

THE BREAKER

Preached at Providence Chapel, Oakham, on Tuesday Evening, May 12, 1846

"The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them." Micah 2:13

I should not do justice to my conviction of the meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures if I did not state that I believe this passage has a prophetic as well as an experimental meaning. Let us give a glance at the context. We read in the preceding verse, "I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold; they shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men. The breaker is come up before them." Now as to the prophetic meaning of this Scripture, it appears to my mind to point to a day not yet arrived, to "the latter day" of which the Old Testament prophets speak so much. When the Lord shall set his hand a second time to gather the remnant spread abroad on the earth, then this prophecy of Micah will be literally fulfilled: for there will be those difficulties in the way which none but "the Breaker" going before can remove. But the Scriptures are written with that mysterious wisdom that there is not only in the Old Testament prophecies what is strictly prophetic, but also experimental. We are not to discard the prophetic meaning as some do, for God has given it, and every word of God is pure. But on the other hand, it is the spiritual and experimental part which is food for the church of God. Therefore though we dare not pass by the literal meaning, yet we confine our attention chiefly to the spiritual. And in

this way, with God's blessing, I shall view it this evening, taking the words much in the order as they now lie before me.

"The breaker is come up before them: they have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it: and their king shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them."

There are two main things here:

First. The people of whom these things are said.

Secondly. That wondrous Individual who is here pointed out by the expression, "The breaker."

I. The people here spoken of are the people of God, the remnant according to the election of grace, God's own beloved family. But we gather from the words used that they had great difficulties, for why need they to have a breaker go before them unless they were in such difficulties as nothing but an almighty hand could break down and remove? Thus we gather that the people to whom this promise is made are in such straits and difficulties, that they can never succeed in making a passage for themselves: but that this wondrous Person, this Immanuel, God with us, is to go before them; and for that reason he is called "the breaker," because with his almighty hand he breaks up and breaks down these difficulties that lie in their path, and which they themselves could not by any wisdom or strength of their own remove out of the way.

Let us look at this a little more closely, and open it a little more in detail. When the Lord is first pleased to quicken a soul dead in sin, he sets before him the narrow gate; he

shews him that his sins merit eternal wrath and punishment, and he raises up in his heart a desire to flee from the wrath to come. However the circumstances of the new birth may vary, there will always be this leading feature accompanying the work of the Spirit in the heart—a fleeing from the wrath to come; a cry in the soul, "What shall I do to be saved? God be merciful to me a sinner." As Bunyan sweetly sets forth in the Pilgrim's Progress, a quickened soul, like Christian, immediately begins to run. All the difficulties that encompass him are nothing compared to the burden on his back. Wife, child, family, money, all are considered less than nothing compared with the salvation of his soul. Therefore he begins to run, setting his face Zionward, earnestly desiring to be found saved at last with an everlasting salvation.

But no sooner does he begin to run, and move onward in the heavenly way than he begins to find difficulties. The way to heaven is described as "a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen" (Job 28:7) . "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matt. 7:14). We must "through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." The Lord, therefore, knowing the difficulties of the way, on one occasion, when he saw great multitudes following him, turned and said to them, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26, 27). As though he would check this rash forwardness by shewing them that no one could run in that way except he denied himself and took up his cross; implying that the way to heaven is one of continual self-denial, a path of daily crucifixion. And what is the object of this? It is to teach a soul this great lesson—that he cannot by any wisdom, any

strength, any righteousness, or any goodness of his own obtain eternal life. We are very slow learners in this school. The pride of our heart, our ignorance, and our unbelief, all conspire to make us diminish the difficulties of the way. But the Lord has to teach us by painful experience that the road to heaven is so difficult that a man can only walk in it as he is put in and kept in it by an almighty hand.

