

Chapter One



KeZIAH made her way upward through the winding streets of Hebron past the simple whitewashed mud houses that were burnished gold by the afternoon sun. Her father would be angry if she was late, so she picked up her pace. Her home was in the upper city, where the more prosperous citizens of Hebron lived, not far from Machpelah, the grove and cave where Father Abraham and Jacob were buried at the northwest edge of the city.

She was returning from an errand at the fuller's, who had his business located at the edge of town, at the foot of the long, sloping incline on which her town was built. The odors caused by the substances he used to whiten or dye the fabrics that were brought to him—lye, putrid urine, and certain noxious desert plants—required that his business not be located in close proximity to the homes of Hebron.

Keziah spotted two familiar people coming down the path toward her, and she broke into a broad smile. It completely transformed her face from its usual somber aspect and brought an answering smile from her two friends, who were now drawing close to her.

“Ira, Haggadah. I’m so glad to see you. I wish I could stop

and visit, but I have been on an errand for my father, and I have to get this back to him." She indicated the bundle she carried.

The brother and sister were the only friends Keziah had of her own age. Although they lived near her, she seldom had a chance to visit with them. That Haggadah was younger than Keziah was evident by her shorter stature and plumper face. Her carefree nature evolved from being the youngest child and the darling of her parents. Now Haggadah poked out her bottom lip slightly in a hint of a pout.

"But you are always on some errand for your father. Sometimes I wonder if Aaron thinks you are his slave instead of his daughter."

Even as Keziah reddened in embarrassment and tried to think of something to say in defense of her father, Ira rebuked his sister.

"Haggadah, if you don't learn to be more moderate in your speech, you will never find a husband, and no one will be left in Hebron who will speak to you. You will have offended all of them! Please excuse my sister, Keziah," Ira smiled at her and her embarrassment vanished. He was older than Keziah by a year, tall and gangly, as young men are wont to be at his age, and quite self-conscious.

"I looked for you at the New Moon feast last week. Almost everyone in Hebron was there."

Ira wasn't just trying to make conversation, Keziah knew. He had a genuine interest in her, and Keziah suspected that if her father were not such a stern and imposing figure, he would have asked for her in marriage already. After all, she was already past the age when most girls were betrothed.

Perhaps he would soon muster the courage to do so, or, more likely have his father do it. Keziah wished for Ira to be her brother more than she desired him as a suitor. Her father inspired respect but not friendship, and Keziah guessed that even Ira's father might hesitate to approach him. She retained flashes of memory of her father as a friendlier, happier man, but not since her mother's death.

But Keziah doubted that her father would entertain any offers for her as long as he remained unmarried himself. His second wife had died several years earlier, leaving him without a male heir, so it was essential that he find another wife—a young wife. The requirements for the wife of a priest were more stringent than for the rest of the population. Besides, Aaron was very particular. Keziah doubted there was a family in Hebron he would consider worthy of being united with his.

“I suppose your father has still not changed his mind about letting you attend.” Haggadah’s statement, which brought her a nudge from her brother’s elbow, brought Keziah’s wandering thoughts back to the conversation.

“No, Haggadah. He is sending me to Adoraim to stay with my aunt. I won’t even be in Hebron for the New Moon. Besides, Father never changes his mind about such things. He believes that the New Moon feasts should not be observed because it is not written in the Torah.”

“But it is not forbidden in the Torah, either. And sacrifices are always made to Adonai, and that is commanded in the Torah.”

Keziah just shrugged. She knew that most people did not understand her father’s strictness in matters of the Law of Moses. She didn’t understand it herself. She only knew there were dozens of things practiced in Aaron’s household that other families in Hebron never observed. Her thoughts about her father’s strictness reminded her that she was late, and he would not be happy about that.

“I have to go now. Perhaps I will bring you back some almonds from Adoraim when I return. I will be gone a month while Father is in Jerusalem, but I will try to come to your home for a visit when I get back.”

She addressed her words to the sister, but they were meant for Ira as well, and as she parted from the pair, she entertained the thought that someday it might be pleasant to be married to Ira. That would mean she would have Haggadah for a sister.

But so far Keziah's father had discouraged all suitors. He did not allow her to go to the New Moon feasts, where young people mingled and often chose their mates. Most people looked forward to these social occasions and even observed a spiritual rededication with a special offering.

