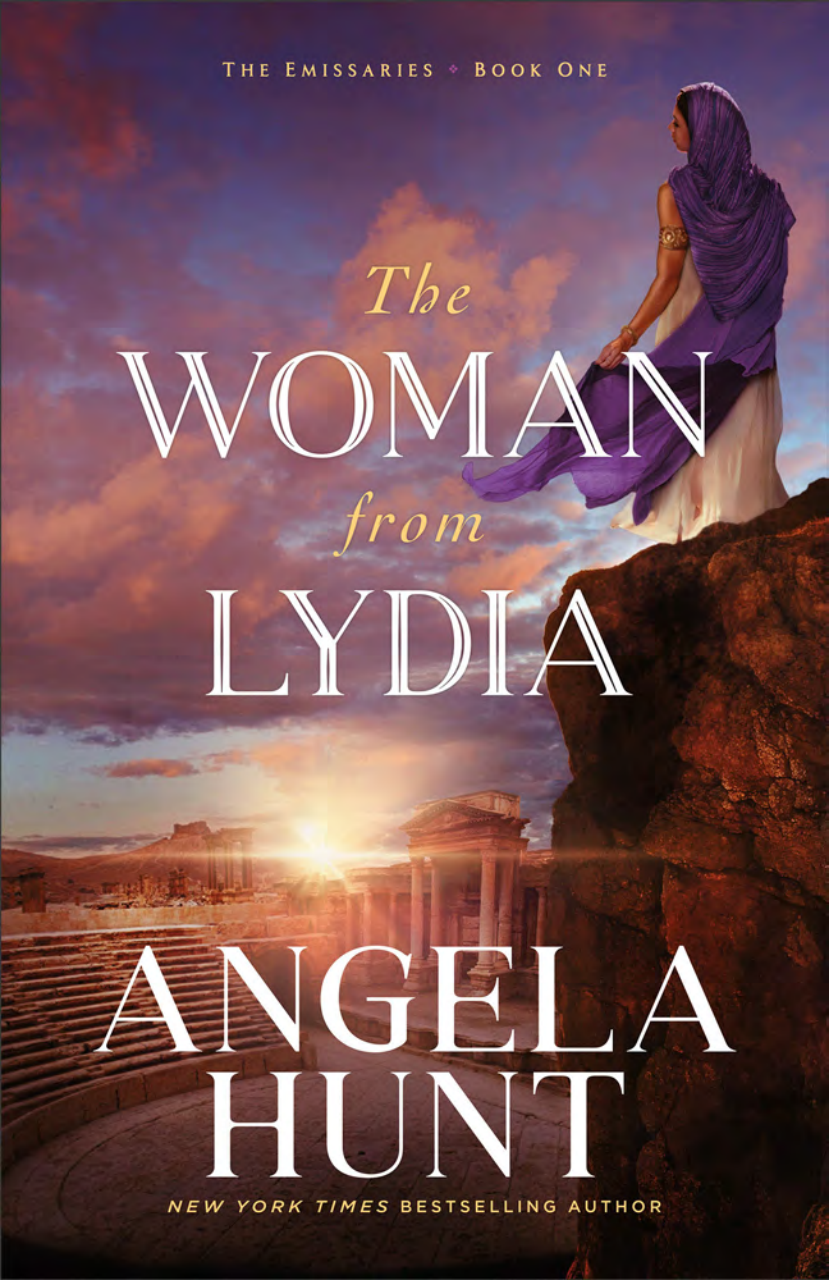


THE EMISSARIES ♦ BOOK ONE

The
WOMAN
from
LYDIA

A woman in a purple and white dress stands on a dark, rocky cliff edge, looking out over a sunset over ancient ruins. The sky is filled with soft, golden light and scattered clouds. In the background, there are stone structures, including a prominent temple with columns and a pediment, and a large circular stone structure in the foreground. The overall mood is serene and historical.

