

*A Certain Mercy* transports readers to the first century where the characters are tangible and real and the plot-line compels you to read the next paragraph. It's creative writing tethered to biblical conscientiousness.

— Brian Dainsberg, Lead Pastor, Alliance Bible Church, Mequon, Wisconsin, *The Brian Dainsberg Podcast*



A CERTAIN FUTURE: BOOK TWO

A  
CERTAIN  
MERCY

LINDA DINDZANS



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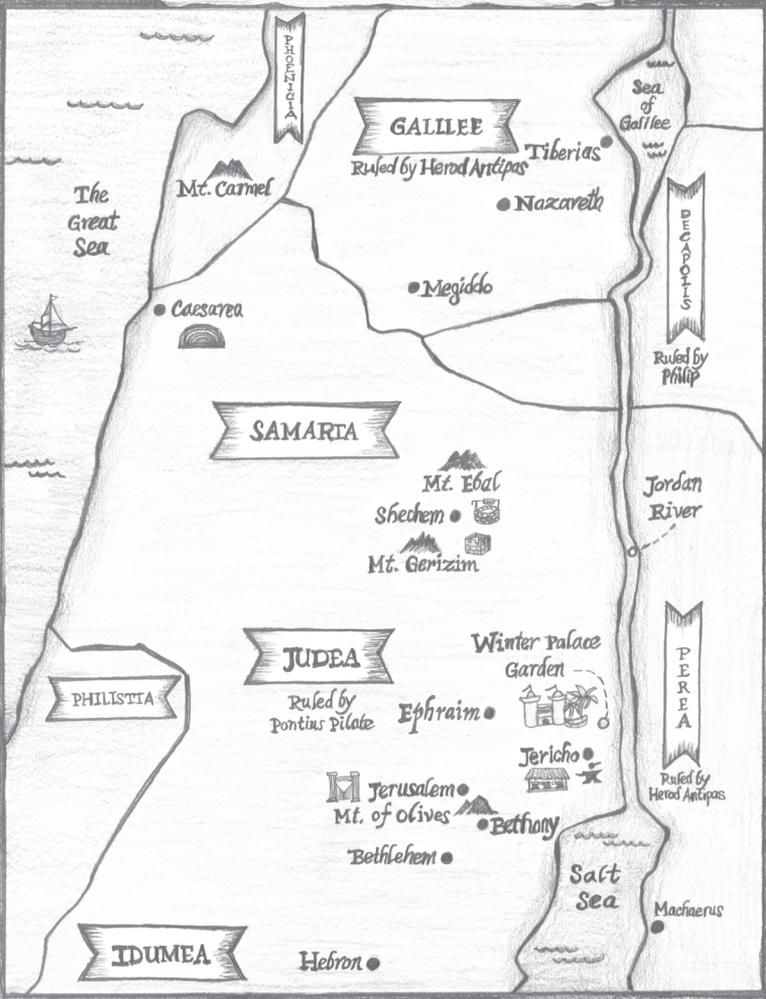
*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ~  
Sermon on the Mount*

*This novel is dedicated to those who will forge our family's  
future—Andra, Maisie, Karen, Lauren, Karlis, Viktors, Greg,  
Mikey, Henry.*

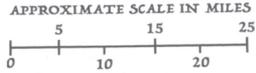
*May they be blessed and bless others as they journey along the  
path of a certain mercy.*