Keziah knew her father would never change his opinion of these events. For one thing, he did not approve of young people mingling and forming their own opinions about who they wed. He believed that only fathers should decide who their children should marry—especially daughters. Keziah knew that when her father finally chose a husband for her, he would not ask her opinion of the match at all. So Keziah had very little social interaction and very few friends of her own age in Hebron, even though it was the city of her birth.

As she had tried to explain to Ira and Haggadah, Keziah's father also rejected the New Moon feasts because the Law of Moses had not specifically prescribed them. The only New Moon feast that Aaron observed was in the month of Tishri, the seventh month. This feast, commonly called the Feast of Trumpets, had been commanded by Moses, and Aaron had proudly declared that he would celebrate no other. Keziah looked forward to the festival each year.

One reason Keziah wanted to accompany her father on his journey to Jerusalem was so that she might see new things and meet new people. But she also wished to spend time with him, to demonstrate that she was worthy of his love and would bring him honor.

Her shoulders lifted as she heaved a sigh. So far, she had not been very successful. No matter how hard she tried, it seemed she always fell short of winning her father's approval.

Keziah possessed a pleasant nature and a wide smile that often prompted a smile in return from those who saw it, but since she had very little chance to interact with others, she did not realize this about herself. She only knew that her smile brought no answering smile to her father's face.

Her pleasant nature seemed to leave no impression on him either; in fact, it appeared to make his own more sour than ever. She still had vague memories of a mother's smiles and kisses, but her mother had been dead since Keziah was five years old, and those memories grew less clear as time passed.

Keziah had never thought to question her father's treatment of her. She had always known he rejected her, at least since her mother died, and had always assumed it was her fault that he did. But with a natural optimism and the resilience of youth, she continued to try to win her father over. So she quickened her pace as she neared her home, hopeful that Aaron would not be too angry that she was late and that this time he would take her with him.



Keziah's father stood in the doorway of his house with a scowl on his face. "I told you to go to the fuller's early today so that I might have my things ready early and be able to get enough rest. I leave at dawn tomorrow, Keziah. Can you never consider the welfare of your only parent? What have I done to have such an ungrateful daughter?"

Another daughter might have broken down into tears over such a scathing rebuke for such a small trespass. But Keziah was used to hearing such lectures from her father.

She knew that if she explained that she had stopped to talk to friends it would only make matters worse and possibly lead to his forbidding her to see them again. So she offered a simple apology. "I'm sorry, Father." She handed him the bundle and followed him into the house.

Aaron immediately went to his chamber, where a woven bag stood open on a chair. He carefully folded his freshly laundered ephod, the sleeveless vest that marked his position as a priest and a son of the tribe of Levi. He always looked forward to wearing it during his stay in Jerusalem.

As he placed the ephod with his other belongings for his trip

to Jerusalem, he smiled in anticipation. Always impressed with himself —after all, he had been named for Israel’s first high priest, the brother of Moses—he was never more proud than when his priestly duties called him to Jerusalem to take part in the rotation of priests that King David had set up for the worship in the tabernacle he had erected there.

Since the King had returned the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem after its hundred-year exile with the Philistines, worship in Israel no longer centered in Shiloh or Gibeon, where the brazen altar was housed, but in the capital itself. David had organized the worship, appointing musicians and bringing in priests from all over Israel to participate. Aaron would surely see the King on this trip, for David often came to the tabernacle.

“Father, won’t you take me with you this time? You promised me that one day I could go to Jerusalem with you.”

Aaron broke off his pleasant musings at the sound of his daughter’s voice. Keziah stood in the door of his chamber, holding a small cloth bag filled with bread and cheese that she had prepared for his journey. Her dark auburn hair curled riotously about her face, framing rich brown eyes that complemented her hair and a wide mouth that curved in a pleading smile.

Aaron suppressed a momentary pang of guilt. Since the death of her mother, he had never taken the girl, his only child, with him to Jerusalem, not even to the Passover Feast, which had become an annual pilgrimage since David had centered his people’s worship in Jerusalem. Most families made the trip together, enjoying the time away from mundane daily life.

But Aaron did not enjoy spending time with Keziah. To take her with him would remind him of her mother and the time they had taken Keziah with them to the feast. He did not want to be reminded of his first wife and those happy days before his life had turned to bitterness.

Such a disappointment Keziah was to Aaron. If only she had been a son; he gladly would have taken a son with him to Jerusalem. But Adonai had not smiled on him. He had lost two

wives trying to get sons. The first, Keziah's mother, had actually presented him with one before she died, but he was a weak thing who had survived his mother by only a few hours.

