



# CENTURION

L.D. Alford

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*Against thee, thee only, I have sinned  
and done what displeases thee,  
so that thou mayest be proved right in thy charge  
and just in passing sentence.  
In iniquity I was brought to birth  
and my mother conceived me in sin;  
Yet, though thou hast hidden the truth in darkness,  
through this mystery thou dost teach me wisdom.*

PSALM 51:4-6

# One

Naomi walked swiftly across the scree hillsides toward the village. The sun was as merciless as her tormenters. She shaded her eyes. She shouldn't be going for water during the hottest part of the day, but it was the only time she could approach the well and find no other women there.

The women—pah. She had no time for them, and they had too many opportunities to harass her. Their cold, hard stares were painful enough, and though Naomi had brave intentions, she could not make herself face them. Hot tears pressed between her eyelids. She shook her head and dashed them like twin raindrops into the dust. Alone in her small house she had time enough for sorrow; she didn't need to display her grief to the world. She didn't need to tell her tormenters they succeeded.

Perhaps with the newest scandal in the village, they would forget her. Naomi had heard the rumors before and had not believed them; the youngest daughter of Eli had conceived a child. Eli's daughter was the last girl anyone would have imagined caught in that sin. She was always so disconcertingly truthful—and naive. Who would have thought her capable of it? Especially when her prospects were so good. The betrothal was fresh on her and her bridegroom had not taken her to the marriage bed. He had not even had time to prepare the bed, and no one knew whose child she carried.

Naomi supported her own swelling belly. No one knew whose child Eli's daughter carried, but unfortunately, everyone knew the father of Naomi's child. Naomi was the most beautiful girl in Natzeret—perhaps in all of the Galil. Had she not been chosen out of all of them to be the wife and consort of Abenadar Iustus, the Roman emissary to the court of Herod the Great?

Naomi had lived the past ten years like a great gentlewoman. All that time, she served as a lady in Herod's court, and she lived with Abenadar Iustus in a large house in Yerushalayim. She learned to speak Latin and Greek, and unlike most women, she could read and write a little. She had servants and slaves to wait on her. And for the whole time, her family and countrymen despised her as a whore and a traitor.

Naomi knew Abenadar Iustus had a family and a wife back in Rome, though that knowledge came to her gradually. She was once as naive as Eli's daughter. The existence of the Roman's family was well-known. She was foolish to believe it could have been otherwise. All of the highborn Romans who served the Emperor in Palestine took local "wives." Naomi refused to use the word *concubine*.

When the officials' appointments came to an end, they were recalled to Rome and new responsibilities. They left their heathen countrywomen and gladly returned to their rich and cultured Roman brides.

Naomi knew all this, and as the time approached for Abenadar Iustus to leave her, she tried every wile, at first, to convince him to stay. Then she begged him to take her with him, if only as a slave. Of course, he could not—would not—take her, an uncultured countrywoman who would be entirely out of place even as a slave in his house in Rome. Naomi could hear the contempt in his voice as he held her in his arms and conceived his child upon her. In ten years, she could not produce a child for him, and now, the Lord, Adonai, blessed be He, punished her with the blessing of a child.

Tears again threatened to fall, but she valiantly cut them off. Though he had left her, Naomi still loved Abenadar Iustus. She was still a young woman. She still held to notions of love. Yet he condemned her to the life that she, without realizing, had chosen ten years before—the life of an outcast among her own people.

Ahead of her, the village of Natzeret swam in the midday heat. Palms and brush surrounded the well at the edge of the small town. As Naomi stepped into the path and neared the place, she caught sight of another woman already there. Naomi stopped short and started to turn. Better to wait until there was no one at the well. Better to go hungry and thirsty than to face the taunts of the wives and unmarried women.

But then Naomi recognized the slight figure bending over the well; it was Eli's daughter.

The woman was very young and small. She had long dark hair that flowed in a heavy braid out from under her veil, a petite face, and large brown eyes. Naomi thought her pretty, but not nearly as beautiful as she. The girl barely showed her pregnancy, but her small belly pressed out through her robes, displaying for all the world her abomination.

Naomi nearly turned around in the path again. She did not want to gloat, and she understood the solitude the girl desired...knew what she must be feeling. But Naomi was also hot and the clay pot on her head was heavy. She didn't want to make this trip again today. Neither did she want to face this young woman. Who knew what the daughter of Eli thought of Naomi?