ANGELA
HUNT

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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The Emissaries

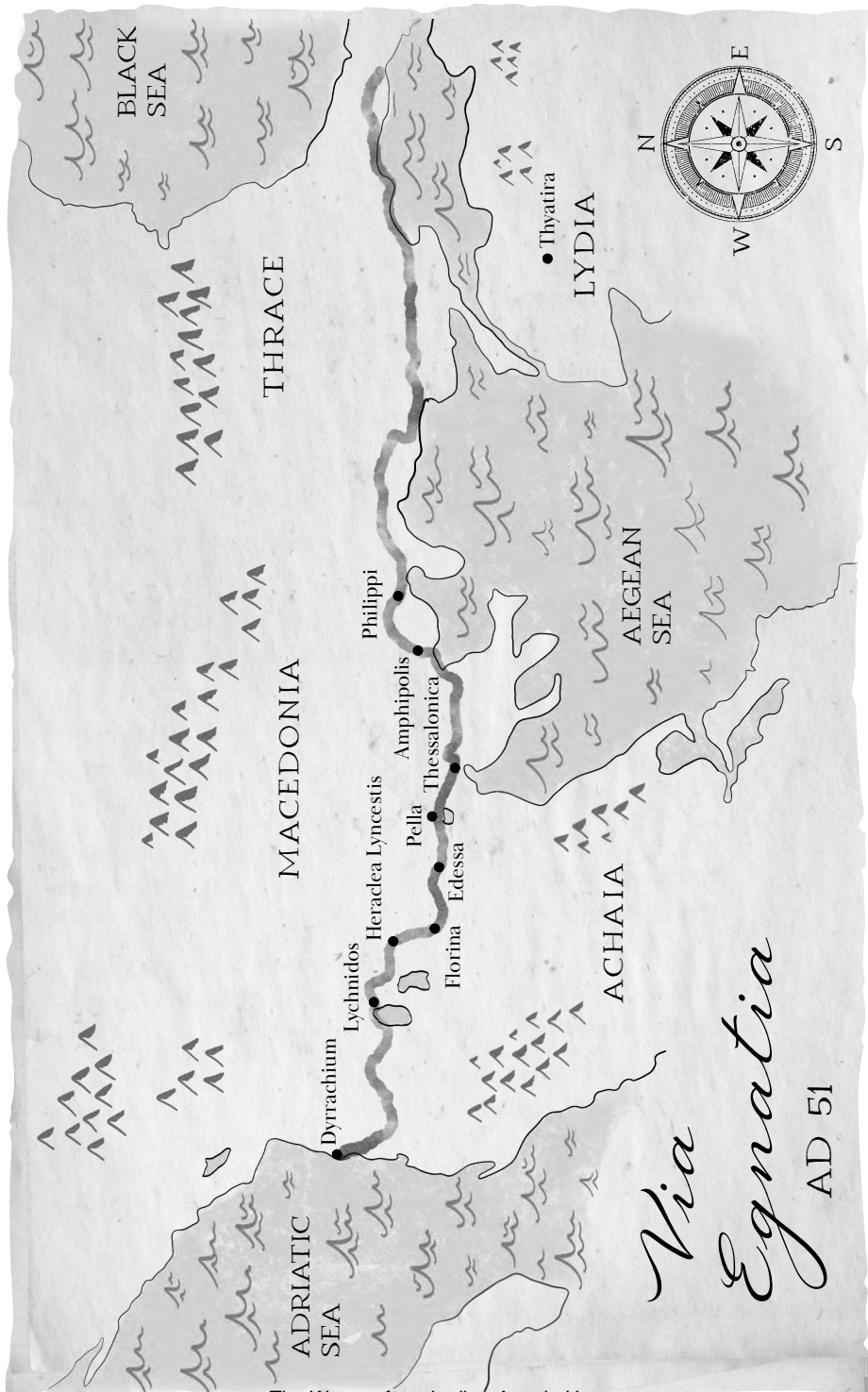
The New Testament’s book of Acts gives us brief outlines of Paul’s missionary journeys. In his subsequent letters to the churches he founded, we can see Paul’s love and concern in the way he praises, encourages, and admonishes the Gentile converts. But although the Scriptures paint an overall picture of the age in which they lived, the modern reader may find it difficult to fully appreciate the pressures facing the fledgling believers.