# The Land at the Time of Yeshua of Nazareth



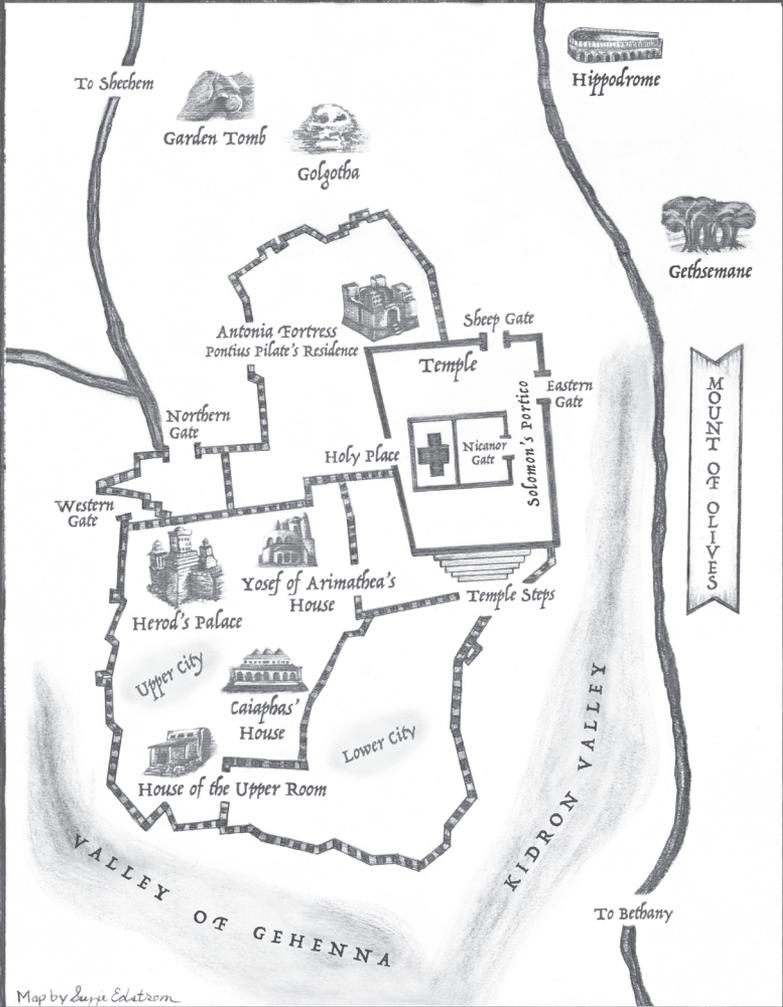
- KEY**
-  Blacksmith  
 Jacob's Well
  -  Amphitheatre  
 village
  -  Temple  
 Altar
  -  Inn



Lena Cass and Suzanne Edstrom



# Jerusalem at the Time of Yeshua of Nazareth



Map by Suzanne Edstrom

Distance from the Eastern Gate to the Western Wall was approximately one mile



# A Certain Mercy: List of Characters

## Legend:

\* Historical figure

+ Biblical figure

# Fictional character

^ Also appears in *A Certain Man* (Book 1)

**Abram** #—Infant son of Shamara (Mara) and Samuel

**Auriga Maximus (Auri)** #—Famed slave charioteer

**Barabbas** +—Criminal released by Pontius Pilate at Passover

**Barid** #^—Innkeeper at the Jericho Inn

**Caiaphas** +\*^—High Priest of Jerusalem during Yeshua's time

**Chuza** +—Herod's chief steward; husband of Joanna

**Dex** #^—Blacksmith in Jericho; husband of Sophia

**Emet** #—Young slave in the House of Lazarus

**Gaius** #—Young son of Sophia and Dex

**Herod Antipas** +\*^—Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea during Yeshua's ministry

**Herodias** +\*^—Wife of Herod Antipas; formerly married to his brother

**Ira** #—Steward over Zara's inheritance

**Joanna** +—Wife of Chuza; Zara's kinswoman

**Johakim** \*^—Retired High Priest of Samaria; obscure historical figure

**Jonathan** \*—High Priest of Samaria at the time of the crucifixion; obscure historical figure

**Joram** #—Zara's husband

**Lazarus (Amon)** \*+—Friend of Yeshua; brother of Martha and Mary

**Lyra** #^—Daughter of Samuel and Zosi, his deceased comfort woman

**Magdalena (Lenah)** +—Mary Magdalene, delivered of seven demons by Yeshua

**Mark (John Mark)** +\*—Young man at Gethsemane; later author of the Gospel of Mark

**Martha** +—Sister of Lazarus and Mary of Bethany

**Mary of Bethany** +—Sister of Lazarus and Martha

**Miriam** +^—Mother of Yeshua

**Ozri** #^—Woodworker at Samuel's woodshop

**Reah** #—Handmaid to Zara

**Samuel** +^—The Good Samaritan; husband of Shamara

**Shamara (Mara)** +^—Wife of Samuel; the Woman at the Well; not named in the Bible

**Simon the Leper** +—Host of banquet in Bethany

**Sophia** #^—Wife of Dex; mother of Gaius

**Theo (Etan)** +^—Disfigured servant at Jericho Inn; victim in the Good Samaritan parable; not named in the Bible

**Yeshua of Nazareth** \*+^—Jesus, the Christ; the Promised One

**Yonah (Salome)** \*+^—Daughter of Herodias; not named in the Bible

**Yosef of Arimathea** \*+^—Wealthy Sanhedrin member; provided the tomb of Yeshua

**Zara (Zera)** #—Wife of Joram; secretly in love with Auriga Maximus



# Chapter One



Jerusalem

Under Roman Rule of Tiberius Caesar

After Sukkot or Feast of Tabernacles, Tishri 22 (October)

Zara

**S**he could think of no one else. Zara's neglected lips tingled at the thought of Auriga Maximus. Golden-haired. Famed charioteer. And her husband Joram's slave.