While Naomi stood in the path, still undecided, the young girl at the fountain glanced up and noticed her. The girl cocked her head.

Naomi instantly made up her mind. She could take any taunt from this one and turn it back twice.

The girl smiled as Naomi walked cautiously to the well. "Good day, Naomi."

"Good day, daughter of Eli." Naomi set her pot beside the open well.

"I am called Miryam. Surely you remember me, Naomi? I am the betrothed of Yosef."

*Miryam*, thought Naomi, *the cuckold of Yosef. That was surely not Yosef's child.* But she only acknowledged Miryam with a nod.

"Let me help you with the water bag," said Miryam. She pushed the leather bag back into the well and brought it up heavy with water.

Naomi held her pot under the bag, and together, she and Miryam poured the water into the pot.

"Thank you," said Naomi pertly.

"Here, cool yourself from the bag," and Miryam held it for Naomi.

Naomi drank deeply until her thirst was slaked; then she splashed the dust from her face and hands.

"Why are you here now, Miryam?" Naomi wished she could take back her words the moment they were said.

"For the same reason you come at noon, Naomi." The girl hung her

head. "I can't stand the cruel ridicule of the women."

"Yes. I'm sorry. Thank you for helping me with the water." Naomi touched her pot. "I haven't seen you for a while."

"I was visiting my cousin Elisheva."

"She is expecting a child, isn't she?"

"Yes," Miryam laughed, "a child in her old age, and Z'kharyah cannot speak. He cannot praise the Lord, Adonai, blessed be He, with his own lips."

Naomi had heard the story. It was reported throughout the country. How Z'kharyah was the priest offering the daily incense in the Holy Place, who could not bless the people because he was struck dumb. "When is she due?"

"In a few months. Z'kharyah still cannot speak, but we are blessed with an abundance." She stroked her swelling belly with her palm.

Naomi glanced at Miryam to see if she spoke with sarcasm, but the girl just stared back at her with large, trusting eyes.

"When are you due?" asked Miryam.

"Soon. One or two months." Naomi glanced again at the girl to see if she spoke with mockery.

"Who will be with you?"

"No one. I will give birth by myself."

Miryam touched Naomi's arm. "You will not be alone. I will be there, and I will ask Puah to midwife you."

"Puah will not come."

"I will ask her. May I visit you, Naomi? I am alone, too. Although Yosef is kind, and he helps me, he is a man and doesn't wish to speak about women's things."

Naomi almost sat in the dust. "You would visit me?"

"Yes, anytime." Miryam paused. "You may visit me too."

"No, daughter of Eli, I cannot visit you. You, like me, are disgraced already. You don't need the taint of Rome in your house."

Miryam glanced up in gratitude. "I will meet you at the well tomorrow at this time and then we will go to your home."

Naomi's eyes filled with tears. "Yes, Miryam, daughter of Eli, come visit me anytime you wish."

Miryam looked down at the ground, then took up the heavy pot

and turned toward the village. “I would stay longer, but Yosef expects me. Shalom, Naomi.”

“Oh, thank you, Miryam, thank you,” Naomi whispered as Miryam walked away. Then she said loudly, “Shalom.”

Miryam paused a step and slowly nodded, then continued into the village.

Naomi picked up her water pot, set it on her head, and wept all the way back to her small house.



*But thou art he who drew me from the womb,  
who laid me at my mother's breast.  
Upon thee was I cast at birth;  
from my mother's womb thou hast been my God.*

PSALM 22: 9-10



## Two

The next day, Miryam followed Naomi to her house. Naomi lived in a small clay-brick hut set precariously on the side of the hill near the approach to Natzeret. Though only a stone's throw from the road, the house was well hidden from the highway that ran from Natzeret to Kanah. The roof of the building was made of sticks with palms for thatch. That didn't look, to Miryam, like it would keep out the rain or much of the summer heat.

The hut reminded Miryam of one of the booths for Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles. She remembered, as a child that she wanted the Festival of Booths to never end. It was her favorite celebration. As an adult, she couldn't imagine living in Naomi's boothlike house every day without end.

Naomi pulled back the reed mat covering the doorway and waited until Miryam entered. The inside of the hut was very different from its rude exterior. It was small but swept clean, and tiny refinements accented its bleakness. The dirt floor was covered with fine mats and a small colorful rug. On the cooking hearth sat one copper and two bronze pots. In the corner was a low cot covered with rushes and a wool covering.

