

Micah 2

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Date: 01 October 2017

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[0 : 0 0] I think I was trying to kid myself on. I cleaned my glasses so that I could read what's on there, and it's not the problem with the glasses, which explains why I was standing looking at what's nearer. Some folk will sympathize with me.

We're going to turn in God's Word to the prophecy of Micah chapter 2. We're going to look together this evening at the last little section, verses 12 and 13. Micah chapter 2, verses 12 and 13.

So, we'll refresh our memory by reading these verses again. I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob. I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel.

I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture. The place will throng with people. One who breaks open the way will go up before them. They will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the Lord at their head. Perhaps the central thought you'll find focusing on the beginning of verse 13. One who breaks open the way will go up before them. Some thirty years ago, the then editor of our church's magazine, the monthly record, wrote an article which included reflections on public prayer in our worship services and in our prayer meetings. He was suggesting, he was saying as a fact that so many of us tend to repeat phrases that we've heard again and again in public prayers and that they can all too easily lose any real meaning. They're virtually cliches. And he gave some examples of these. And one that struck me at the time because it was a phrase that

I'd quite often heard men in our meetings, prayer meetings, especially in the Highlands and Islands area. I'd often heard them using it was at the end of a prayer or almost at the end, they would say, Lord, be thou the breaker up of our way. The breaker up of our way. Some of you have maybe heard or used that phrase in prayer. And the editor went on to say, he could be rather ironic in some of his writings.

[3 : 0 9] Some of you will know who that particular editor was at that time. He said, it makes me think of some kind of divine roadman. Now, that may not mean much to many of you, but certainly in my own case, from my childhood in a country village in the Highlands, I well remember that some of the men in our village were employed by the roads department of the local county council. And we used to see them early in the morning, well, if we were up early in the morning, we'd see them going out perhaps on their bikes, perhaps walking. They were all allocated a small patch, perhaps two or three miles, I'm not sure of our road system, which wasn't too advanced. And they would be there maybe with a scythe tied onto the bike or carrying a spade, or maybe the council van would go around and drop off some tools. And they would be spending their time, their life, their working life, clearing out ditches on some of the roads, were just gravel roads. And so they'd be filling potholes in the summertime, scything some of the overgrown grass and weeds and so on. So, when the editor mentioned the divine roadman and connected it with this phrase in prayer, be thou the breaker up of our way, I must admit that I can't remember if I'd ever used that phrase in prayer, but I never used it since. But I did go through the Bible and see, now, is this a Bible phrase? I couldn't find it. And I felt, well, it's one of those phrases that we get used to. We think even that they're biblical, but in actual fact, they're not.

Well, a few weeks ago, in my own private devotions, I was reading through the minor prophets. And I came to Micah, and I came to this verse, verse 13. I'd read it many times in my life, but it rather hit me, because here, if not the words, is the very thought that was been rather discounted in that particular article. One who breaks open the way will go up before them. In the authorized version, I think it's the one who opens the breach. But one who breaks open the way will go up before them. So, the exact phrase is not in Scripture, but certainly the idea when someone prays, Lord, be the breaker up of our way, go ahead of us, take away the obstacles, clear things up for us. Well, here we have it.

And I'd like to delve a little deeper, looking at the context with you, and then applying it to ourselves. What does God say to us in our Christian lives and in our Christian service through such a concept? We're going to identify, first of all, the obstacles. Break up our way because there are obstacles in the way. What are the obstacles that the prophet is referring to? And then secondly, who are the people that he's referring to who are asking this and wanting it for themselves?

And then thirdly, who is the leader that is identified? Somebody, he says, will be there leading the people, breaking up the way for them. And finally, we'll look at the challenges.

Just briefly, we'll look at the challenges for ourselves. So, first of all, let's identify the obstacles that are being referred to in this passage. The picture is of a besieged city.