When these difficulties first begin to rise, they startle him that is first running in Zion's way. For instance, the discovery of a broken law, and of the curse that flames from Mount Sinai is an obstacle insuperable in the way to glory; for if a sinner has to get to glory by the burning mount, he must be consumed as he passes over it, for from that mount nothing but wrath comes. Again, he is startled by the discovery of the corruptions of his heart, the workings of that inward iniquity, which before was hidden from him. He now becomes aware of secret sins that before he was utterly unacquainted with. He becomes aware too that there is such a thing as living faith, and that without faith it is impossible to please God; and he finds he has not this living faith, and is unable to raise it up in his own heart. He finds **love** also spoken of; and he finds he cannot by any power of his own raise up this love to God or to his people. He finds **hope** too spoken of; and he is sinking in the waves of despondency. He finds **prayer** spoken of; and he feels utterly unable to pour out his heart before God. He finds **submission** to God's will spoken of; and he perhaps feels little else but repining and hard thoughts of God. He finds an inward **knowledge** of Jesus spoken of, and the revelation of Christ to the soul; and he finds darkness and gloom within. He cannot bring this knowledge of Christ into the heart. A man may have all the religion of the world in his head, in the theory, and never meet with one difficulty. But if once he is put into the strait way by the hand of God, he will meet with difficulties; nay,

he will feel the whole scene to be more or less a scene of difficulties. Now this prepares a man for the knowledge of "the breaker." "The breaker," we read in the text, "is gone up before them." But what use is the breaker if there be nothing to break down? no obstacles in the way? no rocks or stones in the road, all a smooth, grassy meadow with nothing to obstruct the course? The very circumstances of a breaker being wanted implies there are such difficulties in the way as nothing but an almighty hand can break down. There was a custom in primitive times which throws a still further light on the text. In those times there were no great highways as there are now. When kings wanted to go out on an expedition, men went before them to clear the way, to fill up the hollows, and dig down the mountains in order to make a path for the king. So this divine breaker has to go before, and as he goes before he breaks down those difficulties and obstacles that lie in the path.

II. **But who is this breaker?** Need I say it is the Lord of life and glory; Immanuel, God with us? Why is he called a breaker? This is one of his titles. But why is this title given him? Because he breaks down those obstacles that lie in the road. For you will observe if you read the text, it speaks of a people coming up, and passing through the gate, and journeying onward, and the king passing before them, and the LORD, that is Jehovah, being at the head of them. And you will observe also that this breaker is Jehovah: for it is the LORD in capital letters, which always implies Jehovah. The LORD **that is Jehovah** "is at the head of them," implying that the breaker is Jehovah, and he is called a breaker because he breaks down the difficulties that lie in the path. For instance, there is **the law**; and how are we to get by that obstacle? Bunyan represents this in that invaluable work, the Pilgrim's Progress. When Christian was drawn aside from the path through the persuasion of Mr. Legality, and

was going to the city pointed out to him, he saw a mountain that overhung the road, and thunder and lightning flashed from it, and he was afraid it would fall on his head. There Bunyan shews that there will be these flashes of God's wrath from the law, and the mountain will appear as if it would fall upon him, so that he dare not go by that road. But the breaker has travelled that way; he endured the curse of the law for us. He **so to speak** broke down its curse against God's people. As the Scripture speaks: "He took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;" and thus he so removed it that it should not be a covenant of condemnation to his dear family. In this sense he is a breaker. But not only is the law against them, but also **God's holiness, majesty, justice and purity**, what God is as an eternal Jehovah—all these things have to be removed out of the way. But when Jesus died upon the cross, he satisfied justice, and all the claims of God's holy law. By suffering himself he made such a propitiation for sin as God the Father could accept.

But besides these **external** difficulties that lie in the road there are **internal** difficulties. The Lord's people find internal difficulties as great and heavy to grapple with as external difficulties. For instance, there is an **unbelieving heart**; and what a difficulty an unbelieving heart is! If you are one that is journeying Zionward, do you not know experimentally the workings of unbelief? And is not this sometimes the sincere cry of your soul?

O could I but believe,
Then all would easy be;
I would, but cannot; Lord, relieve,
My help must come from thee.