Why had his only son been too frail to live when Keziah had been born fat and healthy, with a lusty cry and that ridiculous red hair? Aaron knew that most Hebrews considered auburn hair to be beautiful, a rarity among a swarthy people who nearly always had black hair. And now that they had a king with hair the shade of a golden sunset, they admired it even more.

But Aaron did not want his daughter to be admired for her beauty. He wanted her to be known for her virtue, her piety, so that someday he might be able to arrange a marriage for her to one of the sons of the high priest. But that could wait. He had no wife to see to his household, and it was convenient to keep his daughter with him until he found another wife. Finally, he turned to Keziah to answer her question. "No, daughter. There is no one to look to your safety while I go to serve in the tabernacle. Jerusalem is a large city, and there are many dangers. I would have you go to your aunt and uncle in Adoraim. You'll be safe there. But I do intend to begin making inquiries to find you a suitable husband."

Aaron had repeated this promise often over the past few years. Most young women were betrothed by the time they reached puberty or soon after. But, of course, since the death of Keziah's mother and then her stepmother, she was the only one to keep house for her father. He had been in no hurry to see her married.

Besides, in his opinion no other Levite families living in Hebron had produced a son he would choose for his daughter. No, Aaron had dreams of giving his daughter in marriage to one of the offspring of Zadok or Abiathar, men appointed by David to share the office of high priest.

Perhaps on this trip to Jerusalem he would approach one of his friends in the priesthood to be an intermediary with one of them. If his daughter married into one of the high priestly families, Aaron might be able to move to Jerusalem and become

one of the inner circle of priests who served perpetually at the tabernacle. He could picture himself with bodyguards, living in a fine house with marble floors, and maybe even becoming a confidant of the court.

Aaron didn't think this was at all beyond his reach because he was of the tribe of Levi, which was accorded special honor in Israel. Having received no land in the division that was enacted under Joshua, they were to be given land by whichever tribe among whom they lived. And they were to receive a tithe in payment for their spiritual services to their brethren, services such as presiding over feasts, teaching the Law, offering blessings, and the rotation of service in the tabernacle of David.

As a priest, Aaron was actually more prosperous than many of his neighbors. The roomy home that he shared with Keziah was better than most. Its foundation had been laid with native quarried stone, and its ceiling was supported by heavy oak beams. He had no servants, not because he couldn't afford them, but because he was most ungenerous and preferred to allow Keziah to perform all the duties to which a servant would normally attend. He would never have admitted that he did so because of a vindictive anger toward a daughter who had failed to be born a son.



The next morning at dawn, Aaron and his daughter gathered up their things in preparation to depart, the priest to Jerusalem and Keziah to Adoraim some nine miles to the west of Hebron. As they prepared to leave, Aaron eyed his daughter critically. "Depart for Adoraim right away, Keziah. You want to arrive well before dark. And don't forget to cover your hair."

The young woman tossed her head as she felt a surge of resentment. Uncovered hair was a sign of availability. Until a girl married, she was allowed to go with her head uncovered. After all, a young woman's uncovered head served to attract the attention of would-be suitors.

But Keziah knew that her father was ashamed of her hair. He believed it drew attention to his daughter and made her appear immodest. He also felt a deep distrust of human nature. He was constantly on the lookout for improper behavior either on her part or by others.

Her father was a difficult man to love, Keziah admitted to herself. But he was all she had. She kissed him good-bye, and they headed their separate ways, he to the north, she to the west.

Chapter Two



Talmon of Gibeah impatiently made his way along the road that led to Hebron, calculating that it would take at least one more full day of travel before he reached Jerusalem, especially since his manservant, Ishobeam, puffed, panted, and constantly complained about the pace Talmon set for them.

Joab, commander of all Israel's armies, had sent him on this mission to Philistia, a trip that had proved futile as well as exhausting. Talmon had been slowly ingratiating himself with the general. He had finally been appointed one of several bodyguards, honorary armor bearers who did the general's bidding. Up to this time, Talmon had never failed to fulfill an assignment, but the futile trip to Philistia had left him in a nasty frame of mind. He couldn't wait to be back in Jerusalem, indulging in the vices that entertained him.

Of course, he would not have long to enjoy himself. He would soon have to report back to Joab at Rabbah. Talmon had detested waiting outside the city gates to starve the rebellious Ammonites into submission. Violent by nature, he always looked forward to the cruelty and slaughter of the battle.

