A hasty one." Adah shook the folds of her skirt to loosen any dirt. "Our governor is coming to Jerusalem and my father is not prepared for his arrival."

"Doesn't Nehemiah send letters?" Othniel scratched his stubbled chin. He seemed in as much of a hurry as a bloated mule.

"None that my father saw," she said.

His eyebrows raised as understanding brightened his eyes. "But someone received them?"

And she knew who. A nobleman never traveled unannounced. Her father ruled a half-district of Jerusalem, but Rephaiah also ruled a half-district, and no one caught him or his brood of sons off guard.

"Come now." Her pulse sped as if in a race. "Open the room where your mother keeps her wares and help me find a polished pearl jar. I've seen it in the

marketplace." She urged him down the alley next to his home, wishing she could give him a powerful push. "My family has need of it."

"I should warn you. I have labored in the grove." His steps still lumbered. "I smell like a dung heap."

"My nose has been in oils all afternoon. To me, you have the aroma of a blossom." She smiled big.

"Good. For the storeroom is small and I believe the gift you seek is in a cedar box on the top shelf." Othniel opened the door to a storage area near the back of his family's dwelling. As she entered, he inhaled. "Ah, is that a lily note? I do not know whether I should sleep or till the soil."

"Cassia and fruit." She sniffed her fingertips. "Though I have been stroking sandalwood." She lifted the chrysolite and wooden beads around her neck.

"That is what my trees look like. All brown. If only I had olives as green as your gems." He laughed short and loud, but desperation strangled his normally lighthearted tone.

Her smile vanished as he turned toward the shelves of trinkets. The once-full room held only a few tapestries, beaded veils, and decorated pottery, items easily disregarded when a family needed to eat.

While Othniel searched for the crate that held her jar, she stuffed loose strands of hair under her head covering. With her sprint through the market, she probably resembled a ruffled bird.

He held up the emblazoned wooden case as if it were a king's scepter. "This is what you have need of?" He opened the carved cedar box and revealed the tiny pearl bottle with the gold stopper.

She practically leapt into the air and grabbed the prize. Producing three silver coins from her pouch, she

said, "I am in your debt."

He did not reach for her payment. "No. I am in yours. For my mother asks less than this sum."

"This item is worth every coin. Please, take them." She pushed the silver into his palm.

As his fingers closed, his calluses weighed heavy upon her skin.

If only Othniel's family could keep her payment, but she knew these same pieces of silver would come back to the city officials for a land tax. She turned to leave and remembered her upbringing. "How is your family? Does your vineyard fare any better than the grove?"

"We have already discussed a dung heap." He started to grin but his smile faltered. "Without water the vines wither. And without money, my father withers. All will be lost if it does not rain soon."

"Then I will pray for our God to open a rain cloud above your lands." Truly she would, for she knew Othniel and his brothers worked harder than most, but the drought did not reward their labor or increase their family's income.

"I hope *Adonai* listens to you. Now go and fill that jar." He closed the door behind them. "If it is with the scent you are wearing then it will be a priceless gift."

Her cheeks warmed from his praise of her perfume. Othniel was one of the few who supported her trade. When he found a flower in the fields it appeared on the table in her storeroom.

She back-stepped quickly down the alley. "Tell your mother I am grateful."

He held up the coins and nodded. "This payment eases the worries of a fifth son. Perhaps you are my vision today."

"*Shalom*, my friend." She would be no one's vision if she did not hurry home, remove her oil-stained clothes, and be dressed in time for the banquet.

She ran down the straight street through the middle of the city. Why couldn't there be a breeze this afternoon?

After arriving home, she donned a striped malachite robe, while her mother waited in the front quarter of their home. When all the ladies of the house were dressed, Adah and Judith took their customary positions on each side of their mother. Adah stood on the left and Judith stood on the right. Each daughter supported the wife of Shallum as they made the journey to the officials' chamber. Guiding her mother came naturally now. Rocks, juts in the street, and wayward goats were warned about without a thought.

"I wish we were not rushed this day," Adah said as they neared the columned meeting place adjacent to the temple. She briefly let go of her mother and stuffed a stubborn ringlet under her head covering. Her other hand clutched the cedar perfume box. "Two priests are at the entrance. Straight ahead of Judith."

Her mother nodded to the priests, and after a few strides she said, "Let us uphold your father's name and see that the governor does not forget our household."

"Like he forgot to announce his visit?" Judith's voice rumbled with contempt.

Adah and Judith exchanged a raised-eyebrow look.

Inside the meeting room, finely robed magistrates, noblemen, and ephod-laden priests milled around the governor as if he were the cow and they his freshly birthed calves. Even though her father had left early, Rephaiah, the other ruler, had already stationed

himself at the governor's right hand.

