

A love story for the ages, set in the turbulent times when Christ walked the earth. *A Certain Man* is a celebration of love, devotion, persistence, and faith so needed in our uncertain world. Author Linda Dindzans crafts a suspicious death into a tale both harrowing and inspiring—a story about the power of prayer, never-ending love, and ultimately, salvation. A must-read.

— Peter Van Sant, Correspondent, CBS News

Linda Dindzans captures the passion of the woman at the well like no other retelling of this Gospel story. Beautiful writing coupled with solid research makes this novel both thought-provoking and emotionally stunning. I so empathized with the Samaritan woman before Jesus walked into her life at the well that when He spoke of her five previous husbands, I knew without a doubt He must have felt even more compassion and sorrow for her than I did. Her zeal and faith in the Messiah was so well grounded because of all this novel portrays, and I'll recommend it to every biblical fiction lover I know!

— Mesu Andrews, Award-winning author

Linda Dindzans takes us on a transformative journey from heartbreak to restoration, establishing herself as a promising and vibrant voice in Biblical Fiction.

— KD Holmberg, Award-winning author

Linda Dindzans hits the nail on the head with her inspiring and moving book, *A Certain Man*. Set in ancient Samaria and Judea, Mara is a young Samaritan woman who waits to marry the love of her life, Samuel. In an unexpected turn, her father's greed leads him to devise a marriage to the son of a wealthy High Priest, making Mara's future unsure. Written beautifully, with characters that grip the reader, Dindzans spins an endearing story of love that survives the trying events placed before them. A well-done must-read that should be on every bookshelf.

— Cindy K. Sproles, Award-winning author of
This is Where It Ends

Linda Dindzans' debut novel, *A Certain Man*, is a must-read. Based primarily on two familiar Bible stories, she has woven a tale of good versus evil that will keep you on the edge of your seat until the last page.

— Deborah Sprinkle, Awarding-winning
author of the Trouble in Pleasant Valley Series
and the Mac & Sam Mysteries Series

A Certain Man breathes life into familiar gospel stories we too often skim. Characters come alive, giving us deeper insight into the hope they find in their world, a world with Jesus in it.

— Marilyn Malcolm, author of *The Disciple's
Wife*

Hearing Bible stories at the knee of my devout grandmother, I wanted to know more about the people in those gospel stories. *A Certain Man* weaves the tales of Mara and Samuel into a captivating connection of several Bible stories. An engaging story that twists and turns, yet has a satisfying ending – a book that I believe my grandmother would have enjoyed. I certainly did and think you will also.

— Nancy Martin, writing instructor, co-author
Patton's Lucky Scout

Readers who might shy away from a novel labeled Biblical fiction shouldn't with *A Certain Man*. They would be missing a beautifully written book with rich characters, a powerful and surprising plot, and a strong woman's point of view, all set against the backdrop of the well-researched and detailed history surrounding the period of Jesus' life.

— Susan Taylor-Boyd, author and columnist

Mara, the heroine of *A Certain Man*, finds herself in the warming presence of a stranger-turned-prophet. And quite unexpectedly, she becomes one of the blessed few who experiences love in its purest distillation. Author Linda Dinzans creates an ancient world that gives voice to the women of first-century Palestine under Roman rule.

— Michele Merens, author of *Inside Our Days*
(Muriel Press)