But this was a siege, not a battle, so Talmon had volunteered to take a message to Ziklag. The general had thought to pressure

the Philistines into sending a contingent of soldiers to assist in the siege, but the wily king of Ziklag had been well aware that Joab was too busy subduing the Ammonites to retaliate for a lack of cooperation. Not only had he not been cooperative but also he had provided Talmon with the poorest of accommodations and had granted him only a brief audience. Talmon had expected to be feasted and entertained but had been rudely ignored. There had been nothing he could do but return, his mission unaccomplished.

Still, Joab did not like to be denied, and Talmon knew that the general would not forget his failure to gain the Philistines' cooperation. Just as Talmon's father had always publicly humiliated him as a child for any infraction, Joab would almost certainly ridicule him in the presence of the other aides.

Talmon's mind replayed an incident that had happened in his fourteenth summer, when his father had sent him to deliver two donkeys that he had sold to a neighbor. Bandits had accosted him and beaten him on the road, taking the animals. When Talmon reached home, he received no sympathy. Instead he had been beaten again by his father and humiliated in front of the entire household. He imagined Joab doing the same thing to him in front of the troops.

As his mood grew darker with these thoughts, he felt a need to vent his ire on someone. Talmon's appearance utterly belied what was inside. His finely chiseled, handsome features, and ready smile served him well in deceiving those he met. But his true nature was anything but pleasant. From childhood he had despised most other people, convinced no one could match his superior intelligence and cunning. For the most part, that opinion had turned out to be accurate. Talmon lived for self-gratification and ambition, and he felt not a moment of empathy for any other human being.

Attaining what he wanted was Talmon's only goal in life. Most of the time that could be accomplished best with charm and manipulation. For that reason, most people never saw his baser, cruel nature. Those who did see it never forgot the experience.

Ishobeam was one of the few who knew the true extent of Talmon's evil, but since he was a man equally as wicked, for the most part he enjoyed his association with the young man he had served these past ten years. At this moment, though, Ishobeam was the only person near enough to serve as the focus of Talmon's anger. He drew his sword from its sheath and whacked the flat of it against the older man's backside.

"Move your lazy carcass, old man, or we will be another week getting to Jerusalem." The older man grunted his protest but picked up the pace, and they moved quickly along the deserted road.

They were some two miles from Hebron when they spotted the child. She was singing as she moved among the trees that lined the road, picking some of the plants and placing them in a basket.

Talmon paused for a moment to watch her. Here was a diversion, someone he could dominate in order to lessen the shame of his failed mission. And Ishobeam would forget to sulk over his recent harsh treatment if his thoughts were diverted by the little girl. The old man always found satisfaction in tormenting any creature smaller and weaker than he. Ishobeam was used to his master's frequent changes of mood and action, so he wasn't surprised when Talmon put his finger to his lips and motioned him to silently approach the girl. Evidently his master was now willing to pause in the journey long enough to make sport of the child.



Keziah sauntered along the road that led to Adoraim. It was the month of Iyar, and she was enjoying the pleasant spring day. The day was cloudless and beautiful, and Keziah turned her face up to the sun as the breeze feathered her hair back from her face.

The road was a winding one, with rocky outcroppings and an occasional stand of oak or cedar trees. It transversed an area of

undulating hills that sometimes dropped off into deep ravines. There were still many hours of daylight left in which to reach Adoraim.

Keziah was in no hurry to arrive at the home of her aunt and uncle. They were not expecting her at any particular time, though she usually stayed with them when her father went to Jerusalem. Her father's sister, Milcah, was just as dour as Aaron. Although Uncle Benjamin was more pleasant, he was too cowed by his wife to offer any assistance in persuading her to give Keziah freedom to mingle with the other young people in the village. Instead, she would spend her time doing chores for her aunt.

Keziah doubted her father would keep his promise to look for a husband for her, but he might look for a wife for himself. At his age, if he were ever to have sons, it must happen soon. By law he was not allowed to wed a divorced woman, nor one whose virtue had been questioned. Not that her father would consider such a woman for his wife anyway.

Keziah hoped that Aaron wouldn't choose a woman like Aunt Milcah, or like Hannah, her deceased stepmother. Keziah remembered the conflicting feelings of guilt and relief she had when Hannah had died. It was a pity that a woman so young had to die, but Hannah had been so cruel toward twelve-year-old Keziah that she could not grieve her loss.

