



**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH CONNILYN COSSETTE**



***Shelter of the Most High***

CITIES OF REFUGE #2

by Connilyn Cossette

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**1. What can you tell us about the main characters of *Shelter of the Most High*?**

As I was writing *A Light on the Hill*, one character became very dear to me—Eitan, a little boy caught up in some tragic circumstances that changed the course of his life in both positive ways and painful ones. Over the last eleven years, Eitan has faced the challenge of overcoming the heartbreak of being an unwanted orphan, along with the struggles of a disfigurement from birth, and the consequences of choices made without the wisdom of age. By the time we catch up with him as a grown man in *Shelter of the Most High*, those internal conflicts have come to a boiling point, setting him on a collision course with his past and, of course, our heroine, Sofea.

Sofea was a fun character to write, especially since for the first few chapters she does not speak the language of the people she assumes have taken her prisoner. Sofea adores the sea (one of my friends likens her to Disney’s Moana) and spends much of her time swimming and exploring its mysteries, but when pirates (yes, there were pirates in the Bronze Age!) attack her village, everything in her life is stripped away in an instant. Her fierce protectiveness over her cousin Prezi, the only person she has left, becomes the impetus for nearly every choice, good and bad, that she makes along the rest of the journey.

**2. What is the biblical and historical setting of this story?**

This book opens nearly twenty years after the Hebrews entered the land of Canaan. At this point, the tribes of Israel have settled into their new territories and are busy cultivating land, building homes, and enjoying the inheritance Yahweh bestowed upon them. However, even though Moses’s Law is for the most part respected during this period, with the Levites working to keep the Torah forefront in the minds of the people, it hasn’t taken long for things to slide off the rails. Mixing and intermarrying with the remaining Canaanites instead of pushing them out as they were instructed by Joshua, disrespecting the Sabbath rest for the land and its people, and creeping idolatry has set the Israelites on a direct course for judgment and disaster. Although Kedesh (the setting of *Shelter of the Most High*) is mostly protected from these realities due to faithful leadership and the influence of Moriyah (Eitan’s adopted mother), there is a sad downward trend in all of Israel that will eventually lead them into eight years of subjugation by an evil king.

**3. What were some of your unique challenges with this book?**

I have never written a character like Eitan that I “knew” as a child and then had to “grow” into a hero. Discovering how his character and personality might have changed over the years, how his past affected his self-image, and determining his motives was a challenge but also really enjoyable. My biggest challenge, however, was the element of mystery and the murder plot that Eitan and Sofea become involved in. There are so many little important details that have to work together, so working out the timeline and establishing motives for everyone involved (both heroes and villains) was a bit of

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a tangle. Thank the Lord for the world's best editors at Bethany House, who are champions at catching my plot holes/faulty logic and are so very patient with my ever-shifting timelines.

**4. What do you want readers to take away from *Shelter of the Most High*?**

As with all my stories, my main goal is to gently guide readers back to the Word and possibly give some fresh perspective on details we all may have overlooked. The cities of refuge are such a beautiful picture of God's grace and mercy in the Old Testament, so I hope that readers will be inspired to search out more nuggets like these in their own study that illustrate and foreshadow Jesus's sacrifice. Also, like most of us, both main characters in *Shelter of the Most High* struggle with confusion about their true identity—Sofea because she has no context for a loving God or a law and priesthood that seeks to guide and protect people instead of profiting at their expense, and Eitan because he is dealing with shame, false assumptions, and a refusal to embrace forgiveness. Hopefully, if readers are struggling with any of the same issues, this story will connect with their hearts. I also hope that readers of *A Light on the Hill* will enjoy spending more time with Moriyah and Darek's family and be curious about what is still to come for these characters, both familiar and new.

**5. What can we expect next for this series?**

In the next book of the series, *Until the Mountains Fall*, readers will get to know another of Moriyah's children, Malakhi, along with Rivkah, the girl he loved to tease as a boy (so keep an eye out for hints of them in *Shelter of the Most High*!). This story was inspired by the well-known parable of the Prodigal Son told by Jesus, but there's a twist that I can't divulge just yet! I hope readers will come to love Malakhi and Rivkah just as much as I did while their story came to life on the page, even though sometimes they might just want to shake some sense into both of them!