A CERTAIN FUTURE: BOOK ONE

A
CERTAIN
MAN

LINDA DINDZANS



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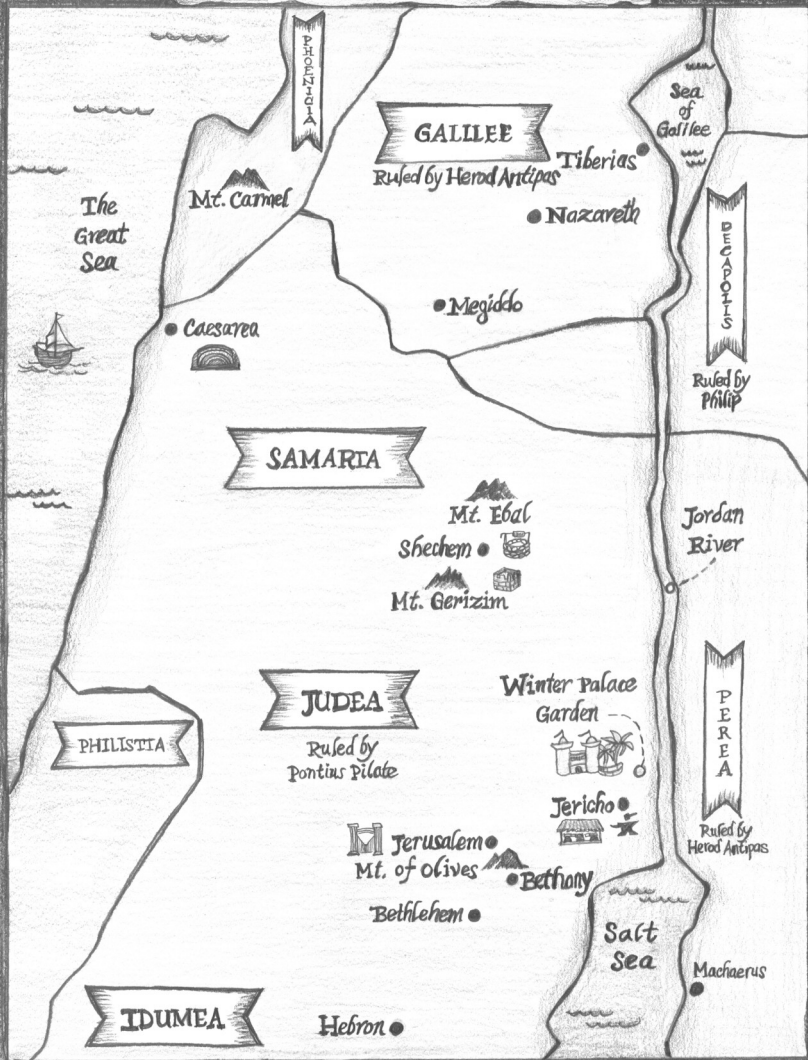
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*To my husband, Vincents.
I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.*

Song of Solomon

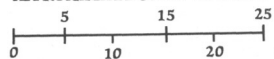
The Land at the Time of Yeshua of Nazareth



KEY



APPROXIMATE SCALE IN MILES



A Certain Man: List of Characters

*Historical figure in first-century Judea

Abram: Samuel's father

Achor: youngest son of High Priest of Shechem

Barid: innkeeper at Jericho inn

Caiaphas*: High Priest of Jerusalem

Dan: Daveed's younger son

Daveed: Mara's fifth husband

Delilah: wife of Dan, gave Mara pagan herbs

Dex: blacksmith at forge in Jericho

Enosh: middle son of High Priest of Shechem

Herod Antipas*: Tetrarch or "King" of Galilee and Perea at the time of Yeshua

Herodias*: Herod's wife, after she divorced his brother, also Herod's niece

Jareb: oldest son of High Priest of Shechem, rightful blood avenger

Johakim*: High Priest of Samaria at time of slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem

John the Baptizer*: prophet in the wilderness of Judea

Joseph of Arimathea*: wealthy merchant, member of Sanhedrin

Judith: Johakim's wife, deceased for many years.