Perhaps Father would find a woman with a better disposition this time. Besides, once he remarried, Aaron might seriously seek a husband for Keziah. Then she would have a home of her own, a family, and a child to hold and love.

What would it be like, she wondered, to have another human being love and trust her completely? She couldn't imagine, but it was a goal she looked forward to reaching, as did every Hebrew girl.

Her hopes did not include having a husband's love. From what she had seen in her own home, Keziah believed that duty was the primary bond between husband and wife. The husband provided shelter and protection, and the wife gave him sons.

Her musings were interrupted by a sound coming from a grove that stood some distance from the road. It was a high-pitched sound such as might be made by a small, frightened animal. Keziah stopped and listened. It came again. A child's treble tones—clearly upset, though Keziah could not distinguish the words. And the answering deep voice of a man. *Probably just a small child unwilling to do his father's bidding*, she thought as she started to walk again. But then the high voice raised to a plaintive wail once again.

Alarmed, Keziah crept through the rugged boulders between the road and the trees toward the sound. If nothing was amiss, then whoever was in the woods would not need to know she was there. But if the child needed help. . . .

"Please don't take my basket. It holds only herbs for a salve my mother makes."

Keziah saw that the plea came from a little girl who appeared to be about eight years of age. A large, rather ugly man in his middle years held the basket over the child's head, just out of reach. A younger man, dressed in military uniform with leather mail covering his upper body, and a large broadsword strapped to his left side for easy access, leaned against a large oak a short distance away. His hair was thick and black, his features patrician.

"See whether she's telling the truth, Ishobeam."

"Good idea, my lord," the older man replied, and opened the lid, tilting it so that his master could see, and in the process dumping some of the contents on the ground. With a cry of outrage, the child kicked the older man in the shin. He dropped the basket and hopped on one foot, swearing. The child grabbed the basket and started to run, but the young man reached out his arm and snared her around the waist.

"You shouldn't have done that, brat. Ishobeam doesn't like it when people kick him. You'll have to be punished. What shall we do to her, Ishobeam?"

The older man grinned, showing a couple of missing teeth, one on either side of his two front ones. As he started toward his

master and the child, the little girl screamed in terror and squirmed helplessly in the young man's strong grasp. Keziah was so incensed that she forgot her own fear and stepped from her hiding place.

"Leave her alone!" she commanded indignantly.

Three heads swung in unison toward the sound of her voice. The servant's eyes narrowed suspiciously. The little girl's face lit with hope. The younger man looked her over with a hungry expression that made Keziah's heart clinch in fear. But she held her ground, determined to stare him down.

The soldier, whose countenance had seemed so comely from a distance, now made chills run down Keziah's spine. The look in his eyes was cruel and predatory, and Keziah sensed that she had now become the prey.

"Do as she says, Ishobeam," he said without taking his eyes from Keziah.

"But, Master . . ."

"Let the child go," Talmon ordered. "What need do we have of a little lamb when this sleek gazelle has appeared?"

As he continued to stare at her, his gaze came to rest on her hair. Keziah instantly regretted having disobeyed her father's instruction to keep her head covered.

The servant released the child, who stood for a moment, looking questioningly at Keziah.

"Go along now. Run home, little one," she told the child, who raced away. While the men's attention was on the child, Keziah seized her chance to escape as well. She ran faster than she ever imagined she could, back to the road, then in the direction of Adoraim.

At first, Keziah thought she might outdistance them, for when she glanced back, she did not see the men. Where were they? They must be somewhere among the boulders. Her side had a terrible catch in it, but she did not slow down, nor did she dare to look back again.

She came to a curve in the road that skirted a huge boulder.

As she rounded it, she was suddenly knocked to the ground. Her breath left her body in a whoosh. She was stunned for what seemed an eternity, then she heard the mocking laughter of her two tormentors. They had stationed themselves on a boulder and waited for the opportunity to pounce. They had merely been making sport of her!

Keziah became so angry at the thought that again she forgot to be afraid. She struggled against her captor's hold and screamed at the top of her voice until he silenced her with a stunning blow to her face. With the help of the older man, he dragged her off the road into another stand of trees. Keziah, though dazed by the blow, still fought valiantly. She managed to scratch the young soldier's face.

"Ishobeam, hold her arms. No, over her head."