Do you not find the workings of unbelief in your carnal mind? that you cannot raise up living faith in your own heart, and

yet you are persuaded you must have living faith, or you can never please God? Now this glorious breaker, this Immanuel, God with us, breaks down this evil heart of unbelief by communicating precious faith; and when he communicates precious faith, this evil heart of unbelief is broken down. Unbelief does not then rule and reign, it gives way to a better principle, for the elder is to serve the younger.

But there is also a **hard heart**. And how the Lord's people have to lament and mourn continually on account of their hard heart; that they cannot feel as they would; soft, and contrite, and broken; that they cannot see and feel sin as they would see and feel it; that they cannot mourn nor sigh on account of the iniquities that work in them; that they cannot look to a crucified Saviour, and mourn over him, and grieve and groan because his holy soul and body were so afflicted for sin. "The heart of stone," as the Scripture speaks, is in them, and nothing but the power of God can take it away; for this is God's promise, "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26), implying that there is a heart of stone, and implying that nothing but the hand of God can take it away. Now the breaker, when he comes up before the people of God, breaks this hard heart; he melts it, and softens it, dissolves it, and humbles it, and lays it low in holy admiration and adoration of this blessed Immanuel. And thus he breaks the heart by breaking into the heart, and breaks the soul by a sense of his dying love and atoning blood, and this breaks it all to pieces, so that it crumbles into nothing at his feet. And thus contrition, sorrow, and grief blend together with faith, hope, and love. In this sense, then, "the breaker is come up before them." Because when he breaks their hard hearts he goes before them and leads them in the ways of truth and righteousness.

But as they journey onward they find arising **immeasurable difficulties**. What the Scripture calls, "**gates of brass and bars of iron.**" And there is a promise made to spiritual Israel, "I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron" (Isa. 45:2), implying that there are these difficulties which the Scripture compares to brazen gates and iron bars in the way of a believer. These are so great that the believer cannot break them himself. He needs the breaker to go before him; and when the breaker has come up before him, he has but to touch them, and the way is made plain. As when Peter was in prison, and the angel came to set him free, the gate opened of its own accord. The angel had but to look, and the iron gate opened. But what is the power of an angel, though angels are said in Scripture to "excel in strength" (Ps. 103:20), compared with the power of God himself? His power is incomprehensible. Words would fail to speak of the distance betwixt the power of the brightest seraph or the highest angel and the power of Jehovah. In a similar way, then, as the gate opened of its own accord when the angel looked or spoke, whatever the gates of brass and bars of iron a child of God feels in his own experience to be obstacles that obstruct his path, when the breaker is come up before them, he breaks them asunder and takes them out of the way. Thus there are **temptations**, and these are gates of brass and bars of iron; there are **trials**, and there is the very nature of brass and iron in them; and there are **afflictions and difficulties**, all the evils of **an evil heart, God hiding himself**, not giving an answer to their sighs and groans. The weary soul finds, through the difficulties of the way, that all these are insuperable obstacles. But the breaker goes up before them: and as he moves onward and goes before the soul, all these difficulties vanish. The good Shepherd goes before his sheep, and they follow him, for they know his voice. And so the breaker is here represented,

not as following, but as going before; not waiting for his people to accept offered grace, nor waiting for them to close in with the invitation, but as going before them, and they following in the path that he precedes them in.