Miryam said a blessing as she entered the house that Naomi acknowledged with a nod. Miryam sat on the floor and Naomi eased herself heavily onto the cot.

As Naomi sat down she said, "The child is heavy within me. I hope it is a boy. I need a strong arm here to keep me safe."

"It is not safe for you here?" returned Miryam.

"Nowhere is safe for me, daughter of Eli. I have no man to keep me and no family to look after me."

"How do you live?"

“Abenadar Iustus left me with enough money to keep me fed. I have some comforts. I make things from reeds and clay to sell in Kanah and when I visit Tzippori. It is not much, but it is enough.”

“What of your child. When it is born, what will you do?”

“I will live here. Abenadar Iustus promised me the child would be a citizen of Rome.” She spat. “It is enough. That is all he left me.”

“I have dreamed a dream about your child, Naomi. Would you like to hear it?”

“Oh yes, Miryam.” Naomi bent over as much as she was able and moved closer to the girl. She had often heard about Miryam’s dreams. Many said they foretold the future, but others now thought they represented only the ramblings of misspent youth.

Miryam stared at her feet. “I don’t know whether you will think much of my dreams. Once the village awaited them as though they were important. They don’t listen to me anymore.”

“What was your dream? Please tell me. I will listen to your dreams though no one else will.”

“Very well.” Miryam’s bright eyes turned to her. “I will tell this one to you. I saw your child and mine. We will both have boys. They will know each other, and they will be fast friends. They will be as different as the day and the night. Yours will be fair and handsome and mine ruddy and dark. They will be bound in life in some way I cannot understand. There is some greatness for them both. Your boy will be great. I saw him wearing a helmet.” She paused. “What do you think that means?”

Naomi sat back again and held her belly. “The child leapt,” she said with amazement. “I do not know, daughter of Eli. Do your dreams sometimes come true?”

Miryam looked down at the mats on the floor. “They have always come true before. Shall I tell you the dream that no one believes?” She stopped. “That is, everyone but Yosef and Elisheva.”

Naomi smiled at her. “Tell me your dream.”

“It wasn’t really a dream. I saw an angel who said I was to bear the Son of the Highest.”

“Of the Lord, Adonai, blessed...” Naomi stared at Miryam suspiciously. “Of Adonai?”

“So the angel said.” Miryam looked up at her. “I have never known a man.”

“Never?”

“Never.” Her voice became very quiet. “I don’t even understand what it is to know a man. Yosef will not tell me.”

Naomi’s mouth was dry. “I will not tell you either.”

Miryam smiled. “I was not seeking to know. I just wanted to tell you the dream.”

“You should not be here, Miryam, daughter of Eli. I am a defiled woman. You are something else.”

“You don’t have to believe me.”

“I am not sure that I do, but my child moved at your words.”

“That is what Elisheva said. She has a child in her old age. I have a child and I am not sure where he came from. Except what the angel told me. That is enough for me. Now you are the only woman who will speak to me in Natzeret.”

“What? Won’t your mother speak to you?”

“No.” Miryam’s voice was forlorn. “You are not evil, Naomi.”

“I was foolish...I was a foolish girl. I will pay for my foolishness. I am paying for it.”

“Would you repeat it?”

Naomi’s eyes glazed for a moment as she contemplated the city of Yerushalayim far away; the events of ten years seemed to pass across her sight. “I’m not sure,” she answered truthfully. “But if I could live it all over...if I could live it over, I might do it all again.” She glanced down, shamefaced.

“We are all foolish in some way. Adonai blesses us nonetheless, and we live on. Ah, show me how you weave your mats. I would learn, and I could tell you of the events in Natzeret.”

The silence stretched out between them. Naomi absently took down her latest work and bent over it.

Miryam got to her knees and watched Naomi’s nimble fingers as they quickly built up the fine mat. “This is much better than anything made in Natzeret,” Miryam said.

“It is the style of the court.”

“I will bring my own rushes tomorrow. Will you help me learn?”

“Yes, and if you bring cloth and thread, I will show you how to sew a fine garment and decorate it in the court style. I have no money for cloth myself.”

“I have cloth and thread. I will bring some to you if you will teach me. I could sell it in the marketplace. That is, if I could learn to sew as well as you.” Miryam examined again the fine hangings in the small house.

“I will teach you, Miryam.”

The women both hunched over the mat, and Naomi showed Miryam how she made the reeds take on a design. They spoke of the village and many other things until the late afternoon.