Keziah wanted to scream again, but found she could not. The warrior kept one hand over her mouth, and she felt she was suffocating. She tried to kick, to dislodge him with her legs, but his weight held her immobile. She attempted to jerk her arms from the servant's hold and almost succeeded, until he knelt on them.

As the brutal attack continued, the only sounds were the warrior's strident breathing, an occasional lewd laugh or comment from the servant, and the stifled moans coming from the helpless girl.

Keziah was mercifully near unconsciousness some time later when she felt herself being roughly dragged some distance. When the motion stopped, she managed to partially open one of her swollen eyes and saw that she was lying near the edge of a deep, rocky ravine dotted with scrub brush. She heard her attackers—they were talking about pushing her over the ravine. Keziah knew that she would soon die. At that moment she almost felt relief; perhaps her father would think only that she had fallen to her death, if she were ever found, and would never know of her shame.

The next instant Keziah felt the push of a foot, then sensed

herself falling through space, until a bone-jarring impact brought blessed blackness.



Adah was in sight of Hebron when she made up her mind to go back. At first she had only thought of escape, but she soon became worried about the stranger who had helped her. The kind lady who had helped her was in trouble. Those were mean men. They had laughed in a funny way and frightened her. The lady would be no match for the two men. Adah decided she would sneak back.

As she retraced her steps, she stopped several times to pick up rocks that were just the right size and weight to fit her hand nicely. She intended to be ready if those hateful men were still about. She would hide in the trees and throw rocks. Maybe the men would think travelers were nearby and leave the older girl alone.

She rounded a bend in the road where a huge rock jugged out. There were drops of red sprinkled across the road. Adah stooped down for a closer look and realized it was blood. Frightened, she was tempted to run away, but she remembered the young woman who had helped her and started to search the area. Then she saw the two men who had accosted her leave the cover of the trees that bordered the nearby ravine.

Quickly, Adah ducked behind the rock. When she could no longer hear their voices, she crept from her hiding place and ran toward the area from which the men had come. She had walked along the edge of the ravine for several moments when she heard a low moan.

She paused to listen, and in a moment another moan, this one louder than the first, alerted her that her rescuer was somewhere below her. Adah knelt and peered over the edge of the ravine. Her heart sank when she saw the distance to the bottom. Then something moved a few feet below and captured her attention.

Adah scrambled down the incline. Halfway down, on a ledge

that had broken her fall, lay the pretty lady. Only she wasn't pretty anymore. Her eyes were nearly swollen shut and her clothing was torn.

The little girl knelt down beside the battered, bleeding young woman and spoke soothingly. "My lady, did the bad men hurt you? Don't worry. They are gone now. I will help you." Adah untied the small skin of water she had tied at her waist. It wasn't much, but it would have to do. "Here is some water. Can you raise your head?"

Keziah moaned but lifted her head slightly when the little girl's hand slipped under her neck to help her. The water stung her bloodied lip. The little girl dampened the bottom of her tunic and tried to wash the bruises and cuts on Keziah's face.

Long moments passed before she regained the strength to sit up. She gasped and winced in pain, but for the sake of the child she bit back the groans that tried to escape her. Adah found Keziah's discarded cloak and brought it to her.

"Please, lady, can you walk? I will take you to my mother. She will know what to do. Come. Come. Those men might come back at any time."

That admonition registered with Keziah, even in her dazed state, and she stumbled painfully to her feet. It took a long time to climb back up to the road, and Keziah sprawled, panting and exhausted, when they reached it. The little girl wiped the beads of perspiration off Keziah's brow and once more gave her water to drink.

"Come now, lady, please get up again. We have to leave this place as soon as possible. My mother will help you as soon as we reach Hebron. That's the way, just lean on me."

Keziah wanted nothing more than just to lie there and die, but the child was so insistent and so persistent that, eventually, it was simply easier to allow herself to be helped to her feet and guided along.

They made their way very slowly back to Hebron. Keziah fell to her knees more than once before they reached the city.

When they were almost to Hebron, she covered her head with her cloak and insisted they not enter by the main road that led into the marketplace but by a small path that was not heavily traveled. Unlike any other town of its size, Hebron had no city walls, so it was approachable by numerous paths.

She allowed herself to be led to the little girl's house because she was afraid that if she returned to her own, a neighbor might see her and send word to Aaron. Although the thought of anyone learning of the humiliating attack horrified Keziah, the idea of her father knowing caused her limbs to tremble and her stomach to churn. Her father could never find out about this! Never! That was the foremost thought echoing through Keziah's mind.