III. And this leads me to consider what is contained in the next portion of the text. "They have broken up, and have passed through the gate, and are gone out by it." They have broken up. Now the word 'broken up' here means that they have left the camp where they were stationed. It is a common expression. Boys are said to break up when they go home from school, that is, a leaving the place where they are, and going home. So spiritually, a breaking up here does not mean a breaking up of the soul, but it means that they move onward from the spot in which they were standing. "And they pass through the gate, and go out by it," which implies that until the breaker goes before them, they are stationary. It is with the children of God spiritually as it was with the children of Israel. There is a sweet description in the book of Numbers of the children of Israel moving as they saw the pillar of the cloud move, and resting as the pillar of the cloud by day and of fire by night rested on the tabernacle. When it was taken up, they moved forward: and when it stood still, they stopped; where it abode, they rested: implying that the spiritual Israel can only move forward as the Lord goes before them. But directly the pillar of the cloud was taken up, they journeyed forward: but there was no stirring until that took place. So it is with the spiritual Israel. They cannot move forward until they see the pillar of the cloud move; until the Lord goes before them, they cannot stir. There they are; some full of darkness, others full of doubts and fears; others, exercised with a heart full of unbelief; others, conflicting with powerful temptations; others, well-nigh swallowed up in despair, but all feeling themselves unable to move forward. This marks the true

Israel. We read in the book of Job of those who "run upon the thick bosses of God's bucklers" (Job 15:26). These are different characters from those who wait at the footstool of God. "Your strength is to sit still" (Isa. 30:7). So with the children of Israel when they were at the Red Sea; they did not rush through the waters, but they waited till God appeared; and when God appeared and Moses struck the waters with his rod, and the channel was opened, then they passed through. Thus it is spiritually: there is no moving except as the Lord goes before the soul; and immediately that the breaker is come up and goes before, the soul goes on; when he stops, it stops; and when he moves, it moves. And then what takes place? "They pass through the gate." Here is this gate that has before stood closed against them, and they were unable to pass through; but when the breaker goes before them, then the gate is opened, and they pass through the gate just as the breaker precedes. And is not this sweetly typical and descriptive of the way in which the Lord's people move forward? This gate is not only, perhaps not chiefly, the strait and narrow gate that leads to eternal life. There are other gates besides that; for we read, "Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in." And thus the gate here spoken of is not only, perhaps not chiefly, the strait and narrow gate, but it is also any of those difficulties that lie in the path which may be compared to a closed gate. But when the breaker goes up before them, he opens the gate. We read that the Lord will open "a door of hope in the valley of Achor," that is, he opens the gate, and when he opens it they pass through. But what is the meaning of "passing through the gate," viewed spiritually? When the Lord, for instance, does not appear to the soul, then the gate is closed; there is no going up of faith to the Lord, and there is no answer from him; there is no view of his glory such as Jacob had in Bethel when he said, "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate

of heaven" (Gen. 28:17). What made him see that this was the gate of heaven? Because in his dream, when he had chosen stones for his pillow, he saw a ladder, and angels ascending and descending it; and he looked up and saw where the ladder was fixed. Then he saw heaven opened. This too, was what Stephen saw when the enraged populace ran upon him and stoned him to death. He said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:56). There was a view in his soul of heaven and the glory and blessedness of it. As his eyes looked up, he saw it, and his heart's affections flowed out to it. So with God's people; this gate is often closed; they cannot look up, or if they do, they cannot see anything for their comfort. But when God is pleased to go before them and unbar the gate of heaven, then they look up and see such things as God is pleased to manifest to their souls. Then they "pass through the gate." And the difficulties, trials, temptations, and exercises that have lain in their path, like closed gates, are removed when the breaker comes up before them.

Some of the Lord's people are exercised with powerful temptations. And this makes access to God a closed gate. Others of the Lord's people are greatly cast down in their minds because they have not received the pardon of their sins. Others because they are not brought into the enjoyment of gospel liberty. Others because they have not had the application of Christ's blood to their consciences. These are so many closed gates; but when the breaker comes up before these gates, then they pass through the gates and enter into the sweet enjoyment of those things which are beyond the gate, such as the love of God, the salvation of their souls, and all the rich treasures of love and mercy that are beyond the gate. But the breaker goes up, the gate opens, and they pass through it. Then they pass

through that gate and have some manifestation and discovery of these blessed realities to their souls.