The procession of greeters filled the center aisle of the main room. Rephaiah's sons, all eight of them, hovered in back of Adah, Judith, and her mother. Their breath on the back of her neck felt like a storm wind.

A waft of spit-cooked meat caused her stomach to rumble.

Judith glared at her. Who could hear such a small belly gurgle with all the clamoring of the people?

"Five paces and we will stand in front of Nehemiah." Adah glanced at the mosaic on the wall and smiled as if her conversation were polite banter.

"How low does my sash hang?" her mother asked. "I do not want my knee to catch when I bow."

Adah eyed her mother's robe. "The beading ends below your hip. You will not fall at the governor's feet."

"Do you not trust my abilities?" Judith took a step and eased their mother forward.

"Of course I do, dear." Mother patted Judith's hand. "But I have not seen the governor for a while and not since—"

"My wife, Elisheba." Her father's arm swung wide.

Her mother bobbed. "And my twin daughters, Judith and Adah." She hung back and let Judith give her greeting to the governor. After all, she was the oldest daughter if only by a few screams.

Nehemiah stood shoulder-to-shoulder with her father, not towering, but with a stature to command authority. He was not old, but somehow his face held grooves far deeper than his years. A golden fringe hemmed the governor's sleeves making his every move grand.

"Adah." Her name flew from her father's lips as though she had done something wrong.

Had she been staring? A snicker from behind stiffened her posture.

"Governor." She bent low. "My father speaks of how you have found King Artaxerxes' favor and that of his queen. The king will receive our taxes, but I hope you will see that Queen Damaspia receives this perfume as a gift from Jerusalem." She opened the tiny cedar chest and displayed the pearl vessel. "The fragrant oils were gathered not far from our wall."

Nehemiah reached to take the box. "This is truly a gift from my city. Bless you, daughter of Shallum. May the Queen remember us fondly." Holding the gift to his chest, the governor whispered a prayer. When he finished, tears glistened in his eyes. "I will send a messenger to the Queen at once. May the City of David be a delight to her as it is to all of us."

*Toda raba, Othniel.* If only he knew what his timely arrival meant to her.

Her father ushered his small family to the side of the procession so Rephaiah's sons could be paraded before the governor.

"That was the errand you had this afternoon." Judith's face glowed like a freshly oiled lamp. It seemed any insult she thought Adah had cast by leaving in a rush was long forgotten. "You could have mentioned it."

"I did not know if I would be successful, but your jar is by your bed."

Her mother sighed. "Someone describe the gift to me. I do not want to guess all night."

Adah released her steadying hold. "Take mother to sit with the women and describe the vessel. I will

serve us some drinks.”

Leaving the spacious hall, Adah headed toward a courtyard set up for the women. In a nearby tent, servants filled cups with water and wine for the coming meal. Before she reached the opened tent flaps, a cool shiver bathed her skin.

“Daughter of Shallum,” a man bellowed.

She turned to find Gershom *ben* Rephaiah, the ruler’s son, closing in on her ground. His lips were but a thin line and his eyes were those of a mourner, not a rejoicer.

Had his father finished the introductions of his eight sons already?

Gershom crossed his arms, displaying his gold rings. “Gifts are to be given by the officials upon arrival. Does the king’s household not have enough oils?”

Where was Gershom’s proper greeting? Flattery usually preceded a rebuke. She smiled at the ruler’s son, but inwardly she scolded his insult.

“You saw the perfume, then? My father had other business to attend to since the notice of the governor’s arrival was late.” She emphasized the tardiness of the announcement, even though Gershom, his father, and his brothers had not seemed flustered by Nehemiah’s visit.

“Do not fool yourself, girl.” Gershom kept a respectable distance but his voice assaulted her ears. “Whatever business Nehemiah has with Jerusalem will be dealt with by the men of this city. You have no standing here.”

Her cheeks flamed. What did Gershom care if she bestowed a present on Nehemiah? Except, perhaps, that he and his brothers had brought nothing of



importance. This night would not be ruined by this fool.

"Whatever business? You mean you do not know the governor's decrees? Perhaps you should be talking to him and not to me." She turned, waved off a servant girl, and collected three cups from a table. Her chin rose slightly as she sauntered by Gershom.

Gershom blocked her escape. "We do not have to be adversaries. Our fathers rule together."

She stepped away from him. "Apparently not at all times."

Shaking his head, he leaned in. "What a shame your father finally had children in his old age only to be cursed with two girls. I will pray he lives a long life."

Adah met his dismissive gaze and held it until he rocked back on his heels. "See to your father's dealings and leave me to my own." She cocked her head toward the door to the officials' hall. "I do believe the men are dining inside."

Gershom stomped off and almost collided with Judith as she rounded the courtyard wall.