Zara sat in front of her dressing table. Every time she was in Auriga's presence, her yearning for him lingered longer and grew more vivid with each stolen glance.

"When is the charioteer expected to arrive?" Reah lifted a polished bronze mirror.

"He will sup with us at sunset." Zara's breaths quickened, captives to her longing. She drew in calming air. "My husband has sent word he wants me to look my most alluring."

"Mistress, look in the mirror. For the banquet, I will hide

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your right eye with this draping tendril.” Then Reah brushed Zara’s curls upward and secured them with her amber-studded comb. “The comb will set off your cinnamon brown hair. And my lady, your hair draped in this fashion will add mystery to your appearance.” Reah stepped back and studied Zara. “Of late, your husband has been in high spirits. The golden tunic clinging to your slender form is so tempting.” Reah touched Zara’s shoulder. “Perhaps he will come to your chambers tonight.”

“Do not torment me. You well know that during the first three years of my wedded life, my husband doted upon me. Now, for nigh on three more years, I am an unbedded wife. I have kept a thousand lonely vigils. Why should this night be any different than the others?” Zara could not keep the bitter tone from her voice or the sour twist from her stomach. “From the day Joram won our charioteer while casting dice with King Herod Antipas, my husband has come to me only to beg for lucre to back his wagers at the hippodrome.” Zara removed the comb. “Pin back the draping tendril.”

“Mistress, why flaunt your flaw? Since birth, it has been the source of such superstition and shunning.”

“Auriga will not flinch at my gaze. He chose this comb to match my eyes.” Zara turned back to the mirror and studied her blemish. In the place of a small dark circle, the slit of a cat eye gleamed.

Soon, Auri would stand before her. Soon, he would feast upon her carefully crafted appearance. Soon, they would share the evening meal. And her husband would never know of her secret hunger.

Something soft brushed against Zara’s toes.

*Mmrrr ... Mmrr.*

Two black kittens had escaped the willow basket tucked under the dressing table.

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She scooped up one in each hand and cradled them against her cheeks. “These little ones are hungry.” She turned to Reah. “Did you bring the fresh goat milk?”

“Yes, Mistress.” Reah poured milk from a pitcher into a silver bowl meant to mix kohl to paint around the eyes. She set the bowl on the floor and looked up at Zara, who still cradled the kittens against her cheeks. Reah giggled. “Your eyes mirror the color of the kittens’ eyes.”

Zara released the kittens onto the floor. They scrambled over each other, racing toward the dish. She smiled at their antics, having learned to cling to any scrap of joy. “The kittens miss their mother.”

“As you and I both miss my beloved mother.” Reah’s voice faltered.

“I remember her fondly.” Reah’s mother had been Zara’s nurse. “We both coddled you from the day you were born. You were my first doll. Now you are my only friend.”

Reah sighed and seemed to gather herself. “Mistress, may the gods bless you for saving the kittens. I did not want to watch that fish merchant drown them.”

“Auri reveres Bastet, the black Egyptian cat goddess.”

“You dare call him a fond name ... Auri?”

“Auriga means charioteer, but my husband was amused when I suggested we call him Auri, which means golden. His victories in the hippodromes have amassed us a fortune. A fortune my husband is quick to stake on his next wager.” Zara strove to suppress the caress in her voice when she spoke of Auri and the loathing in her tone when she spoke of Joram.

Reah’s eyes flickered with something Zara could not read. “Is this Auri pleasing to look upon?”

Zara’s cheeks heated from a passion that was growing harder and harder to deny—and harder to hide. She flashed a soft, shy smile toward Reah. Zara considered Auri’s son-of-a-

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gladiator build, his strong charioteer arms, and his soothing voice. A voice that sent pleasant shivers down her spine. One that made her stomach flutter and her face flame.

“Reah, you may judge for yourself. My husband has arranged a sumptuous banquet for the three of us to celebrate Auriga’s victory today. You will help serve.”

The kittens licked the bowl clean, and Zara lifted them, moving to her raised sleeping pallet. She motioned for Reah to join her in the nest of embroidered pillows where they lazed in comfortable quiet.