As Naomi saw Miryam out of her house, the younger woman said, “I will come again tomorrow. And I will talk to Puah.” She put her hand on Naomi’s arm. “You are like the Naomi of the past, and I will be like your Ruth.”

Naomi bowed slightly and smiled for the first time in a long time.

As she watched Miryam make her way down the side of the hill, she thought to herself, *Miryam is as innocent as a child. She could have known no man. A rape? No, she knows nothing of consort between men and women. An angel told her?*

But Naomi could not laugh. Perhaps it was as the girl said.



Miryam, her eyes large and bright in the darkness, held on to Naomi’s shoulders. The firelight and lamplight were barely enough to illuminate Naomi’s small house. Old Puah coaxed her. She touched Naomi’s spread thighs and spoke gentle words that Naomi only caught with half her mind. The pain, real and imagined, was all she could contemplate.

Miryam whispered to her, but Naomi couldn’t understand those words either....

Finally, in a moment, it was done. The pain and pressure gave way to an abrupt release and the old woman smiled. There was a hearty cry. “It is a boy,” she cackled, and Naomi understood that.

“A boy!” shouted Miryam.

Puah tied off the umbilical cord and placed the child on Naomi's stomach. Crying for joy and pain, Naomi took the child to her swollen breast. "A boy," she mumbled. She arched slightly as her womb expelled the afterbirth, but her thoughts were only for the child. He nuzzled her breast and suckled her.

"He is a strong one," said Puah.

"A boy, Miryam. A boy, just as you dreamed. And he is fair and beautiful."

"They are all beautiful," said Puah. Her old voice seemed to crack. Puah took her flint knife and cut the umbilical cord. "There is much blood in this one." She put the cord and afterbirth in a small burial urn.

"Is that good?" Naomi asked. She could barely get out the words for her fatigue.

Puah put Naomi's knees together and gently lowered her legs. "Yes it is very good. He is a strong boy." She glanced around the room. "I have done all I can. Send for me if you bleed. I cannot help you with the child much."

"I understand, Puah. Thank you," Naomi said wearily.

Miryam let down Naomi's shoulders and made her comfortable; then she held open the reed door covering for Puah. "If I ask, you will help, won't you?"

"Yes, yes, if you ask, Miryam. Anything for you. Everything I can do is done for now. Naomi—" Puah spat the name, then spoke more kindly—"Naomi won't need much. She is strong. The child is strong. There is not much more we can do. It is Adonai, blessed be He, who heals and saves."

"Yes," said Miryam.

The mat door covering dropped as Puah took her lamp and walked down the hill.

The inside of the house was much darker now. Miryam put another piece of dung on the fire.

Naomi gazed at the nursing child; he was almost asleep.

"Is he cold?" said Miryam.

"No, but help me swaddle him."

Naomi held the child up a little from her body as Miryam wrapped the wide strip of cloth around him.

Naomi changed her position on the cot and moaned a little. “It still hurts, but it is much better than a little while ago.” She pointed toward the far wall. “Miryam, I made that mat for Puah. Take it to her tomorrow. She will know who sent it, but don’t remind her; I want her to accept it.”

“It is beautiful.” Miryam stroked the reed mat. “She will accept it. If only to sell.”

“That is good too. Thank you for bringing her.”

“I told you she would come.”

“I didn’t believe you.” Naomi turned her head toward the fire.

“Did you believe my dream?”

“I hoped it was true.”

“What do you think now?”

“It is true. Do you have more dreams?”

Miryam was evasive. “It is late, and you must sleep. I will come in the morning with food and to help you with the child.”

“Just one more word before you go. What else have you dreamed?”

“It is late, but I will tell you one other thing that Adonai, blessed be He, has shown me. I needed to help you. I would have anyway, but I needed to see your child’s birth. I know I will give birth without any woman to help me. I am afraid, but now I know how it will be.”

Naomi grasped Miryam’s arm. “I will be with you, and Puah will be there.”

Miryam shook her head. “I have dreamed it. There will be Yosef and no one else. In the village, girls are not allowed in the birth chamber. You know we are taught nothing of this, and we see nothing. This is a mystery of womanhood held from us until we are ready—until we are wives. Your child’s birth has let me know what I must do. I am ready now.”

Miryam put her veil around her thin face. “I don’t want to leave you, but I must see to my household. I have no one to take care of things while I am gone. I will be back in the morning. Shalom.”