THE EMISSARIES series features the stories of men and women who came to faith through Paul’s church-planting efforts in Gentile cities. Our own society—which grows ever more saturated with unbiblical worldviews—is not so different from that of ancient Rome. May we be challenged by the first-century believers’ vision, courage, and commitment to Messiah Yeshua.

Since reading involves “hearing” words in your head, you might find it helpful to know the pronunciation of several names of people and places in this story. *Euodia* is pronounced U-oh-dee-ah, *Syntyche* is pronounced Sin-tee-chee (or -key), and *Magaere* is pronounced Meh-JEER-ah.

The Roman greeting *salve* is pronounced SAL-vey.

The early church was the *ecclēsia* (ek-la-SEE-ah), and our heroine, from *Thyatira* (Thy-ah-tire-ah) and *Philippi* (Fil-ip-pie), visits several cities: *Thessalonica* (Thess-ah-lo-ni-kah), *Amphipolis* (Am-fip-o-liss), and *Lychnidos* (Leek-nee-dose) as she travels the *Via Egnatia* (VEE-ah Egg-NOT-tee-ah). Some of these pronunciations may vary according to the source.



The Woman from Lydia • Angela Hunt

If a man gets lost in the mountains, hundreds will search and often two or three searchers are killed. But the next time somebody gets lost just as many volunteers turn out. Poor arithmetic, but very human. It runs through all our folklore, all human religions, all our literature—a racial conviction that when one human needs rescue, others should not count the price.

Robert A. Heinlein

One

APRIL AD 51

I stood in the river shallows, my smile tightening as Syntyche's little daughter splashed in the rippling water. "Adonai gave—" I whispered, pushing past the lump in my throat—"and Adonai has taken away, blessed be the Name of Adonai."

I looked away and bent to pick up a gray shape on the sand. Another snail of the right shape and size.

"I found another one!" A woman emerged from the middle of the river, her hair wet and her smile exultant. She waved a gray shell. "I thought I had found every snail in this spot, but the little beasts are good at hiding."

"You are blessed to be such a good diver," I called. "Not everyone can swim so well."

Behind me, an older woman complained, "My toes are as wrinkled as my face."

"I cannot feel my feet," another worker called, flashing a wide grin. "But I have nearly filled my basket. My children will eat well tonight!"

Syntyche watched us from the shore. "Fill your basket

completely and your husband will eat well tonight, too,” she yelled, her voice reaching even the edge of our group. “Be sure to stop by the chicken keeper’s booth at the market. My neighbor is selling a group of fat hens.”

Syntyche’s comment was unusually encouraging for a woman with a generally dour temperament, but she was doing exactly what I had hired her to do. Pleased with her efforts, I continued searching the shallows.

The valuable snails blended easily into the sand, but experience had taught me to spot them even when hidden among the rocks. I squinted yet found it difficult to focus with Syntyche’s little daughter scampering at the river’s edge. How could I spot anything through a veil of tears?

I blinked the wetness away and lifted my head. The sun hovered just above a bank of approaching clouds, so only two or three hours of daylight remained.

“Ladies!” I lifted my voice. “We have gathered enough for today. Now let us count the result of our efforts.”

“And do not forget,” Syntyche shouted, “tomorrow you will receive a bonus if you bring another woman to join us.”

The women waded toward shore, the younger ones playfully splashing their friends. Syntyche moved behind the table and pulled the purse from her tunic, preparing to count the snails in each woman’s basket.