Lyra: Samuel's daughter with Zosi

Mara/Tamara/Shamara: Young girl who loves Samuel

Miriam*: mother of Yeshua

Misha: Daveed's oldest son

Naomi: mother of Johakim high priest, respected matchmaker

Okpara: Egyptian slave, camel driver

Ozri: apprentice at Abram's workshop

Pil-i: twin of Okpara, camel driver

Pontius Pilate*: Prefect of Judea

Prima: first harpist at Herodias' court

Pyrce: Greek stonecutter who hides Samuel

Rivkah: Mara's mother who died in childbirth

Ruth: Samuel's mother, expert weaver, healer with herbs

Salome*/ Yonah: princess, daughter of Herodias. Not named in the Gospels

Samuel/ Didymus: young man who Mara loves

Sarah: midwife, present at Mara's birth

Seth: Mara's fourth husband, conscripted into the Roman Army

Sophia: wife of Dex, wet-nurses Lyra

Theo: victim of bandits on Jericho Road, named by Barid

Tobiah: Mara's greedy drunken father

Yeshua the Nazarene*: Jesus, The Messiah, The Promised One

Zosi: Samuel's comfort woman, Lyra's mother, favorite handmaid of Herodias

1



The Samaritan City of Shechem
During the reign of Emperor Tiberius Caesar
Spring, Nisan 14, Day before Passover

Mara

Mara ran deep into the field of barley, arms spread wide, embracing smells of fertile earth, ripening grain, and a few stolen moments of solitude. Having suffered thirteen years in her drunken father's house, more servant than daughter, soon she would be deemed mature enough to marry. Motherless since birth, only the Lord knew what type of match her father would broker.

Samuel. Her heart fluttered like a fledgling sparrow ready to take flight. Last night when he watched her weave, he called her *Mami*. *Sweetness*. Memory of his chiseled cheeks, sculpted form, and sun-bronzed skin set her feet dancing, weaving a path through the barley stalks. The rising sun warmed her back and

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face, her head-cover spilling to her shoulders, setting her hair free in the soft wind.

Samuel. For a moment, she allowed herself to imagine what her life could be if he came to love her—if she came to love him.

And, for just a moment, she allowed herself to dream. She spun, hands reaching for the sky, feeling beautiful and blessed and beloved.

Humming a wedding dance, Mara set aside her troubles and scampered toward the road, her heart singing Samuel's name.

Mara burst onto the dirt path and slammed into the chest of a man. She stepped back and gaped at the pitch-black eyes of Achor, son of the wealthy High Priest of Shechem.

"A thousand pardons." Mara fumbled, failing to secure her head-cover.

He seized her chin.

Warm sweat beaded on her neck, and searing heat crawled onto her cheeks.

Everything about Achor was dark. His eyes, his hair, his cloak. His soul.

"Those blue eyes must harken back to some pagan temptress in your bloodline." He leaned his head back and his eyes crept over every new curve of her body. "Such an enticing blush. You are ripe in time for the Festival of First Fruits. Ripe for early harvest."

Mara's heartbeat hitched like a startled doe. She side-stepped him and started to run.

He seized her arm and hauled her into a crushing hug. One hand slid into the hair at the back of her head. "Tresses the color of copper." He twisted her hair around his fingers. "The sign of a fiery woman." He leaned in, lips pursed.

Achor's breath reeked of last night's savory stew and well-aged barley wine. Both gone rancid.

A Certain Man

Mara angled away from him. "Let me go."

"Who will hear you in this out-of-the-way place?" Achor's slurred speech flashed a familiar warning of violence.

He was still besotted.

She shoved against his chest with all the might she could muster.

He licked his lips and pulled her closer.

Her skin skittered with the feet of a hundred scorpions.

"Release her." Samuel stepped through the barley, looking more warrior than woodworker.

Achor yanked her hair tighter. "Ah, the toolmaker's son. This time of year, the fields are full of creatures coupling. Perhaps that is why you are here." He looked from Mara to Samuel. "Surely you are old enough to have a woman."

Mara's eyes blurred with tears of pain and shame.

"Release her." Samuel raised his voice and widened his stance.

Mara drew in deep, slow breaths, striving to slow her runaway heart and mind. Samuel had tamed the quick temper that marred his youth, but Mara was sure he would not hesitate to defend her honor. She studied the two men.