“Thank you, Miryam. Shalom,” said Naomi as she nodded off to sleep.

The wind blew cool through the doorway for a moment, and then it was cut off as the reed covering fell back into place.



*Thou art my hope, O Adonai,  
my trust, O Adonai, since boyhood.  
From birth I have leaned upon thee,  
my protector since I left my mother's womb.*

PSALM 71: 5-6

## Three

Naomi finally screwed up enough courage to visit Puah. Miryam had not come to see her for many days, and the time for Miryam to give birth was very close. Naomi still would only approach Natzeret in the middle of the day, the time when she was sure most of the women would be inside, and the streets less populated.

She carried her babe, Abenadar, at her breast. He was already a large boy. She could not have wished for a better child. He was fair, but his personality seemed almost brooding. His light gray eyes would follow her quietly as though they already comprehended something of her disgrace. He seldom cried.

At Naomi's first call, Puah came to the door.

"What do you want?" said Puah. When she noticed the child, she smiled and her voice gentled. "Well, he looks healthy. What do you need, Naomi?"

"I came to ask after Miryam."

"Ah. She is gone."

"Gone. She didn't say anything to me."

"She is gone. Haven't you heard about the census? No, I suppose you don't hear much about such things. There has been a decree from that Roman."

Naomi knew she meant the Emperor Augustus.

"He has called for all men to register in their own cities and be taxed," Puah continued. "Yosef was born in the village of Beit-Lechem. He has taken Miryam with him, and, you know, the trip to Beit-Lechem and back takes almost a week."

"But she is so close to her time."

"That doesn't mean anything to the Romans," Puah hissed. "They would as soon we all die, much less a woman with child. She is riding



on Yosef's donkey. The old fool cuddles her as though she were a virgin bride."

"They will be back soon?"

"As soon as they register and pay, I suppose." Puah wiped her hands on her robe. "That is all I know, Naomi of the hill. Here." She peered up and down the street and shrugged. "Since you are here...let me see him." Puah gently took the child from her arms. "Ah, he is a big one." She stiffened. "He is not circumcised! What will you do to this child?" All the while, Puah held the boy, crooning to him.

"No one..."

"Yes, I know no rabbi will circumcise a Roman child. Well, perhaps that is best. Perhaps he will be a friend to us, no."

Puah smiled at Naomi and handed the child back to her. "Miryam has gone with Yosef. They will be back in two Shabbats. Don't have such a long face; your friend has not gone forever. Now I did have one question for you. About the mat?"

"What was wrong with it?"

Puah put out her hands. "Nothing was wrong with it. I would like more." She opened the door a little wider, and Naomi saw the mat she made on the floor beside the hearth. "Every woman in this village told me how beautiful they think it is, and I cannot figure how you put those designs in it. Since I can't make it, I must buy from you."

"You would buy from me?"

"Don't look at me that way. Are we not of the same clay? Are you not a woman of the Galil? Make me another one like it, and I will try to save you a trip to Kanah. Well, what do you say?"

"Yes, oh yes." Naomi took her hand. "Thank you, Puah."

"I will soon be the one thanking you, Naomi."

Naomi bowed her head slightly and began to turn.

"Shalom, Naomi," called Puah from her doorway.

Surprised, Naomi turned with a thankful look. "Shalom, Puah."

Naomi bundled her child close to her breast and walked back to her house, shaking her head. What a story she would have to tell Miryam when she returned.



Miryam did not return.

Yosef and Miryam settled with Yosef's family in Beit-Lechem. Later Puah told Naomi that they escaped to Egypt just before Herod killed all the children of Beit-Lechem looking for a child prophesied to be the King of Y'hudah. "Better Hordos should kill Romans instead of his own subjects," Puah told her, making a sign to ward off the evil eye.

In time, the women of Natzeret came to tolerate Naomi. Her sewing and reed work were considered the best in the countryside and won some fame for her in the town.

Naomi's son, Abenadar, grew quickly and straight. Abenadar was known as Able to the people of Natzeret. Most had forgotten his origins, or they didn't care anymore. He had the cast of a boy of the Galil with the face of a Roman. His eyes were gray and constantly sober. Even as a child, he was given to a fixed and disconcerting gaze that many times took his opponents by surprise.

