


IN THE  
SHADOW  
OF JEZEBEL



A NOVEL

MESU  
ANDREWS

  
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This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearance of certain historical figures is therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

14 15 16 17 18 19 20      7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my mothers:

The mother who gave me life—thank you for loving me unconditionally. I see Jesus in you every day.

The mother of my heart—thank you for choosing to love me. I learn to give by watching you.

The mother who gave me her son—thank you for teaching him to love well. I'll see you again someday in glory.



## NOTE TO THE READER

Israel demanded a king, and Yahweh gave them Saul. When Saul failed them—as Yahweh warned he would—1 Samuel 13:14 says the Lord “sought out a man after his own heart.” David was that man, and Yahweh expressed His favor with a threefold covenant: David’s lineage, kingdom, and throne would endure forever (2 Sam. 7:16), even if his descendants needed discipline from time to time.

The first discipline came after David’s son Solomon died, when civil war split the kingdom into two nations. The northern ten tribes retained the name Israel, with its eventual capital in Samaria. The southern nation became Judah, maintaining David’s descendants on the throne, with the capital in Jerusalem and the worship of Yahweh in His holy Temple.

Israel’s King Ahab married the daughter of a Phoenician Baal priest, bringing pagan worship to the forefront of Israelite society. Though Judah’s King Jehoshaphat remained true to Yahweh, he couldn’t afford to make Israel his enemy, so the good king agreed to his son’s treaty marriage with Ahab’s daughter—a decision that shrouded two generations *in the shadow of Jezebel*.



# CHARACTER LIST

Ahab	eighth king of Israel; married Jezebel (Jizebaal) to seal treaty with Phoenicia
Ahaziah/Hazi (king)	ninth king of Israel; son of Ahab and Jezebel
Ahaziah/Hazi (prince/king)	sixth king of Judah; son of Jehoram and Athaliah; Sheba's half brother
Amariah	high priest during Jehoshaphat's reign and beginning of Jehoram's reign
Anna	Jehoiada's first wife (fictional)
Asa (king)	third king of Judah; Jehoshaphat's abba
Athaliah/Thaliah/Thali	daughter of Ahab and Jezebel; married Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram; Hazi's ima; Sheba's guardian
Elan	priests' assistant (fictional)
Eliab	helpful priest during Jehoiada's early high priesthood (fictional)
Elijah	Yahweh's prophet in Israel; died approximately ten years before Jehoram's reign
Elisha	Yahweh's prophet in Israel after Elijah's ascension
Gadara	midwife from the City of David (fictional)
Hobah	Sheba's favorite widow (fictional)