I remained in the water, my eyes fixed on the sky. Behind me, Syntyche’s daughter began to count the incoming waves of high tide, her childish treble rising above the softer chorus of women’s voices. “*One, two, three . . .*”

“You have changed my lament into dancing,” I whispered, closing my eyes. “You undid my sackcloth and girded me with gladness. You redeemed my soul from the battles

that were upon me, for the sake of the multitudes who were with me . . .”

Paulos had taught me those words, and they never failed to calm my mind. I could not honestly say I felt like dancing, but at least I was no longer mourning.

When I was certain my smile would not wobble, I turned and studied the women who stood in line to have their baskets examined. Nearly a dozen joined us today—young and old, married and widowed, and one as yet unmarried. A good group, but we could always use more willing hands. To complete my latest commission, I would need twice as many helpers.

The sun was within a hand’s breadth of touching the horizon by the time I reached the table. “How did we do?” I asked, lowering my basket.

“We did well.” Syntyche scrutinized my catch. “Have you counted yours?”

“Sixty-four.”

“Good.” She jotted the number on a parchment while I looked beneath the table and found her daughter sitting cross-legged on the sand. “Hello, Lena. What are you doing under there?”

“Waiting.” The girl’s lower lip edged forward in a pout. “I am hungry.”

“Your mama will have dinner ready soon enough.”

“Four hundred thirty,” Syntyche announced, her voice dripping with disappointment. “Added to the count from prior days, we have four thousand six hundred snails. We are still a long way from ten thousand.”

“But we are nearly halfway to our goal,” I answered, determined to remain positive. “Tomorrow these women will

bring their friends, and then we will have enough hands to begin the extraction. We will send half to the water and put the others to work on the table.”

“We will need wool. Do you have enough to begin?”

“I am going to the market now. Do not worry, dear friend.” I nodded with a confidence I did not feel. “I will have everything ready.”

Two

Hector stood in the doorway of his house and clenched his hands. One of the Nabatean's servants had arrived late last night, promising the mare would be delivered this morning. But though Hector looked up and down the street, he saw neither man nor horse.

He stepped onto the flagstone road and glanced left and right again, eager to see the horse that had cost him more than a common man would earn in two years. Since the Nabateans were famous for their fast, courageous horses, Hector had dared to spend a sizable chunk of his pension for a mare that should bear superlative foals. He would race some of them and breed those with no gift for racing. After twenty years of caring for the beasts of Rome's army, he knew how to spot an excellent broodmare—

He turned at the sound of iron-rimmed wheels grating against flagstone. A cloth-covered *cursus clabalaris* approached, driven by a man in Bedouin garb. The man met Hector's gaze and nodded, then pulled a pair of mules to a stop.

Hector felt an internal shiver as he approached the

conveyance. A good idea, hiding the magnificent beast from would-be thieves. Even better to have the clabalaris drawn by ordinary mules.

“How did she manage the journey?” he asked the driver. “Is she calm?”

The man dropped from the wagon and dipped his head in a show of respect. “A horse senses the mood of its handler,” he said, smiling. “I am calm, and so is she.” He gestured toward the back of the conveyance. “Come, I will show you.”

Hector walked to the back of the clabalaris, where the driver lifted the bar from the double doors. They swung open, releasing the familiar scent of manure. Inside, Hector saw another Bedouin and his purchase, the Kohl-ani mare.

He sighed. “Magnificent.”

“She is.” The driver gestured to the servant, who had traveled with the horse. The man led the mare forward, tilting the wagon bed as the mare stepped onto the flagstones.

Smiling, Hector placed his hands on her head and took inventory. The mare’s large, bulging forehead was a sign of intelligence and a blessing from the gods. Her muzzle was perfect, delicate and small. The flaring nostrils would allow her to inhale more air than other horses, and her wide rib cage would enable her to outrun any steed from Rome. The mare’s blue-black skin was the color of kohl, the mineral wealthy women generously applied to their eyelids and lashes, hence the name *Kohl-ani* for this magnificent breed.

