

Woe to those who devise iniquity, and work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields and take them by violence, also houses, and seize them. So they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance.

Therefore thus says the LORD: “Behold, against this family I am devising disaster, from which you cannot remove your necks; nor shall you walk haughtily, for this is an evil time. In that day one shall take up a proverb against you, and lament with a bitter lamentation, saying: ‘We are utterly destroyed! He has changed the heritage of my people; how he has removed it from me! To a turncoat he has divided our fields.’”

Therefore you will have no one to determine boundaries by lot in the assembly of the LORD.

“Do not prattle,” you say to those who prophesy. So they shall not prophesy to you; they shall not return insult for insult. You who are named the house of Jacob: “Is the Spirit of the LORD restricted? Are these his doings? Do not my words do good to him who walks uprightly?”

“Lately my people have risen up as an enemy—you pull off the robe with the garment from those who trust you, as they pass by, like men returned from war. The women of my people you cast out from their pleasant houses; from their children you have taken away my glory forever.

“Arise and depart, for this is not your rest; because it is defiled, it shall destroy, yes, with utter destruction. If a man should walk in a false spirit and speak a lie, saying, ‘I will prophesy to you of wine and drink,’ even he would be the prattler of this people.

“I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together like sheep of the fold, like a flock in the midst of their pasture; they shall make a loud noise because of so many people. The one who breaks open will come up before them; they will break out, pass through the gate, and go out by it; their king will pass before them, with the LORD at their head.”

(Micah 2:1–13)

## Introduction

In a speech during a debate on the state of the nation in February 2015, the leader of the official South African opposition party stood up in parliament and boldly confronted the leader of the governing party. A number of times in his memorable speech, he repeated that the president at the time was not

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an honourable person but, indeed, a broken man ruling over a broken people and a broken system. In approximately 730 BC, the spokesperson of the official opposition to the ruling power of Judah and Israel similarly confronted the rulers and people of the land, accusing them of being a broken people, led by broken leaders of a broken system. This brokenness is nothing but sin.

In Micah 2, we see the oft-repeated pattern in the prophetic books of the Old Testament, where the guilt of a sinful people is exposed and then judgement is meted out on the offenders. We previously considered Micah 1, and were exposed to the person of Micah: He was a pre-exilic prophet, active and at large before Israel and Judah were decimated and shipped off to captivity and exile in Babylon. The pre-exilic prophets repeatedly pointed out the transgressions and covenantal unfaithfulness of the chosen people of God as a justification for why the covenantally faithful God would be just in bringing captivity and exile upon them.

Micah 2 again points out the sins of this disobedient people, sins that showed that they were broken. And right from the outset, we must be careful not to view them in their brokenness and sin as being peculiar and unique, but recognise our own proclivities to offending a faithful God. Throughout the ages, nations and societies have shown their brokenness by the sins they have wilfully committed. I wonder, if like me, when you first read this passage you were thinking, what is the meaning of this? “I don’t understand what this is all talking about.” Either that, or you were saying, “What’s the relevance of this archaic Old Testament prophecy to me in this modern age?” To be sure, this was a unique situation, in which a covenantally-bonded people had to deal with the consequences of their covenantal unfaithfulness. But, as we’ll see, the sins and the pattern by which they fell into brokenness are the same that we encounter today. But also—praise God—we’ll see that the judgement and the solution that overcomes this sin is wholly effective in restoring the chosen people of God.

What sins were they guilty of that made them a broken people? See, in vv. 1–2, that they were plotting evil schemes and then enacting them. In the 36th Psalm, David wrote of such people that their transgressions actually declare that there is no fear of God before their eyes, and instead they flatter themselves and deceive themselves that they are good when in fact they are evil. This self-deception, when one doesn’t even recognise that one is devoid of good and consumed by evil, is exactly the heart issue that anyone must grapple with and come to terms with before one can be delivered from the kingdom of darkness, which that type of thinking represents, and be brought into the kingdom of God, of light and life, of completeness and wholeness. Every broken person must come to see that they are broken. We need to be confronted by the wickedness and the seriousness of our sin before we can see our need for a saviour.

This is the aim of discipline. Christian parents should not discipline their children so that they will be fine, moral citizens, or even leaders in society. Discipline should be directed at the heart, showing that, in themselves, there is no good thing, that they are sinners through and through, and they need to have a heart transplant. This is part of the problem with evangelistic approaches that merely offer a lost person joy, happiness, and God’s wonderful plans for their life. To be sure, does knowing God bring

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these things? Absolutely and thankfully. But do you see the problem with this approach? If someone is led to believe that the Christian life is all joy and blessing and health and prosperity, what happens when they are confronted by various trials? If their saviour only saved them from loneliness or poverty, what happens to their faith when they are lonely, poor, sick, or depressed again? None of us will turn our nose up at a pampered all-expenses paid holiday to our dream destination, but if you rock up there and you're given a fork and a shovel and are told to build a shelter for the approaching storm, you'll complain to the travel agent. It's only when sin becomes exceedingly sinful, when we come to hate the fact that we are saturated and stewed, completely consumed by sin, that we can then be delivered from it.