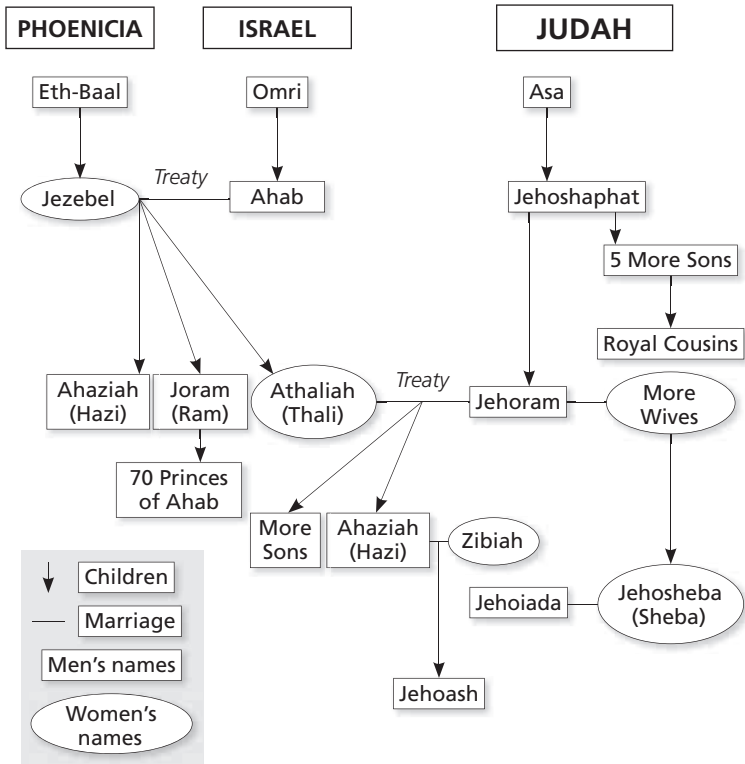
## *In the Shadow of Jezebel*

Jehoash/Joash (prince)	Hazi and Zibiah's son
Jehoiada	second priest during Amariah's high priesthood
Jehoram (king)	firstborn son of Jehoshaphat; fifth king of Judah; Athaliah's husband; abba of Hazi and Sheba
Jehoshaphat (king)	fourth king of Judah; Jehoram's abba
Jehosheba/Sheba	Jehoram's daughter; Hazi's half sister
Jehozabab	Zabad's best friend and fellow Korahite (fictional)
Jehu	Israel's general under King Joram
Jezebel/Jizebaal	daughter of Phoenician King Eth-Baal; wife of King Ahab; Gevirah of King Joram; ima of Queen Athaliah; mastermind of Baal's rise to power in Israel/Judah
Joram/Ram	tenth king of Israel; son of Ahab and Jezebel; Athaliah's younger brother
Keilah	young widow who is friends with Sheba (fictional)
Mattan	Baal high priest for Queen Athaliah
Nathanael	second priest to Jehoiada (fictional)
Obadiah	nobleman in Ahab's administration; Yahweh's prophet
Zabad	young guard made chief keeper of the threshold under Jehoiada (fictional)
Zev	captain of Judah's royal Carite guard (fictional)
Zibiah	Hazi's wife; Prince Jehoash's ima



## In the Shadow of Jezebel

### Family Tree





# Prologue

✧ 2 KINGS 6:24-25 ✧

*Some time later, Ben-Hadad king of Aram mobilized his entire army and marched up and laid siege to Samaria. There was a great famine in the city.*

## SAMARIA, ISRAEL, 843 BC

*From Jizebaal, Queen Mother—Gevirah—of Ram, King of Israel.*

*To My Revered Daughter, Athaliah, Queen of Judah, Wife of King Jehoram.*

*Greetings with blessings from almighty Baal Melkart, Rider of the Clouds.*

*Our plan to expand Baal's dominion will fail if your brother Ram continues to be duped by Elisha. Yahweh's prophet convinced him that his god ended Aram's recent siege on Samaria. Ram pledged his loyalty to Yahweh and destroyed my Baal temple and sacred stone in Samaria.*

*I warned him that almighty Baal would have his vengeance, Athaliah.*

*But he laughed.*

*In the Shadow of Jezebel*

*Now Elisha is building prophet schools and teaching others to blaspheme Baal Melkart, while our nation falters under Ram's weak leadership.*

*If the fear of Baal Melkart won't bend the will of Israel's king, perhaps the fear of Jizebaal will. Ram must know that every king is replaceable—even my son. It's time I met my grandson Hazi. He's proven more pliable than Ram and seems more courageous than your husband.*

*I believe it's time to involve your daughter Sheba as well. I know her preparations as Baal's high priestess are nearly complete, but she may prove more useful in an alternate role. Bring her to me so I may judge her myself.*

*Come quickly to our spring palace in Jezreel.*

*Written by my own hand.*



PART 1



# 1

## 2 CHRONICLES 21:12

*Jehoram received a letter from Elijah the prophet, which said: “This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: ‘You have not followed the ways of your father Jehoshaphat or of Asa king of Judah.’”*

Late for the evening meal again, Princess Sheba hurried down the grand stairway, embers of fury still white-hot. A bumbling maid had dropped her favorite ruby earring and, after an enduring search, found it under Sheba’s couch. In order to make an example of the careless girl, Sheba denied all her handmaids their evening meal. Queen Athaliah would commend her strict discipline. She might even forgive Sheba’s tardiness when she noticed how beautifully the ruby earrings matched the scarlet head covering Abba had given her.

Sheba was usually afforded these little indiscretions since she was King Jehoram’s favored daughter, but the looming pall in the dining hall made her wonder if she’d pushed too far. Keeping her head bowed, she tried to walk softly, but her new sandals clicked with every step across the marble tile.

Finally reaching the dais, Sheba took her customary place at the women’s table beside Ima Thaliah. She kept her head low

but felt every eye focused on the royal tables. Surely the eerie silence didn't hinge on her late arrival.

"You're late, Jehosheba." Ima Thaliah leaned close, whispered, and used Sheba's full name—three sure signs of her anger. But the queen always maintained control, considering emotions a luxury of the weak. Her ochre-stained lips, now pressed into a thin red line, resembled a wound against her alabaster skin and screamed their warning.

*I'll probably have to help the servants clear the tables.*

Ima often disciplined publicly if the offense was public in nature. Sheba's hidden bruises were testimony of her private errors.