IV. But it goes on to say, "And their King shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them." Now this King is the same as the Breaker; the same as the Lord. This King is King Jesus, the King of Zion, the King and Head of his covenant people. And why is this expression used? Not only because he is their King, but because they are his subjects. The titles given in Scripture to the Lord Jesus Christ are not uselessly scattered up and down God's Word, without a meaning to them. But every title that is given to the Lord Jesus Christ is not only exactly adapted to the wants of his children, but is suitable to the very text where it occurs. It is like a diamond because it exactly fits it. So every text that speaks of Jesus by any title, the text fits it, and it fits the text, and he is the glory of it, as the diamond is the glory of the setting. So he is called here "the King," not merely because he is a King, but because they follow him as obedient subjects. And we never give ourselves, our hearts and souls to Jesus; we never yield up our affections unto him until he comes and manifests himself as a breaker. But when he comes up in this great and glorious character as breaker, to break the hard heart into contrition, humility, and love; to break down the difficulties and obstacles that lie in the road to Zion; to break down every temptation, every besetment, and every snare, every sin, and everything distressing to a living soul—when he breaks these things down by his almighty love and power, then his children go in through the gate and pass onward, and then the King passes before them.

He is a King because he is such a precious disposer of kingly power; for you know the office of a king is to rule over his subjects, and to fight their battles for them. Then when they

yield to him their hearts, and fall down before his footstool, he becomes enthroned in their affections as King of Zion, and being their King, he is to be at their head. What! is not a king to be at the head of his people? What! a subject to precede the king? What an indignity to the monarch! So when the Lord Jesus Christ moves onward in royal dignity as Monarch and Prince, those who know him, believe in his name, and love him in their hearts, follow him obediently as his subjects. He says to such, "Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house" (Ps. 45:10). He addresses them tenderly as his people, and in the same way as king Ahasuerus addressed the queen when she touched the golden sceptre.

V. "And the LORD on the head of them." O what dignity is this that the Lord Jehovah should be at their head! What if the Lord is to be at your head? If he is to go before you in the way to glory, what obstacle can there be in the path that he cannot, and will not in a moment surmount? You have a hard heart. Can that stand before the almighty power of God? You have an unbelieving nature. Can that stand before the power of God put forth? You have temptations, you have trials, you have difficulties, you have hardness and darkness, and worldly-mindedness, pride, presumption, and hypocrisy, every evil, every iniquity, nameable and unnameable. But if you are God's people, the Lord Jesus Christ is your King, the King of Zion. Everything must disappear before him. And if he is the Lord Jehovah, who is to stand against Jehovah, who can frown devils into hell in a moment, before whose word creation itself would vanish like a scroll?

What a mercy it is for God's people to have the Lord Jehovah going before them, making a way through the deep waters, as of old he made a way through the Red Sea, and made every difficulty to move, and every mountain to melt down, leading them on in the ways of peace and righteousness. But

some may say, "How am I to know whether I am one of these people for whom these mercies are written?" Let me ask you two questions. First, have you found any difficulties in the way you are travelling? Have you found the way you have been taking in divine things a hard way, a difficult way, a strait and narrow way? "Why," say you, "I have found it a very hard way, but I sometimes fear lest my difficulties are natural difficulties." Now do you not need a breaker to break them down for you? But let me ask you a second question. Has the breaker ever done anything for you? Any meltings, any movings, any softenings, any humblings, any actings of faith, hope, and love; any godly fear, any goings out to him in the yieldings of your heart's worship, any subjection of spirit, any obedience to his blessed will, ways, and word? Now if you can answer these two questions; that you know by experience that the way you have been led in is a difficult way, a distressing way, an afflicting way, such a way as you never could have walked in of yourself, but God has put you in and kept you in, then you have an evidence that you are one of those to whom the promise is made. Have you not found at times that the breaker is gone up, and has melted, softened, and humbled your heart, and appeared for you, when nothing but his hand could deliver? Then you have a further testimony you are one of the Lord's people. And this breaker will go before you all your days: and you will need this breaker, for all your days you will need something to be broken down. And this breaker will go before you all your days as your King and your Lord, until he bring you safe to glory.