Abenadar's mind and limbs were fit and strong. At 17 he did a man's work—when he could find it. Alone, no one bothered him, and he had long ago shown the boys of Natzeret that even a group was not a good match against the child of Naomi of the hill. When they tried to beat him, he outran them and picked them off one by one. They gave up their persecution of him early and let him join, an unwelcome and always isolated playmate—never a friend.

Except to Yeshua.



Five years after they had left for the census, Miryam and Yosef returned to Natzeret. Their son, Yeshua, was an amazing child. He was fine-boned like his mother and dark-haired. His eyes were a very deep brown, almost black...large and solemn. But his face was never solemn; it always sported a smile that stretched from every point of his features. His smile wasn't insipid, nor was it out of place. It was contagious. He

was a child who never seemed to know sadness, but in some way he was as out of place as the Roman bastard, Abenadar.

Yeshua was a good boy. He worked with his father most days and went to Torah school every day he could. Abenadar envied Yeshua's easy grace, his quick wit, and his compassion. They knew each other well. Their mothers often visited, for Naomi could come into Natzeret now without censure.

Abenadar and Yeshua played together as children. They grew up in the same world but different realms. Yeshua lived in the village, attended the Torah school, and had a father as his example. Abenadar had no father, lived outside the limits of the village, and only gained formal learning from what his mother taught him. Naomi taught him Latin, the language of Rome, some Greek, and the little knowledge of Latin and Greek reading and writing she knew. Abenadar attacked his lessons with zest and was never content, though his mother taught him everything she could.

Yeshua was Abenadar's connection to the village of Natzeret. When he was free, Abenadar would wait every day outside Yosef's shop until Yeshua was finished with his work.

"Shalom, Yeshua," said Abenadar as Yeshua left the workshop.

"Abenadar. Where have you been today?"

"I gleaned Shim'on's fields and he gave me a kodrant for the work." Abenadar held up the copper coin.

"A whole kodrant?"

"Yes, I guess I gleaned too much."

"Are you going to give the kodrant to your mother?"

"What do you think?"

"I think she could have used the wheat more than you could use the kodrant."

"Zeus," cursed Abenadar.

"What makes you angry, friend?"

"You're right. You're always right. I'll probably do as you say."

"What have I said for you to do?"

"Nothing." And Abenadar flashed a smile.

Yeshua smiled back. "Shall we climb the hill on the road and see if a caravan will pass today?"

Abenadar stopped abruptly. "A caravan, eh. What makes you think one will pass within the whole next week?"

"Why don't we see? The climb will be goal enough."

The two boys ran until they reached the base of the plateau, then started to climb the large hill on its north edge. They pulled and pushed each other up the steep slope until they sat at the very crest.

Yeshua pointed down into the valley. Below them, a caravan of laden camels and horses wended toward Natzeret. "It will pass by without getting near Natzeret," said Yeshua. "I suspect it is going to Yerushalayim."

"You are probably right, although I can't figure out how you know when these things will happen."

"I make a good guess?" Yeshua shrugged.

Abenadar shrugged also. "I will be leaving soon."

"Yes," Yeshua said as though he wasn't surprised. "Where are you going?"

"I am 17 now, only a little older than you. Tomorrow my mother will take me to the palace in Tzippori. At the Roman consul she will have me registered as a Roman citizen."

"A citizen of Rome. Do you think the Primus Pilus will acknowledge you as a child of Rome?"

"Primus Pilus? My mother will seek an interview with the Roman ambassador, not the legion's chief centurion. She has a letter from my father that will prove my claim."

"And then what will you do as a citizen of Rome?"

"Why, I will join the legion."

"The legion." Yeshua didn't seem all that surprised. "Does your mother know?"

"Of course not." Abenadar glared at Yeshua. "Do you disapprove of my plans?"

"I rarely advise at all. On the contrary, I applaud your choice and ambition."

"You do?"

"Of course I do. Why would I steer you otherwise?"

"I'm not sure." Abenadar rubbed his bristled chin.

"Have I given you the impression that I don't approve of the

profession of arms?”

“No. But we have seldom spoken about the subject.”

“David was a king of Y'hudah. David was a ‘man after Adonai’s own heart.’ How could I not approve such a man myself? Adonai will have much for you to do in the army of Rome.”

“I did not intend to serve Adonai,” said Abenadar almost painfully.

“I knew that.” Yeshua drew with his finger in the dust. “I warn you, my friend Abenadar, although I doubt you will heed my words for a long while. Do not forget Adonai, and do not forget me. This moment is like so many moments in our childhood, but more than any other time of your life, your choices will determine your fate.”