Achor was a few years older than Samuel's eighteen, and a fist taller. But he did not have hard muscles forged by long hours of heavy work. He lived a soft life of luxury. If it came to blows, Samuel would prevail.

"I will share her with you." Achor let go of her hair and ran his hands down her body. "No one need ever know."

A bitter taste filled Mara's throat. She batted his groping hands away. *Lord, strike this demon dead.*

Achor clutched the neckline of her tunic, ready to rip it open.

"Release her." Samuel grabbed and squeezed Achor's wrist — his large hand a vise. "I will not warn you again."

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Achor's fingers uncurled from her tunic.

Samuel's face was frozen in bare-teethed fury. His temper must not explode.

"You have won." Mara tugged at Samuel's sleeve.

"You only think he has won." Achor's face flashed revenge and he kicked Samuel's knee.

The blow dropped him. He clutched his leg, face the color of ashes.

Achor seized Mara around the waist.

Samuel reached up. "Let her go." He yanked Achor's robe.

Achor staggered. "She wants me."

Mara wrenched away, but Achor stepped on her long tunic. Trapped—her pulse raced, her hands shook, her blood boiled. She rounded and rammed her knee hard into Achor's loins.

Samuel yanked harder at Achor's robe and toppled him.

She pulled free.

"Run, Mara, run."

She ran faster than she had ever run before.

"I will ... kill you." Achor's threat was edged with an evil she had never heard.

Mara stopped and turned. Achor straddled Samuel, pinning him to the ground. Both hands on his throat. Cutting off his life-breath. Samuel's face purpled.

Achor's lust for her been exchanged for a lust for blood.

She picked up a stone and hurled it at Achor. But the stone glanced off his back. He leaned into his chokehold.

Mara spotted two men on the road and ran, waving her arms above her head. "Help." She pointed toward the brawl. "He is killing him."

The two men hurried closer.

Mara knew them. Achor's elder brothers. Her stomach dropped and twisted. "Stop him."

They must save Samuel.

A Certain Man

They eyed each other and something unreadable passed between them.

“If Achor kills Samuel, you will be called before your father as witnesses against your brother’s sin.”

Jareb grabbed Achor around the middle and heaved him away from Samuel. “Rein in your temper.”

Achor gained his feet. Spewing curses, he headed back toward his eldest brother.

“Fool.” Jareb shook Achor by the shoulders. “Kill him and you will be stoned.”

Achor might have fought Jareb were he not a hand taller and half a talent more weight.

Sucking air, Samuel lurched to a stand, lame knee bent, weight on the other leg.

Enosh, near as wide as he was short, folded his arms across his chest. The look settling on his face was one of perverted pleasure. He seemed to relish his brothers’ discord.

Achor straightened his clothes. “This lout attacked me.”

“He lies.” Both brothers ignored Mara’s shout of the truth.

“Should we teach this brazen woodworker’s son a lesson?” Enosh, the lifelong victim of insults, seemed to savor the chance to brutalize someone else.

Jareb turned to his brothers. “Samuel may survive, but he will not soon forget. He has dared to assault a son of the high priest.”

Achor shot Mara a lecherous look. “Then, I will take you as mine.”

Bolts of horror surged through Mara’s veins. The three brothers closed in and surrounded Samuel—a pack of wild dogs.

Samuel’s eyes locked with hers. He mouthed, “Run.”

Mara could not breathe, she could not scream, she could not move.

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The three brothers shoved Samuel to the ground. Fists and feet flew at him, landing vicious blows.

Mara's mind was overrun with fears. Samuel could die. No witnesses. The words of women were worthless. She would be defiled, violated by all three brothers.

Above all, she must save Samuel. A newfound courage quickened her legs. She raced toward town, screaming for help.

At the crossroads, she rushed past Jacob's well. Too early for the village women. She ran past the forge. Fire stoked but no smithy in sight. A stitch in her side stole her breath. But she dashed on. At the edge of town, her father sprawled in their yard. Useless sot. The humble home of Samuel's parents was next door. She shouted inside. "Help! Priest's sons. Thrashing Samuel."

