

Last Days in Moav

By Sharon Reiss Baker

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Ages 12-16; 320 pages, hardcover

“A well-characterized coming-of-age story in an epically unusual setting.” —Kirkus Reviews

“[A] suspenseful historical novel...about family duty and finding the courage to love.” —Foreword Reviews

About the Book

**Four siblings. Two ancient worlds.
One last chance to shape her destiny.**

Set on the banks of the Jordan River over three thousand years ago, *Last Days in Moav* blends romance, mysticism and betrayal in a story told in multiple voices.

16-year-old Milcah and her twin brother Gidon have a mysterious healing gift that makes them both sought after and feared by their tribe. Unjustly accused of a crime she didn't commit and promised in marriage to a scoundrel, Milcah undertakes a dangerous journey in a bid to take control of her future.

Narrated by four siblings—including a brother who speaks from the spirit world—this YA novel explores the passions and dramas of an Israelite family as they prepare to cross into the Promised Land.

Sharon Reiss Baker collected ideas for future story settings in the many places she lived, including Puerto Rico, Maryland, Massachusetts, France, Florida, Israel, and Connecticut. Some of those ideas turned into actual books, including *All Kinds of Strong* (a PJ Library selection), *A Nickel*, *A Trolley*, *A Treasure House* (a Sydney Taylor Notable book). *Last Days in Moav* is her debut novel. Sharon and her husband now live outside Philadelphia. For more information about Sharon, and for an in-depth look at the research, process, and behind-the-scenes information about the making of *Last Days in Moav*, visit www.sharonreissbaker.com.



Discussion Questions

- The novel is set over 3,000 years ago, when the twelve Israelite tribes—having escaped enslavement in Egypt—are on the cusp of a new chapter as a people. Waiting on the banks of the Jordan River for the Crossing into the Land, they know their forty years of nomadic wandering will soon end, and they will begin life in the homeland they have only heard about from their ancestors. Discuss how Netanel, Milcah, Gidon, and Avidan view this impending transition. How do their unique backgrounds and personalities shape their feelings, and how do their perspectives evolve throughout the story?
- The novel is narrated by four siblings—three living and one dead. Compare their voices and discuss whether and how the multiple points of view affected your experience as a reader and your understanding of the story. Which narrator did you trust most and why?
- Milcah, Gidon, and Avidan narrate their respective chapters in first person present, with no knowledge of their audience. Netanel, speaking as a rapha, directly addresses a future audience who can “send images across oceans, shoot into space, and witness celestial explosions through...telescopes.” Discuss why the author might have chosen to break the story’s historical frame when writing in Netanel’s voice. What effect does it have?
- Milcah struggles with the community debates about whether she is a “fraud or prophetess, a magician or a healer.” This tension between whether the twins’ abilities are holy or come from a prohibited source mirrors debates today about who decides what’s real or fraudulent. Discuss some contemporary versions of this ambiguity and how it connects to people’s judgements about things they don’t fully understand.
- In the betrayal scene, Yoram suggests using Milcah as a bargaining chip for the loss of the goats. Father, and ultimately Gidon, conclude that this may be in the family’s best interest. What choices does Milcah have in this arrangement, and



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how does she create options where none seem to exist? In the context of the time she lived in and the social norms of her society, would you describe Milcah as a feminist? Why or why not?

- The twelve tribes shared a past and a common destiny, and yet in the book, we see significant distrust between them, especially with respect to “the two and a half tribes of trouble” who chose to make their home on the eastern side of the Jordan River rather than on the western side in the Land. Can you think of similar, contemporary examples of distrust between different factions of one people or nation?
- On page 47, Gidon narrates this scene:

Avidan turns to Father, but his place is empty. He has gotten up and is walking toward the path, back to his commanders and his strategies.

He has forgotten the stone houses.

Avidan blinks hard. He presses his lips together and swallows.

I don't think. I just push myself to standing, put my fingers between my lips, and whistle. Father stops and turns.

“Announcement!” I call. “Family announcement! Master builder Avidan, son of Aryeh of the tribe of Yehudah, will now commence a tour of the one-of-a-kind stone village. Come see the model of all villages to be built in the Land! Don't miss this special opportunity!”

All eyes are on Father now as he stares at me. I have risked angering him, and everyone knows it.

Discuss what this scene reveals about Gidon's relationships with Avidan and Father as well as Gidon's personal strengths. How do those relationships evolve over the course of the story? Compare Gidon in this scene to the Gidon who, many chapters later, participates in betraying his sister. How do you reconcile these different portraits of Gidon?



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- Compare and contrast the characters of Mother and Milcah. Do you see parallels between the two? How does Mother's experience of losing her early love, Eliezer, impact Milcah's choices in the book?
- Rahel and Misha'el are important, but secondary, characters in the book. What roles do they each play in illuminating the other characters? How do they each impact Milcah's and Gidon's growth over the course of the story?
- Analyze the book's ending. How did the characters change? Were you disappointed that Milcah would not cross the Jordan to the Land?
- Discuss what Netanel means when he says on page 307 "she got what she wanted, and now she saw what she would lose." What did it mean for Milcah? Does it resonate with anything in your own experience?