[7 : 30] The inhabitants are stuck behind the walls of the city, unable to escape, because all around them, there's a powerful army with its siege weapons, siege engines, and whatever weapons they had in those days. And these were blocking the way of the inhabitants if they ever wanted to get out and escape. Now, Micah the prophet, we're told at the very beginning, chapter 1, verse 1, that he lived under various kings in Judah. And one of them, the most famous of them all, was Hezekiah. And that being so, I think it's reasonable to suppose that Micah is thinking of the particular time when Jerusalem was indeed besieged, very seriously so, by Sennacherib king of Assyria. In 2 Chronicles chapter 32, at verse 1, we read that Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah. He laid siege to the fortified cities, thinking to conquer them for himself. That definitely seems to fit the situation here. And further on in that chapter, at verse 17, we're told of some of the consequences, the threats that Sennacherib was leveling against God's people in this besieged city. The king also wrote letters insulting the Lord, the God of Israel, and saying this against him, just as the gods of the peoples of the other lands did not escape, did not escape, or they were not able to rescue their people from my hand. So, the God of

Hezekiah will not rescue his people from my hand. Well, we know that in that particular story, God did deliver his people. There was a miraculous deliverance, which we're not going to explore in detail this evening.

So, the first obstacles were very obvious. They were under siege from a powerful army. But there were other obstacles that Micah pinpoints, and you have them in this chapter and indeed throughout the whole prophecy, and these were not just external obstacles. There were internal obstacles.

Inside the walls of the city, God's people were facing very real obstacles. Just look at the beginning of chapter 2. There were those in the city, they were Jews, they were subjects of Hezekiah, if it is at that particular time. And yet, they had no interest in obedience to God and care for the poor of God's people. Woe, it says, to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds. At morning's light, they carry it out because it's in their power to do it. They covet fields and seize them, and houses and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellow man of his inheritance. So, the situation was far worse than just being under siege. If they were all united in heart and soul and spirit, then it would be easier to draw support, moral support from each other. But it wasn't like that.

There was injustice and there was oppression within the city. And even more, those who were supposed to be the moral and spiritual leaders of the people, they were leading them astray. There were false options, a false optimism being given by false prophets. Again, in the same chapter, if you look at verse 6, here's what they were saying to faithful prophets like Micah, do not prophesy. Do not prophesy about these things. Disgrace will not overtake us. And so they went on.

[12 : 05] God's going to deliver us. Don't come with your messages of doom later on, your messages of captivity. Think of Jeremiah and what he had to prophesy. Now, the church, the people of God, can expect opposition from the world. We know that. We know that those who do not accept God, do not accept God's Word, they're not going to have much time for those who are the followers of this God against whom they object and whom they in different ways would seek to attack. But we expect that, don't we? We know that Satan is always marshalling his hosts against God's people. But it's much harder in some ways, isn't it, when the opposition to our faith in Jesus, our desire to follow Him, our belief that this is God's revealed

Word and that our people, our nation ought to listen and ought to follow. It's much harder when from within the church, the professing church of Jesus Christ, that are those who call for Christian people, for God's people. There were God's people within the city, not all of them sadly, but those who were, calling for God's people to go along with the world's view, the world's view of Scripture, the world's view of morality.

And there is a call for strength and courage in the face of external and internal obstacles.

So, that in summary is the situation with regard to what was facing them. But let's go on to identify not just the obstacles, but the people that this is talking about. Theoretically, everyone inside that besieged city was part of God's covenant people, a chosen people, a blessed people, a holy set-apart people.

But in reality, it wasn't like that. There was division within the city. Just looking on to the next chapter, chapter 3, it begins, Then I said, here's the true prophet Micah, bringing God's Word, Listen, you leaders of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel. Should you not know justice, you who hate good and love evil, who tear the skin from my people and who eat the flesh of their bones, who eat my people's flesh, strip off their skin and break their bones in pieces, who chop them up like meat for the pan and flesh for the pot? So, there was grave division among the so-called people of God.

[15 : 26] The leaders and the prophets, many of them were not part in reality of God's true people. And you find that theme, don't you, right through the Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Hosea, for example, in his prophecy, chapter 1 at verse 9, he links it with the birth of one of his children, the name that he gave to his child. And here God's Word comes to Israel through Hosea saying, You are not my people.

You've got my name. I've chosen you to be my people. But in reality, you are not my people. And centuries later, the apostle Paul says the same thing, Romans 9, 6, Not all who are descended from Israel are in reality Israel. And again, he says in Romans chapter 2 at verse 28, A man is not a Jew if he's only one outwardly. And so, you find here and throughout the whole of the Bible, this doctrine of the remnant. Those who among the people who have the name of God's covenant people, let's say in our context, who have the name of Christian, who are perhaps even connected in some loose kind of loose kind of way with the Christian church. You have that wider group. And then you have those who in verse 12 are described with the term I've just used, I will surely gather all of you,

O Jacob. I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. And they were swimming against the tide.