Judith muttered an apology and let Gershom pass. "What did you say to anger him?"

"I believe it's something I did." Adah handed a cup to her sister.

Judith's eyes grew wide. "You found out the governor's business?"

"Whatever gave you that idea?"

Shielding her mouth with her cup, Judith whispered, "I heard a priest say Rephaiah and Gershom rode out to meet Nehemiah and his party."

Storms brewed in Adah's stomach. She clutched her mother's drink to her belly. "Then a notice did

arrive.”

Judith took a sip from her cup. “Not to father.”

“It will. Next time.” Adah kissed her sister’s cheek. “And there will be no more tricks. We do not know why the governor came for a visit, but secrets don’t stay hidden long. People will gossip.”

She had not heard one whisper among the booths in the marketplace as to why a palace official would arrive in Jerusalem. But as sure as she had stood before Nehemiah, the renowned governor of Judah and cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, she would find out why he came to her city. And when she found out the truth, her father and her family would be the first ones to receive her news. Sons or no sons.

## 2

Adah lay on her back, staring at the ceiling and listening to her sister's soft snores. If only she could find peace in slumber. Gershom's deceit inflamed the layers of her mind like a festering thorn. How dare he keep the governor's letters from her father? And how dare he insult her family? The birth of a daughter was not a curse. Or was it? Her father had no heir, no son to assume his position. Had she let her father down? No. She would not let her thoughts linger in shame. Whatever tasks brought the governor to Jerusalem, she would find them out and help her father get them done.

Sounds. A shuffling noise caught her attention. She listened. Someone scuffled through a front room of the house. Since her father's snore sing-songed across the hall and kept rhythm with Judith's, the late night walker had to be her mother.

*Thump.* Several soft thuds followed. *The plums.*

Adah banded a linen cloth over her hair in an attempt to tame her wayward curls and hurried to the front of the house. Her mother, dressed for a day in the courtyard, stood near a stack of cups, her hand feeling the table for something solid.

"Mother," Adah whispered. She touched her mother's sleeve. "Morning will not come for several hours. You must rest."

"Oh." Her mother blinked rapidly as her mouth

curved downward in an unhappy smile. "I saw so much light I thought it must be morning."

"Your eyes are deceiving you. Can't you sleep?" Adah knew this was a useless question.

With wide eyes and drumming fingers, her mother looked ready to prepare a feast.

"I will sit in here so as not to disturb your father."

And do what? Blindness eliminated a host of duties. With Gershom's words stuck in her head and now her mother's restlessness keeping her awake, sleep eluded Adah. She might as well breathe in the tepid breeze blowing through the city. Who knows? A new fragrance might bloom in the night. "Why don't we take a stroll?"

Her mother shook her head. "The city can be dangerous."

"Father is known by anyone who may venture out. Besides, no one will chance a crime with the governor in the city." She stroked her mother's arm. "If we take a walk you may grow tired and be able to nap before morning prayer. I certainly cannot sleep after all the festivities." *And insults.*

Her mother gazed into Adah's eyes as if her sight had been restored. "We will not go far."

Adah rounded up the scattered plums and then slipped on a cloak and sandals. She lit a lamp and led her mother to the street. They headed west toward the Valley Gate. With the city wall in ruins, they could saunter as far as they desired.

"What would I do without my daughters?" Her mother's praise held a hint of pity.

Adah squeezed her mother's arm. "You would do just as well with sons."

"They would be snoring alongside your father."

"Like Judith?"

Her mother laughed.

Adah giggled and beheld the stars overhead. Were they brighter in the middle of night? Or did the battered wall and burned gates not compete for their splendor?

A shepherd with lambs as steady on their feet as a sleepy child herded his livestock down a narrow lane. They passed an elderly man carving by moonlight. Near the gate, a few empty barterers' booths faced the road.

Her mother stopped and breathed deep. "Cloves. And pepper. We must be near the merchant's tables."

"We can turn back." Adah laced her fingers in her mother's and gently nudged her arm.

"A little farther. I'd forgotten how the night smells." Her mother's face tipped toward the sky. "We're near a gate. I can smell the charred post."

What remained of the burned-out Valley Gate loomed before them.

No unusual scents piqued Adah's curiosity. "I wish I had inherited your nose."

"You did. The perfume you gave the governor was beautiful." Her mother sighed. "I could smell it on my arm all through the banquet."

"That was chance. And too many tries." Adah shifted a rock from her mother's path. "Maybe one day I will earn your reputation with oils."

Ridges deepened on her mother's brow. Had reminiscing caused her mother pain? Adah's storeroom had once been a thriving business for her mother.

"Do you hear something?" Her mother asked.

Adah scanned the empty marketplace. "I do not