Zara rested her palms on the sleeping kittens and listened to them purr. The rise and fall of their tiny chests tickled her hands and called to mind how much she craved any loving touch from her husband. She missed a husband who sought to know her thoughts and desired to sleep within the circle of her arms. She mourned the loss of a husband who loved her without restraint. Her husband had been stolen from her by a new obsession, a new mistress—gambling on the chariot races.

Zara sighed. The sigh of an honorable woman whose soul is pulled in two directions. “Auri bought the comb in my hair with his portion of the last victory purse. I want to give him a special gift in kind. Since he honors Bastet, I will give him one of the kittens. Which should I offer him? The male or the female?”

“Tread lightly, my lady. Your husband may become jealous.”

“Joram will not be moved to jealousy. Or even the anger of insult. For months, Auri has looked on me with undisguised admiration. He praises me in Joram’s presence. Once, Joram mocked my cat eye, and Auri saw my humiliation and stepped between us. He presented me with the precious comb, telling me that my eyes were enchanting. The eyes of a goddess. The eyes of Bastet.”

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“Any other husband would have sentenced Auriga to the arena. What did Joram do?”

“His face remained unmoved. No trace of jealousy. My husband’s heart is no longer mine.” The shame roiling in her stomach sent a burning wave of humiliation up her throat. “Then, most mortifying of all, Joram nodded to Auri, sneered and waved toward me as if he would reward his prize-winning charioteer with the favors of his wife.”

“Take care. Joram may divorce you.”

“He will not. I have asked him three times to set me free from the shackles of this insufferable marriage. But Joram refuses—he will not return my dowry as prescribed by my wedding contract.”

Reah rose and stretched. “Your father never meant to leave you languishing in a loveless, lifeless marriage.”

“That is why my father charged his faithful steward with the oversight of my inheritance.” Zara stood and smoothed her robe. “Enough of my troubles. Which cat should be my gift to Auri?”

Reah lifted the female. “The champion charioteer praised Bastet. Give him the one that brings to mind his most favored goddess. But the kitten is young and will need care.”

“I will keep her until she is able to survive and thrive in the stables and give Auri reason to visit me often.”

Auri’s past looks of admiration were locked in Zara’s mind. But the new flickers of desire in his eyes had unraveled her resolve. And temptation threatened to push her to the brink of seduction.

A chill coiled in Zara’s chest like a snake ready to strike.

Suddenly, the heavy cedar door swung open and thudded against the wall. Joram strode in and waved Reah away.

She swept up the kittens and left.

Zara turned to face Joram. She had seen this look before.

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Lips curled tightly in a feigned smile— eyes darting refusing to meet hers. At first, she had thought this look was guilt for his neglect of her, but now she knew it was greed.

Joram's face was flushed from wine and impatience. He clenched a fist and slapped his palm. "Do not dawdle. And do not protest. Give me your ruby armband." He grabbed Zara's arm and shoved her toward the jewel box.

"Do you not recall? You took that weeks ago when you bet on Auri's team."

"And see how it has enriched us." He pawed through her jewel box and lifted a clump of necklaces. "A sure win has been whispered in my ear. We must not miss this chance for great gain. It is so sure I can feel the gold in my hand. But I must have the wager recorded within the hour."

Each strand of jewelry Joram pulled seemed to tighten the tangle. He tossed the knotted jewels down. His face darkened and he reached for the precious comb in Zara's hair.

She leapt back. "Remember, there are no chariot races to bet upon today." She desperately wanted to keep the comb.

A storm of obsession raged across Joram's face. His eyes were the eyes of a man gone mad. He again reached for the comb.

Zara turned away, leaving Joram's fingers pinching air. "Peace, husband. Come, sit on the sleeping pallet. I will look through my other jewel box and find something much more precious than this comb. Something worthy of this grand chance."

He sat, wiped his brow with his sleeve, then slid his palms along the lap of his robe.

Zara stooped at the dressing table and lifted a carved box tucked behind the wicker basket. She carried it to the sleeping pallet, opened it, and studied her jewels. Many were missing, already confiscated by her husband to secure wagers. Only two

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pieces would rival the worth of the comb. Both were the only remaining jewels left to her by her *ima*. She picked up her mother's emerald brooch hidden at the bottom of the jewel box and brought it to her lips in farewell. Joram grabbed it from her hand and rushed from the room. Praise HaShem. She would hide her *ima*'s sapphire ring.

Reah returned at a run, her face forlorn. "Joram took your *ima*'s emerald brooch."

"I gave it to him." Zara's chest tightened around a breath-robbing realization. Just as her husband was obsessed with risking his whole fortune on a foolish wager, she was obsessed with a never-ending desire for Auri.