Tonight, as on most other nights, two tables graced the elevated dais. Abba Jehoram sat at the head of the men's table, his closest advisors on his left, and Ima Thaliah presided over the royal women. The remaining tables formed neat rows in the expansive dining hall, every place filled with the king's council members, secondary wives and children, royal tutors, and Sheba's cousins—sons of Abba's deceased brothers. Three new tables had been added to make room for the cousins and their guards soon after Abba's brothers died. The thought of clearing all those dishes made Sheba bristle even more about her lost earring.

*Perhaps my maids will lose two meals.*

"Well, are you going to read it or not?" The queen's shrill voice split the silence, her eyes focused on a sealed scroll in Abba Jehoram's hand.

Sheba leaned close to whisper, "What's happening?" but fell silent at Ima's glare.

"You read it." Abba shoved the scroll back at his queen, bridging the small space between their tables. His hand trembled, the gold rings on his fingers clinking intolerably.

While Ima broke the seal and unrolled the parchment, Sheba scanned the tables of the king's royal guard. Her favorite brother, Hazi, sat among the hulking Carite soldiers, his eyes wide and staring, which sent her heart into a gallop. If even mischievous Hazi looked anxious, this scroll must be of grave concern indeed.

With a huff, Ima Thaliah cast a disparaging glance at Abba



Jehoram and cleared her throat. Sheba sat a little straighter, proud to be seated at the queen's right hand. She wondered not for the first time if Abba realized his good fortune at marrying such a capable woman. Athaliah, like her ima Jizebaal, had been trained as Baal's high priestess before her marriage, learning not only the religious rites but also how to read and write in three languages.

"The letter begins like this," Athaliah said. "You, King Jehoram, have not followed the ways of your abba Jehoshaphat or of Asa king of Judah. But you have followed the ways of the kings of Israel, and you have led Judah and the people of Jerusalem to prostitute themselves, just as the house of Ahab did."

She slammed the scroll onto the table. "Really, Jehoram. I refuse to read any more. This scroll could not have been written by Elijah. He's been dead for ten years. This is obviously a ploy of his student Elisha, trying to deceive you as he's deceived my brother Ram. He wants to control the kings of both Israel and Judah."

Abba Jehoram grabbed the scroll from her and read the remaining message aloud. "You have murdered your own brothers, members of your own family, men who were better than you. So now Yahweh is about to strike your people, your sons, your wives, and everything that is yours, with a heavy blow." His voice faded, the last words barely a whisper. "You yourself will be very ill with a lingering disease of the bowels, until the disease causes your bowels to come out." The scroll dropped from his hands, clattering to the marble floor.

Sheba's thoughts raced with her heart. *What prophet would dare threaten the king of Judah and his entire household?* She glanced at Ima Thaliah, expecting the placid, granite calm.

Instead, her red, mottled neck showed raw fury. "Obadiah!"

The old nobleman rose with effort from the tufted cushion at his designated table, his gait labored, his back bent with age. "I am at your service, my queen," he said, kneeling, head bowed. Sheba noticed he'd attempted to comb his thinning white hair over a bald spot.

Ima regained her composure, her voice a dangerous purr.

“Are you at my service, Obadiah, or do you still serve Yahweh’s prophets as you once served them in my abba Ahab’s court?”

Obadiah lifted his gray head to meet her gaze. “I was given the scroll by one of Yahweh’s prophets, it is true, and I delivered it to my lord Jehoram. But I serve King Jehoram and his family faithfully, my queen. King Ahab sent me to Judah to save my life, and I will not betray his favor.”

“He sent you to Judah because my ima Jizebaal planned to kill you with the rest of Yahweh’s conspiring prophets.”

“Enough, Athaliah! Enough!” Abba Jehoram slammed his hand on the table, startling everyone in the hall and overturning his glass of wine. A thin film of sweat formed on his upper lip and forehead, and he was trembling head to toe.

Obadiah slowly resumed his bow, the only one in the hall seemingly unaffected by the prophet’s message.

Abba Jehoram stood, thrusting the parchment toward the nobleman. “Look at the scroll, Obadiah. Is it the writing of the prophet Elijah or not?” Abba’s purple robe dragged through the spilled wine.

He didn’t notice, but Sheba did. The red stain soaked upward—like blood. Was it a bad omen? She cast a glance at Baal’s high priest, Mattan, who sat on Abba’s left as his primary advisor. He was also responsible for Sheba’s magical arts training as a Baal high priestess. He’d taught her to read signs in everything—a bird’s flight, bug bites, even spilled wine—but the bald, beady-eyed priest seemed as preoccupied with the mysterious document as was the king.

Obadiah rose, reached for the scroll, and studied it. “I saw Elijah’s writing only once, but as I recall, these markings look similar.”