Hector ran his hands down the horse’s forelegs, noting the fine bones and strong muscles. This animal had been bred for speed and stamina in the desert, enabling it to survive on dates and camel’s milk. Its strong hooves could gallop over sharp rocks and hot sand. Though the mare appeared

as delicate as a flower, Hector knew she could carry heavy loads over great distances.

“Age?” he asked.

“Three years,” the driver answered. “And she is well trained.”

Hector looked into the mare’s eyes. Few animals had been able to withstand his gaze; most looked away after a moment, if they looked at him at all. But this mare . . . her wide brown eyes took him in, then she blew out a breath and lowered her head as if acknowledging his ownership.

“Amazing beasts,” he murmured.

“Yes,” the driver agreed, “and quite affectionate with humans. Like many others, my family invites our horses into our tent, and we raise their young with our own. I have found that the Kohl-ani’s desire to please is as strong as a dog’s.”

Now, thanks be to the gods, this mare belonged to him.

The driver cleared his throat. “Would you like to examine her gait?”

“Of course.”

The driver nodded to the servant, who walked the mare down the street, then turned and brought her back.

“Stop.” Hector peered at the right foreleg, then glared at the driver. “Did you know this horse was lame?”

“I do not believe she—”

“Watch her. When she walks, her head bobs and her stride is short. There is a problem with her right foreleg.”

The Bedouin frowned but bade the servant walk the mare forward and back again. “It is not a serious problem,” he said. “You must remember that she has been locked inside the clabalaris for many days.”

“She should have been exercised.”

“She was, when time allowed. We could not bring her out

when strangers were present. I would sooner die than have your horse stolen.”

“I did not pay nine hundred denarii for a lame mare.”

The Bedouin squinted. “How can you know so much about horses? You were a soldier, yes?”

“A soldier in the Roman cavalry. Twenty years of riding in an *alae quingenariae* will teach a man a thing or two about four-legged beasts.”

“Ah.” The Bedouin folded his hands. “I do not doubt your expertise, but I believe you will find this mare is sound. A little tired perhaps, but if she is rested, she will be worth every denarius.”

“And if the problem worsens?”

The man lifted his hands. “She would still be suitable for breeding. A mare does not have to run.”

“She has to stand. She has to bear the weight of the stallion.” Hector shook his head. “I will not accept a lame horse.”

Lines of concentration deepened along the driver’s brows. “How can I return the horse to my master? She was sound when he put her in the wagon.”

Hector shook his head, stunned by the man’s blindness. “If she was sound and now is lame, then the problem must have arisen on her journey to Macedonia . . . while she was under your supervision.”

The Bedouin paled beneath his tan. “What if I pay you . . . twenty denarii?”

Hector barked a laugh. “Twenty? I paid nine hundred.”

“But my master gave me forty for the journey, and I have already spent ten.”

“Thirty”—Hector smiled—“will be sufficient to offset my loss.”

“But how will we travel with no coin?”

Hector shrugged. “You can hunt your food and sleep outdoors. I will accept the thirty denarii and the mare, and you may go your way in peace.”

The man scuffed his shoe on the flagstones, muttering under his breath, but finally he nodded. “We are agreed. There is your horse.” He pulled a leather purse from his girdle. “And here are twenty denarii.”

“Thirty, and not a coin less.”

Sighing, the driver gave Hector the purse, which Hector tossed toward his door. He moved to the horse and caressed the mare’s strong jawbone. The animal might be lame, but she would heal. Hector would make certain she did.

“Welcome to my home,” he said, feeling suddenly generous. He opened the door to his house and called for his steward, who appeared almost immediately.

“Show this man and his servant into the atrium and provide them with food and drink. Let them rest for a quarter of an hour, then see them safely away.”

As the Bedouins followed the slave, Hector picked up the purse and walked the mare to the stall behind the house, his heart lifting with the comforting sound of her sure, steady hooves on the flagstone street.