Perhaps a classic case of this, you find in the life of the prophet Jeremiah, he faithfully pronounced God's judgment on the people that they were running away to Egypt, the king and the people to get weapons of war and horses and chariots with which they could defend themselves and defeat Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army. And you remember the message that God gave to Jeremiah was highly unpopular. It was submit. Submit to the enemy. What? Submit to the enemy? Isn't it glorious to be part of the resistance movement? No, God's word came. You have disobeyed me and I'm going to chastise you, but I will still have mercy on you. But submit to King Nebuchadnezzar. And Jeremiah, well, we know how he suffered greatly because he was faithful with that message. And then we're told in chapter 37 of how Jeremiah on one occasion, he went out to attend to a business matter, some land that he inherited. And we're told in verse 11, after the Babylonian army had withdrawn from Jerusalem because of Pharaoh's army, Jeremiah started to leave the city to go to the territory of Benjamin to get his share of the property among the people there. But when he reached the Benjamin gate, the captain of the guard, whose name was Erija, son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah, arrested him and said, you're deserting to the Babylonians. That's not true, Jeremiah said. I'm not deserting to the

Babylonians. But Erija would not listen to him. Instead, he arrested Jeremiah and brought him to the officials. They were angry with Jeremiah and had him beaten and imprisoned in the house of Jonathan, the secretary, which they'd made into a prison. Jeremiah, faithful, proclaiming God's word, he, a vital part of God's remnant. And yet, what happens to him? He's accused falsely, he's oppressed, he is falsely imprisoned, and he is condemned. And again, it's nothing new. It happens in every age. Isn't it true that those who seek to be faithful to God's word in different areas, not just of doctrine, but in areas of morality, of public life, and so on, are described as fundamentalists and bigots and narrow-minded? I noticed listening to Radio 4, the Today programme, just a couple of days ago, they were speaking about the man who just died in his 90s, the founder of Playboy magazine, notorious as what I would describe as a pornographic, immoral magazine, and proposing and carrying out a very immoral lifestyle. And they commented that Hugh Hefner was the son of, quote, Puritanical Christians. Well, I don't know anything about his parents.

[20 : 55] I don't know if they were too strict, or if it's simply that they were good, godly people. I just don't know. But give them that name, Puritanical Christians, and, well, that writes them or sends them out of court.

Well, here are the people of God, the remnant. They're caught in this besieged city.

And you can just picture it, the small group, the remnant. It was hard for them, because they were attacked on the one side by Sennacherib and the Assyrians.

On the other hand, they're attacked by the supposed godly leaders, who weren't godly, of their own city. It struck me as rather similar to the situation of the small minority of Christians that we heard about so often, still do.

In, for example, the city of Mosul. Remember when it was being besieged? And we were told of all the suffering of all the people inside. But the Christians particularly, because those who were supposedly liberating them from other branches of Islam, and those who were oppressing them would come together and squeeze the Christians.

[22 : 25] And we know how many millions of Christians in Syria and Iraq have been forced to flee, and how the aim seems to be to wipe out the witness of Jesus Christ in that part of the world where it all began, under the providence of God.

And the temptation surely is bringing it closer to ourselves when we're just a little remnant. And so we are. I mean, we know the statistics. The most recent statistics tell us how the Christian church in our land is just the tiniest of minorities.

And the temptation for us is to huddle together and to glory in our remnant status. Fear not, little flock, Jesus said to his disciples.

Well, we may not be many, but we're faithful, and we're God's chosen ones. Now, that in itself is true. But we must never, ever, as we'll see in a moment or two, when I seek to apply it more, we must never, ever draw into that temptation of forgetting the world outside and simply withdrawing into ourselves.

But that remnant people in that city, they received a remarkable assurance of God, one that they could never have believed.

[23 : 59] Look at what it says at the end of verse 12, well, verse 12, the middle of it. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture. And then this phrase, the place will throng with people.

Throng with people? We're just a remnant. Everybody's against us. And God from heaven says, I have a people, and that people will be multitudinous according to my great purposes.

Remember how Elijah got that assurance? I only, I am left, Lord, nobody else. And God says, I have 7,000 people who have not bowed the knee to Baal in Israel.