“Similar or the same, man? Is this message authentic? Will the prophecy be fulfilled?”

The nobleman’s features softened as he returned the scroll. “I believe the message is authentic, King Jehoram, but Yahweh is merciful and forgiving. Would you like me to summon *His* high priest? Amariah can speak with you about seeking Yahweh as your abba Jehoshaphat did.”

“How dare you!” Ima Thaliah stood, placing a protective hand on Abba’s shoulder. “He does not need advice from the priest of the god who is trying to destroy him! Now leave—before I do to you what Gevirah Jizebaal should have done years ago.”

Obadiah resumed his humble bow, quickly backing out of the hall, while Ima coaxed Abba back to his embroidered cushion and knelt beside him. “I will not have you bullied by these Gileadites. These prophets from east of the Jordan can’t be trusted, and their Yahweh is no match for Baal Melkart. Yahweh has battled the gods of Canaan since the days of your abba Jehoshaphat, but Yahweh’s power is waning.” Ima glanced in Mattan’s direction. “Tell him there’s nothing to worry about.”

The high priest nodded his agreement, and Abba chuckled, then addressed those in the dining hall who’d grown awkwardly silent. “It appears my queen wishes to assuage any lingering fears. Tell us, Mattan, how we can be sure Yahweh’s power is waning.”

Sheba focused on the creeping stain on Abba’s robe, his overturned goblet. Hadn’t Mattan taught her such unsettling images foretold unsettling times? But her mentor and high priest rose with puzzling calm.

As he nodded first to the king and then to the gathering, Mattan’s deep, resonant voice echoed off the stone walls. “Many of you will remember when King Jehoshaphat trusted Yahweh to bless his joint shipping venture with Israel, but the almighty storm god Baal destroyed Jehoshaphat’s ships before they left the port of Ezion Geber.”

“Yes! I remember!” shouted a white-haired nobleman. “Almighty Baal reigns!”

Mattan offered a condescending smile but lifted his hand for silence. “And remember that even Moab’s god bested Yahweh when Elisha led Israel and Judah against King Mesha’s rebellion. Israel still languishes without Moab’s wool tribute because Yahweh couldn’t secure the victory after King Mesha offered his son to Chemosh.” Mattan reached for his goblet and lifted it high. “Stand, all of you, and bless your king and his queen in the name of almighty Baal Melkart!”

The dining hall erupted with shouts of praise for the Rider of the Clouds, but Abba turned to Ima Thaliah and spoke in a hushed voice. “What if the letter is right and Yahweh takes *you*, my love? I’d die if Yahweh took you from me.”

Sheba’s heart nearly melted. Of all Abba’s wives, Ima Thaliah was the only one Sheba had heard him declare his love for.

The queen cupped his cheeks and drew him close. “I am the daughter of Jizebaal. Yahweh wouldn’t *dare* touch me.” She released a throaty laugh and pulled Abba into an impassioned kiss.

Applause transformed their evening meal into a celebration. Men shouted from every direction, “Long live King Jehoram! Long live Queen Athaliah!”

Sheba stood, joining the chorus, reveling in her parents’ embrace. *Oh, how I long for a kiss like that.* She turned away, unable to bear the growing yearning in her heart. *Blasphemy!* she accused herself, unwilling to let a romantic thought take root.

In only a few weeks, she’d be initiated as a high priestess and vow a lifetime of service to Baal Melkart, dedicating her body to the prince of gods alone. Celibacy was a small price to pay to become the only high priestess presiding over her own temple. She’d endured the intimate Astarte training with full knowledge she’d never need the seductive skills. But on lonely, moonlit nights, she often wondered how she’d bear a lifetime without a man’s love.

*At least I won’t be one of many in a harem.* She had only vague memories of her birth ima, Naamah. She had died when Sheba was very young, but a little girl remembers her ima’s tears. “Celibacy is better than a life of rejection,” Sheba whispered, watching the crowded dining hall become more raucous.

Hazi’s fellow guards grabbed serving maids for pleasure, and Abba’s other wives danced while keeping their eyes on the king—undoubtedly hoping to gain his attention. But Abba Jehoram grew more passionate with his beloved Thaliah.

Sheba stood awkwardly, focusing on her new sandals. She felt Mattan’s gaze on her. Why was she avoiding him? *If I’m going to become a high priestess, I can’t blush like a child when the revelry begins.* Taking a deep breath, she squared her shoulders

and raised her chin. Mattan grinned, his eyelids at half-mast, brows slightly raised as if challenging her somehow. She tried to look away but couldn't. Her breath became ragged as his eyes grew bolder, raking over her.