Mara picked up the striker and hit the cymbal hung in the front tree to call Abram from his workshop.

"Where?" Ruth bolted from the house.

"Near the priest's field."

Ruth rushed to Mara and took the striker from her hand. She kept banging and shouting for help.

Abram came running. His apprentice, Ozri, trailing by a few paces.

Ruth pointed. "Trouble. Samuel. High Priest's field." She ran to meet her husband and looked back, eyes wide, mouth pulled tight. The flicker of fear on her face faded and changed to a squint and set jaw of determination. She waved Mara toward her house. "Bring hyssop, wine, oil, and towels."

Mara darted inside, shoved what they needed into a woven sack, and ran back to help Samuel.

Abram and Ozri rushed to the road where the men had attacked Samuel.

But they were gone.

A Certain Man

Every trace of the brawl had been covered by the brush strokes of a nearby barley bundle fashioned into a broom.

Off to the side, Abram picked up a handful of darkened dirt, sifted it through his fingers, and sniffed. “Blood, not water, has soaked this ground.”

“HaShem, save my son.” Ruth gasped and fell to her knees. “Where is he?” She pressed a fist to her heart.

Mara forced herself to stay calm and study the scene. “Samuel must be alive. To touch a corpse would make them unclean to sacrifice the lambs for the Passover.”

She knelt and took Ruth into her arms. “They must have dragged him into the barley field.”

Abram looked in every direction. “Nothing stirs.”

Ozri touched Abram’s shoulder. “Master, you go east. I will go west.”

Abram looked at his wife. “You stay here with Mara. We do not know if the priests’ sons are still nearby.”

The men went into the field, their calls for Samuel sounding across the land.

Ruth wrung her hands. “We must find him. His time is sifting away.”

Mara hugged Ruth. “Abram and Ozri will find him.”

Ruth pushed away, a wild look in her eyes. “Samuel’s time is short. His blood leaks away. His life fades away.”

Mara buried her face in her hands. “No. No. No.”

“Yes.” Ruth gently took Mara’s hands from her face. “Look at me.”

Mara met her worry-filled eyes.

“I am his mother and I know in my bones, his heartbeat slows. Time is short.”

Mara grabbed Ruth’s arm. “We must search too.”

Ruth rose. “We will stay where we can hear each other.”

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Mara headed into the field, prickling barley snagging her robe. Time seemed both too long and too short.

“Come back to the road.” Abram’s shout hitched with disappointment and despair. The exhausted search party met and traded looks but not words. Abram offered each a drink from his waterskin.

“We cannot stop.” Mara plunged back into the field. Ruth flanked her right.

“Judging by the overhead sun, it must be midday.” Mara wiped her brow with her head-cloth. “Samuel.” Her voice was hoarse and failing.

Several paces away, Ruth stopped and tilted her head. “Shh. I heard something.”

Time crawled in circles.

Ruth shrieked and dropped out of sight.

Mara ran toward the place where Ruth had vanished and found her kneeling next to Samuel, her ear pressed to his chest, grief etching wrinkles around her eyes.

“Those beasts almost buried him alive.” Ruth cleared dirt away from Samuel’s face.

He lay unmoving and bloody. Eyes closed. Face gray. Mara began to dig with both hands. “Over here. Help me.”

Ozri and Abram crashed through the barley and unearthed Samuel’s body.

Mara studied Samuel’s still face. This was her fault. Memories of her father’s relentless taunts ripped at her soul. *Mara can turn a moment of blessing into a curse.*

HaShem, please. Will you hear the prayers of a woman? I have no father, no brother, no husband to pray in my stead. Lord, let him live.

Mara held her breath.

Silence. A far-flung silence. A silence clinging to a shred of hope.

A Certain Man

A gasp broke the silence.
And her buried Beloved began to breathe.