And Paul in Corinth, he must have been pretty discouraged because God in a vision said to him, Paul, don't be afraid.

Perhaps he was thinking of leaving Corinth and pressing on elsewhere. We don't know. And God said, Paul, fear not. I have many people in this city.

[25 : 10] And the same assurance comes to us. The gates of hell, Jesus says, as I build my church, which I will and I am doing, will not prevail against us.

We may be few. We may be many. We may not see the fulfillment of promises like this in Scotland in our day. The place will throng with people.

God's people. God's committed covenant people. We may not see it, but the people of God are secure, are victorious, and will be so.

So we've identified the obstacles. We've identified the people. Now we need to identify the leader. Because verse 13 begins saying, one, it's one person, who breaks open the way, will go up before them.

So God here is saying what he'll do. He then addresses the problem of the siege, which is a picture of many kind of sieges as far as we're concerned.

[26 : 19] And then he points to this one, who is the breaker up, if you like, the breaker open of the way. Because of him, he says, the people will follow him.

One who breaks open the way will go up before them. They will break, they now, it's plural, will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the Lord at their head.

Now it says, first of all, that the leader who will bring deliverance is their king. Now if it's properly identified as Sennacherib's siege, then the king was Hezekiah.

And Hezekiah was a good man. He was a man of God. And he certainly was at the head of God's people. But it doesn't end there.

It says, their king will pass through before them, the Lord at their head. And it seems to me, I can't say this dogmatically, but it seems to me that this has very clear messianic overtones.

[27 : 29] The king is none other than the Lord, the Messiah, the one God himself who was to come.

And we often find that identification and prophecy. How often we, in the Psalms that we sing, we're singing of especially David, not Hezekiah, but David, another king anointed by God.

For example, Psalm 89 at verse 3, you said, I have made a covenant with my chosen one. I've sworn to David my servant. But then it goes on to use language that can't apply just to David.

Just as it seems to me, it can't apply here simply to a man like Hezekiah, good man though he was. I have sworn to David, I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.

David's line historically, well, disappeared, didn't it, with the captivity? Yeah, Zerubbabel who brought them back from captivity was of David's line.

[28 : 41] But then, as we know, the Lord Jesus came from David's line, and it is in him that all who were foreshadowing him, Hezekiah or David, whoever they were, that the fulfillment was found.

Because the best of those messianic kings, whether David, whether Solomon, whether men like Hezekiah or Josiah or others who were seeking to be faithful, they stumbled many a time.

But they all pointed to the great Deliverer. And as you go through Micah, you find clear identifications. Well-known text in Micah chapter 5, verse 2, where we read that, you Bethlehem Ephrata, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

A clear reference to Jesus, our Messiah, our Deliverer. And in that same chapter, it goes on to tell us, in language that is picked up on in the New Testament again and again, chapter 5 at verse 4, this person, this leader, this king, he will also be a shepherd.

He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And we jump centuries beyond the coming, the dying, the rising again of Jesus.

[30 : 26] And we come to those great scenes in Revelation where we're told, for example, in Revelation 5 and Revelation 7, to him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power.

The Lamb at the center of the throne. Now, this is odd, isn't it? The Lamb will be their shepherd. A Lamb shepherding.

And that's what Scripture tells us. He will lead them to springs of living water. And so, the Deliverer that is referred to here, the leader, is thinking of the church in every age.

This age and our age is none other than our Shepherd King, our Deliverer, the one who breaks open our way before us, whatever our problems and our obstacles.

And so, let me close by identifying three challenges for all of us on the basis of what God's people experienced in those days in Jerusalem.

[31 : 35] Firstly, to be a faithful remnant is not to be an inward-looking remnant. I referred to recent statistics.

There was an article about them in the record recently. In fact, a book's been produced. I've forgotten the title of it, but Peter Brearley, the well-known Christian statistician.

And it shows the dramatic decline of Christianity and of Christians, the number of Christians in Scotland. I read recently somewhere that Scotland, thinking of the last even just 50 years, has shown more than any other country in the world how rapidly a country can turn from a fairly solid Christian foundation, Christian practice, to a totally ungodly, pagan country.

And those of us who are much older, we can think back to our childhood days and how different it was. So, these statistics, it's not for us to say, oh, but they're exaggerating them.