She'd heard rumors among the Astarte priestesses that Mattan had broken his vow of celibacy, but no one was foolish enough to accuse him. He'd come to Jerusalem as part of Athaliah's dowry from King Ahab, and he'd worked his way into Abba Jehoram's inner circle of trust. Sheba squeezed her eyes shut, retreating into darkness rather than facing her ruthless tutor. She dared not offend him. He was the key to maintaining favor with Ima Thaliah.

Balling her hands into fists, she dug her nails into her palms. *Stop this, Sheba. You have the power to create your own destiny. No man can steal your future.* She repeated Ima Thaliah's relentless mantra, words hammered into a thin gold plate covering Sheba's thoughts, words, and deeds since she had come under the queen's care. She'd been a whimpering brat when Ima Thaliah began training her.

Not anymore. Independent. Capable. Strong. These words described Sheba now.

So why did her insides shake like curdled milk when Mattan looked at her that way?

*You have the power to create your own destiny. No man can steal your future.*

She opened her eyes to meet Mattan's stare again. This time she lifted her golden goblet, toasted him, and found the courage to turn away with a smirk. Since before Sheba's first red moon, Ima Thaliah had taught her to humiliate men with a glance—but she'd never dared use it against Mattan.

From the corner of her eye, Sheba saw the high priest tap Abba Jehoram's shoulder, interrupting the royal couple's before-dinner passion. Her heart skipped a beat, rattling her fragile courage. Had the condescending smirk been too disrespectful? Would he tell Ima and earn Sheba more bruises? Or worse—days of silence from the woman whose approval meant more than life's breath?

Abba Jehoram leaned toward Mattan's hushed voice, and then he listened to Ima Thaliah's whisper. The king seemed troubled by Ima's words, but Mattan's obvious approval gave Abba pause.

After studying their faces for a long moment, the king lifted his hands to quiet the dining hall. "To show our disdain for the Yahwists' attempts to influence Judah's throne, I'm sending our youngest son as delegate to affirm Judah's parity treaty with Israel."

Sheba glanced at Hazi and found his expression chiseled stone. Hazi hated politics, as evidenced by his choice to join the royal guard rather than govern a fortified city as a Baal high priest like Ima Thaliah's other sons.

Abba Jehoram seemed oblivious—or impervious—to Hazi's displeasure. "Prince Hazi will lead his detachment of Carites to guard my lovely wife, who has demanded a visit with her ima, the Gevirah Jizebaal, in Jezreel." He lifted a newly poured glass of wine in Hazi's direction, and the usually charming prince offered a begrudging toast in return.

Sheba watched Ima Thaliah nudge Abba and whisper again. He cleared his throat and turned his attention to Sheba. "And you, my dear, will accompany Queen Athaliah to meet Jizebaal." Mischievousness crept into his handsome features. "May the gods help you."

Sheba gasped with delight—drawing a chastising glance from Ima for her lapse in etiquette.

A rumble fluttered over the gathering, and Sheba noted the impatient grumbling of the guards as they pulled the serving maids close again. Why were men so feral?

Abba Jehoram chuckled and extended his hand as an invitation for Mattan to address the gathering. "I can see our evening has whetted your appetites for celebration, but we must allow our maids to serve the evening meal." Disapproval threatened to delay the lovely meal Sheba smelled wafting through the hall. With good humor, Mattan raised his voice above the din. "Take heart, my friends. We'll open our temple gates for special offerings through the Astarte priestesses this evening." Roaring sup-

port erupted as the men released the maids to their appointed tasks. Mattan lifted his goblet again, signaling the meal to be served, while those at the head tables resumed their seats.

Sheba glanced at Hazi, his previous alarm replaced with a confident smile. He winked at her and bantered with his comrade Carites. As the youngest of Jehoram and Athaliah's sons, Hazi had been given the chance to choose his future, and he'd chosen a soldier's life. He was as tall as any of the paid mercenaries and more skilled with his dagger than most. Hazi and Sheba had always been the queen's favorites, the "chosen ones," as Athaliah's other sons had called the pair. Hazi's brothers hadn't been as appreciative of their roles as Baal's high priests—nor as committed to celibacy—as Sheba.

Ima Thaliah's hand gently enfolded Sheba's. "Are you pleased to finally meet Gevirah Jizebaal, Daughter?"

More than anything, she wanted to hug her ima and squeal. Instead, she met the queen's penetrating gaze and offered a slight bow. "I am pleased to do anything you ask of me, my queen."

The answer won her ima's approving smile. Respect. Decorum. Compliance. Queen Athaliah was as gentle as a lamb when people met her expectations.