

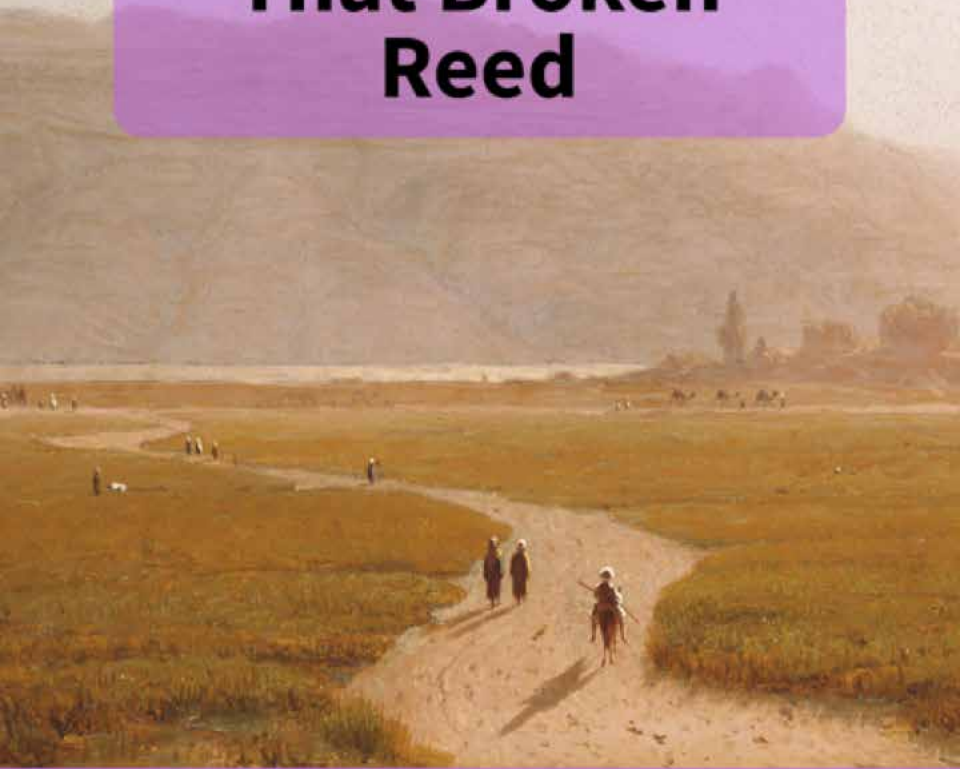
*Terror on
Every Side!*

THE LIFE OF JEREMIAH



VOLUME 6

**That Broken
Reed**



MARK MORGAN

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- Volume 4 – The Darkness Deepens
- Volume 5 – No Remedy
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Cover picture: Siout, Egypt (now called Asyut).
Painting by Sanford Robinson Gifford (1874).

Terror on Every Side!

For I hear the whispering of many—
terror on every side!—
as they scheme together against me,
as they plot to take my life.

A psalm of David: Psalm 31:13

For I hear many whispering,
Terror is on every side!
“Denounce him! Let us denounce him!”
say all my close friends,
watching for my fall.
“Perhaps he will be deceived;
then we can overcome him
and take our revenge on him.”

Jeremiah 20:10

Chapter 1

Leaving

“Off to Egypt today, Jeremiah,” said Baruch with a crooked smile as we met outside the inn.

It was just after dawn on a fine morning in early spring, less than a day since the remnants of Judah had rejected God’s command and decided to escape to Egypt.

We stood in the same place where I had confronted the crowd the day before and told them that God’s answer to their question – the answer they had promised to abide by – was that they should stay in Judah.

“Egypt! Egypt! Egypt!” had been the response, and Baruch and I were going along whether we liked it or not.

That evening, Johanan had made it clear that if we cooperated we could go along in relative freedom, but if we resisted we would suffer. To make sure that we understood, we were forced to collect our belongings and were taken to separate dormitories in the inn where his men could keep a watchful eye on us. In that crowded room, I began writing my prophet’s diary. Finally, after several hours, I was told to stop and lay down to sleep under the watchful eye of some of his men.

We were given no opportunity to escape.

I returned Baruch’s smile with a wry smile of my own and sighed. Neither of us knew quite what to expect. Once again, life was uncertain,

and we knew that some of our countrymen would be very happy to find any excuse to make us suffer.

“Yes, off to Egypt. The very journey God told our fathers we would never need to make again once he led them out of there.”

“Oh, you prophets,” said Johanan, who had come out of the inn in time to hear my words. “You keep harping on things. Just let it go. The decision is made.”

“We could still change our minds. Even now, we could have a time of prayer and thought. We could...”

“Shut up, you old fool!” said Johanan in an angry voice. For a moment, I thought he was about to strike me, but he took a deep breath and continued with a little more control, “Oh, I suppose that I shouldn’t speak to a prophet – a priest – like that, but you just won’t accept when you’re beaten. Everyone has agreed. We’re not talking about it any more. So, just leave it. Do you understand?”

“Yahweh is the one you are abusing, Johanan, I’m just a prophet. He has told you what to do, and...”

Johanan lifted up his hands and spread them out in front of me. “Stop!” he commanded. “Not another word from you, or you’ll be coming along with us tied up and with a bag over your head.”

I closed my mouth.



Almost everyone got up early that day, but that didn’t mean they were ready to leave!

Men and women hurried to and fro, shouting – often at each other. Children played with the goods already packed for transport, often carrying them away or leaving them mixed up with other stacks of goods. Noise was the overwhelming result, but there was also an underlying feeling of urgency. With the passing of winter, the survivors’ dread of Nebuchadnezzar and his army had returned in full force. What if the Chaldeans had heard about the assassination of Gedaliah and the soldiers? A detachment of soldiers might already be bearing down on them from the north, approaching from Jerusalem as the sun climbed above the horizon!

Leaving

Few oxen and even fewer asses were available to pull the limited number of carts that had survived the Chaldean invasion. Most of the refugees would have to walk all the way to Egypt, just as their relatives and friends had recently walked to Babylon.

I stood near the inn and listened to the words of the would-be refugees. Some spoke only of the things they needed to take with them to Egypt, while others reflected on the past or the future.

“It will be good to get away from this cursed place,” said one man to his companion.

“Yes, a curse has been on it ever since our fathers came here.”

“If only they had never left Egypt.”

I couldn't help myself. “Are you serious?” I interrupted. “Our fathers were *slaves* in Egypt! We've had hundreds of years of freedom in this land, although it hasn't always been as good as it would've been if only we'd obeyed God's commands!”

They looked at me in that “here he goes again” way that 40 years of delivering God's messages has forced me to get used to.

I suppose it is desperation that makes people paint in such gloomy colours something they have decided to abandon. After all, Judah was the only country most had ever known, and now they were leaving it to walk into the unknown. And fear was driving them. God had warned that we would meet terror on every side, and now that terror was outweighing God's assurance of his care.

Without faith in God, only terror remained.

No soldiers came, however, and the sun was high in the cloudless sky before the trumpet sounded to start the ragtag caravan travelling south.

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This text is a sample from the first chapter of the latest book in the series: **Volume 6 – That Broken Reed**.

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