Look at some of our fool churches and so on. We praise God for burgeoning churches and for work that God is blessing. But nonetheless, as with the remnant in Jerusalem, so today, there is this reality that we have to face.

[33 : 13] And we could be well tempted to close in on ourselves. If you don't see this so much nowadays, but in a field where there might be loads and loads of rabbit burrows, you can sometimes be there and you see the rabbits coming out, peeking out of their burrows, their ears up, they're looking around.

And there's something they don't like. They're not very sure. And you see them just scuttling back into their burrows. And there is a temptation for us as Christians to look around at the world, to see how dreadful it is.

And then, well, we thank God for Christian fellowship. We thank God for his promises to his little flock. But to enclose ourselves, retreating into our own comfortable zones.

But what this tells us is that the breaker up of our way, the deliverer, he's there, the one who opens the breach, to use the other translation.

He's at work, even though the church may be in a mess and the world may be gleeful. And the call to the remnant, that's us, the call to the remnant is to be faithful, but also to be strong and confident in our deliverer.

[34 : 36] To be a faithful remnant is not to be an inward-looking remnant. Secondly, to be an assaulted minority is not to be a defeated minority.

Because that was a setup there in the city. They were assaulted and for many of them, probably they felt, well, we're already defeated. And we are an assaulted minority.

We're Christians. We're attacked in the media, even some Christians being attacked in the courts, attacked in public opinion.

Again, the temptation could be to keep quiet or give up our commitment to the truth. We all remember the relentless campaign against the former leader of the Liberal Party, Tim Farron, as a Christian, who was constantly assaulted until he yielded and gave an opinion with regard to sexual morality that one assumes as a Christian he didn't really believe.

And the main message of God's Word and especially of those great passages in Revelation to assaulted Christians is Christ is the triumphant King.

[35 : 59] Yes, we're assaulted and we will be more, but Christ is our deliverer, our triumphant King, the breaker up of our way before us.

And the last thing to take to ourselves as we leave is that to be a Christian is to know Christ in all that He is.

A fellow missionary many years ago in Peru, just for his own personal interest first and then to communicate to the people that he was ministering to, he went through the whole Bible and drew up a list.

He didn't use concordances or anything, just went through the Bible, a list of all the titles and names of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, we know lots of them, but he showed me the final thing and the final tally was far more than I would ever have dreamt.

He had, I think, a couple of A4 pages and he wasn't stretching it a bit. They were titles and names and descriptions of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[37 : 14] And that, of course, is so wonderfully true. Christ Jesus made for us our wisdom, our righteousness, our holiness, our redemption.

Romans 8.32, God will with Christ graciously give us all things. And to these beleaguered people, God is saying, I am your shepherd, I am your deliverer.

That's our text, the breaker up of your way, making a way of escape. I am your guide, I am your king. And what he said to them, he says to you, if you know Jesus, then you know him as your shepherd who cares and feeds, cares for you and feeds you.

You know him as your deliverer who takes you out of tight corners and sets you on your way, whatever you're facing tonight. He's your king, ruling and defending you, conquering all his and your enemies.

During the last spell that my wife and I spent in Peru, Catherine attended a ladies' community Bible study. family.

[38 : 34] And it was a very spiritually encouraging and refreshing thing. And indeed, they saw one or two ladies brought to faith in Christ through it.

And there was a lady there whose husband was in some kind of business in Peru. She was an American lady from the deep south. And obviously, they were reasonably well off back home.

She was talking about their home. And they had quite a big garden. And they were in a position to employ a gardener. He was an African-American.

And he was a Christian. And she was telling the others how every time she went out of the front door down the pathway or the driveway to the car or whatever, if this African-American Christian brother, if he was working in the garden near where she was when she went out, he would look up with a big smile on his face.

And he would say, go with the Lord. Go with the Lord. Well, friends, go with the Lord tonight.

[39 : 48] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for your blessings on us. You are all that we need. There may be specific problems tonight that some of your people here are facing.

The rest of us don't know what they are. But they do. And they're troubled. They're concerned. And they're confused. Lord, may they know that you are their deliverer, the breaker up, the breaker open of their way as it stretches out before them.

And help us too as a people, your people, scattered throughout our different congregations to live to the glory of God and in everything at all times to go with the Lord.

Amen. For everybody God's sake, God's sake, our granddad to face and your other's Zusnica