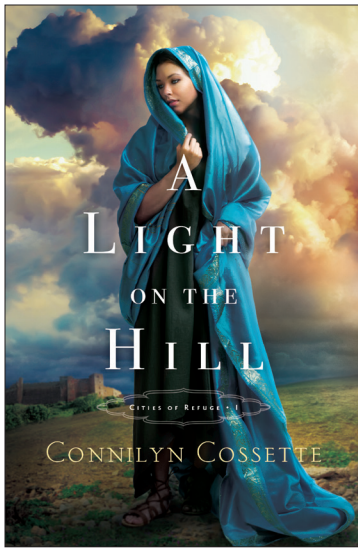




QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH CONNILYN COSSETTE



A Light on the Hill

CITIES OF REFUGE #1

by Connilyn Cossette

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1. What inspired this new series?

In searching for ideas about what to write after the *OUT FROM EGYPT* series, I ran across the Levitical cities of refuge in Joshua 20. This law designated six cities to be set aside (out of the forty-eight allotted to the Levites, who did not inherit like the other twelve tribes) as a refuge for those accused of manslaughter. Back in those times, if you were accused of killing someone, premeditated or accidental, the closest kin of your victim was called the Blood Avenger and was allowed to take your life. But if it truly was an accident, God allowed mercy (which was totally opposite to all cultural traditions), and you could run to one of these refuge cities and plead to be placed on trial and have your life spared. If the elders determined that it was indeed manslaughter and not murder, then you were allowed to live in the refuge city for the rest of your life, or until the High Priest died—in which case the manslayer was allowed to go free and return home, condemnation wiped away, just as if it had never happened! I began to see these cities and this merciful law as a cool foreshadowing of the work Jesus did on the cross. Therefore, since I was so fascinated with how these cities might have worked, I placed Moriyah (a young girl in *Wings of the Wind*) into the time period when these cities were just beginning to appear, while most of the tribes were still gathered at Shiloh during the early years of Israel.

2. What were some of the challenges with this new story?

My first three books take place within the framework of the exodus, a well-known Bible story, but with this series there is no “Bible story”—just the law in Joshua 20 and a few details like how the land was being divided between the tribes, the survey team that was sent out to detail the new country, and a few other (sometimes conflicting) clues about what was happening during this period of time as the Hebrews were settling into the promised land and continuing their job of pushing out the remaining enemies (or at least that’s what they were supposed to be doing!).

So although this created a challenge, it also provided me with a bit more freedom to come up with my own plot and timeline without having to keep everything so perfectly in line with a rigid biblical one. At first this was an intimidating prospect, but I ended up having a ton of fun building a story set against the backdrop of this time, creating new characters who I came to love, as well as revisiting a couple of old ones.

My other challenge with this new series is the historical research. There is a wealth of information about ancient Egypt during the late Bronze Age but very little about Canaan during this period, and most of it is very conflicting and difficult to find. So, as usual, I started with the Bible, layered in as much as I could with the historical information I had available, and used my overactive imagination for the rest!

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3. How does this series tie in with OUT FROM EGYPT?

The CITIES OF REFUGE series is a bit of a spin-off of my first series. Readers who have read *Wings of the Wind* will remember Moriyah, our heroine, as the young girl who befriends Alanah the Canaanite and ends up horrifically branded in Jericho by the High Priestess. *A Light on the Hill* opens seven years after Jericho, when the tribes are still concentrated mostly around Shiloh (although some tribes had already gone to their new lands) and after the Tabernacle has been erected there. Moriyah's life has been defined up to this point by the traumatic events in *Wings of the Wind*, which has kept her from fully becoming the woman she is meant to be. There are a couple of cameos from characters we met in OUT FROM EGYPT, but there are many new friends to get to know as well.

4. You recently traveled to Israel. What insights did you gain while you were there?

Going to Israel had been a dream of mine since I was a little girl and became a true ambition in the last few years of researching and learning about the Land of Promise. So when I had the opportunity to go on a trip with author Cliff Graham's "Good Battle" Tours, I leapt at the chance! There is only so much a writer can do with the internet, Google Earth, and books, but now after walking in Israel and experiencing so much, I will never read the Word of God with the same eyes and will forever have that time to draw on as I write biblical fiction. I had the pleasure of standing atop Mount Carmel where Elijah battled the priests of Ba'al and looking over the Jezreel Valley. I climbed down a billion stairs into the heart of Tel Meggido where the Canaanites dug a cistern down to the spring below, going underneath the City of David and walking the length of Hezekiah's tunnel (with icy-water numb feet) that was built during the Babylonian invasion. And I gazed over at the Mount of Olives where our Messiah will return one day. It was an amazing experience that I am still processing.

One of my biggest takeaways was just how small Israel is, and how especially in the area of the Sea of Galilee (which was way smaller than in my imagination) everything is within such close proximity. Also, I knew from my research that Israel was a beautiful place, but seeing how the northern part of the country especially is so lush and fertile (even in the winter) helped me to reframe some of my mental pictures of different Bible stories, as well as combat many current media depictions. As much as I enjoyed all the many historical sites (and we saw a ton in seven days!), I found watching the vibrant mix of cultures within Israel, and Jerusalem especially, to be almost as fascinating. I could probably go back and just people-watch for days. I am eager to use all the sensory detail I soaked in as I continue to write the CITIES OF REFUGE series so readers can benefit from my trip to Israel as well!