Yeshua’s face tilted upward, blazing with the brightness of sunshine. “I guarantee, you will find glory in the service of Rome. You will find a necessary place in the legion.” He stared back at Abenadar. “You will forget Adonai, the Lord of your mother...of your people. Though I give you this warning, you will forget. You will forget, and you will be brought back to righteousness only if you do not bow to foreign gods. In other ways you will fail Adonai, but in this one thing, promise me.”

“Yes. I think I can promise you this thing.”

Yeshua said, “Abenadar, my friend, a time will come when you will wish you could wipe away all of your glorious past. Though you will be clothed in glory, you will be ashamed.”

Abenadar smiled crookedly at him. “What? Are you now a prophet?”

“Perhaps that is my calling. Yours is a legionnaire,” said Yeshua, brushing the dust from his hands as he stood up. “Don’t forget what I said.”

“I will try not to,” said Abenadar, himself standing. He wasn’t offended by Yeshua’s words, but surprised at the intensity of them. Their past conversations were often serious, but rarely was Yeshua so direct.

They began climbing back down the hill. “You act as if I will be accepted into the legion very soon. That is not such an easy thing.”

“I didn’t say it will be easy. I said you might find you are a legionnaire sooner than you expect. I also warned you not to forget my

words.”

They reached the bottom of the hill. Yeshua grabbed Abenadar around the shoulders and then released him. “Farewell, my friend. I shall look after your mother while you are gone. Shalom.”

“I had not thought about my mother,” said Abenadar. “Thank you.”  
“I know.”

Abenadar turned toward his mother’s house as Yeshua started down the trail. Then almost as an afterthought, Abenadar turned around and shouted at Yeshua, “You have been my only friend. If I am to go so soon, thank you, friend. I will remember your words. Shalom.” Yeshua turned and waved. Then Abenadar watched as Yeshua walked toward the village and was eventually lost from sight around the hill....

For more of the story, read on...



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# The End of Honor

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An intragalactic war  
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The death-knell of the Human Galactic Empire has sounded—it is the crash of an axe against the virgin white marble of the Hall of Accords. It is the bitten-off cry of the Lady Lyral Neuterra, whose head lies sundered from her smooth shoulders. It is the death of the Emperor at the hand of his own son. It is the whirlwind of a thousand ships sent to enforce the new Emperor's will. And only Prince John-Mark, the Emperor's youngest son, can bring the Empire back from the edge—back to peace and honor.

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Before Shawn meets Elina, he vows to convey her to the Imperial Capital to marry Duke Nior's son. But Elina is a startling lookalike for her cousin, Shawn's long-dead love, the Lady Lyral Neuterra. Shawn once loved Lyral enough to grant her his House and fight a war in her name. Now he is honor-bound to deliver Elina, Lyral's "twin," to marry another man.

Shawn must safely deliver Elina to the Imperial Capital before the Emperor discovers and kills Elina, and before her presence drives him insane...or he falls in love.

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## About the Author



“The finest escape in literature is an escape into a real and inviting culture,” asserts novelist **L.D. ALFORD**. He enjoys exploring with originality and intimacy those cultures and societies we think we already know in order to build compelling tales that make ancient and future worlds real to his readers. His stories uniquely explore the connections between events close and familiar and those possible—all woven together with threads of reality and fascinating technology that bring

the past alive.

L.D. Alford is familiar with both technology and cultures. He is an experimental test pilot with over 6000 hours in more than 60 different kinds of aircraft. He also served in worldwide military operations as a member of three different operational combat squadrons. L.D. earned a B.S. in Chemistry from Pacific Lutheran University, an M.S. in Mechanical Engineering from Boston University, and is a Ph.D. candidate in Aerospace Engineering at the University of Dayton. He is a graduate of Air War College, Air Command and Staff College, and the US Air Force Test Pilot School. He is widely traveled and has spent long periods in Europe and Central America. He is a featured writer for **www.WingsoverKansas.com** and the author of the acclaimed novels *Aegypt*, *The Second Mission*, and *The Chronicles of the Dragon* and the Fox series (*The End of Honor*, *The Fox's Honor*, *A Season of Honor*). He has also written and published over 40 technical articles.

L.D. Alford is currently working on the sequels to *Aegypt: The Goddess of Light* and *The Goddess of Darkness*.

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