The root cause of the sins that we see described here—as mentioned and alluded to numerous times in this text—is the sin of covetousness. In Micah 1, the chief sins committed by the people were those that fit onto the first table of the law—sins against God: idolatry, blasphemy, disregarding his holy day. But in chapter 2 we see the nation being chiefly guilty of the sins on the second table of the law—sins against their fellow man, which are still, by the way, sins against a holy God, for all men are made in his image, and, as Paul says in Colossians 3, covetousness is idolatry. But chiefly we see the sin of covetousness rearing its scaly head throughout this chapter.

Covetousness is a strong desire to have that which belongs to another. In itself, “no coveting” is the tenth commandment, but it also forms a root of the other sins that we see depicted here: murder, adultery, stealing, and lying. The root of covetousness—a strong internal desire to have what belongs to another—grows and is then expressed by the sins we see here and which we know to be true in our own lives. Clearly, theft and stealing arise from a desire to have something that belongs to another. So in v. 2, their covetousness leads them to stealing the land that belongs to others, land that, according to vv. 4–5, were apportioned by lot to the people as the Lord instructed them as they occupied the promised land. Their covetousness led them to committing fraud and justifying it or even resorting to violence and intimidation to make sure that their covetous desires were met.

Christians can be covetous too. How so, you may ask? What about phenomena like Black Friday? But further, what is the opposite of covetousness? If we are commanded not to be covetous, surely we should be characterised by doing what is the opposite. Just as the command to not murder doesn't mean that we can do everything short of just the final blow that kills someone, but that we should actually be characterised by doing the opposite and so seek to regard and esteem and preserve life as we have opportunity. What is the opposite of coveting? Is it contentment? Is it being satisfied with what we have received from God's hand? Is it an attitude of gratitude for what we have that leads to a life of bountiful giving? You need to answer that question in your own heart. Christian, as one who has been translated from the kingdom where covetousness is commonplace and almost expected—for how else will you get ahead?—do you display a godly contentment and live a life marked by non-covetousness. Surely this goes a long way in declaring to the world where your allegiance lies.

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In contrast to the world too, Christians who desire to be covenantally faithful need to have a different regard for the poor, marginalised and at risk people of our society. See, in vv. 8–9, how the unrighteous treat the vulnerable: stealing the coat of the returning soldier, stealing the land and the homes from the widows and orphans to satiate their greed. The repeated biblical injunction states the need to do the opposite: to care for the widow and provide for her needs; to visit the fatherless and show them affection in their affliction. It is not good enough for Christians to merely decry the evil deeds of the wicked that perform all these unjust acts. It is required, as an expression of true religion, to overtly care for the marginalised of our society, especially those of the household of faith. Please don't conflate this with a warped social gospel that states that a Christian's primary responsibility is to address suffering in the world. Any honest view of Scripture will declare that the glory of God, as it is being revealed to the hearts of men, is our primary responsibility. But once a heart has been gripped by the glory of God, the other responsibilities that accord with true Christian faith must necessarily extend to and pervade all areas of life, including how we live in a needy society.

Verses 6–7 draw us to another deficiency in which God's chosen people were guilty, and which we too see evidence in our society. God's sent his commands and instructions via his prophets. His word, his instructions, were conveyed by his messengers, as they are today. But what did the unrighteous society do? They ignored them, scoffed at them, disregarded them and ultimately despised them. Oh and how is this so evident and prevalent today! Honest scientists in Bolshevik Russia landed up in the gulags because they wouldn't compromise on observable truth and absolute standards. Christians today who stand on the eternal principles of heterosexual marriage, distinct gender roles, and the sanctity of all human life, are castigated by society and made out to be pariahs. Society is essentially saying that the Spirit of the Lord is straitened, shortened, limited in what he is allowed to speak on in the lives of people in this modern age. It's as if society thinks that it has the final authority in who gets to say what. They decide who they'll listen to—and it's the false prophets who come speaking of wine and a good time as we read in v. 11.

But God's Spirit is never so restricted! The Spirit is powerful and at work powerfully in the world (2 Corinthians 10:4–5). No, the Spirit is not limited and therefore we cannot back down. This is how the Lord has chosen to work and to reveal himself and in this way the righteous realise who he is. How will the unrighteous, covetous, thieves, and corrupt people of society hear of the truth of the gospel unless they are told? So we tell and the Spirit, who is not restricted, does the work of convincing and converting.

So we go and we tell and we seek to make disciples of the Lord Jesus. And we do so even though we are not ignorant of another reality, which is that even God's mercy and God's patience has a limit. When he is continuously maligned and disregarded, when the people declare by their rhetoric and actions that they have no desire for truth, then the pearls are no longer cast before swine. To those who deny him and decry his messengers, he does not persist in reaching out to them, but turns them over to a reprobate mind. As Jesus never returned to Nazareth after his kinsfolk rejected him, the Lord will not just allow his message to be wasted on those who defiantly reject him. Because he is sovereign, all those

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that he has called to himself will be drawn and brought to him, but also because he is sovereign, he owes nothing to those who are not his. Verse 7 indicates that, as was the case for the people of Nazareth who rejected Jesus, it was not the Lord refusing to reach out to them with the truth, but it was them raising a moral obstacle of their own making that became their undoing. So the anti-God, Spirit power-denying agenda of the modern age, the homosexual agenda that defies God's absolute standard, the corrupt and covetous self-serving idolaters, will all get justice. Their kingdoms will crumble. When the absurdity of their opposition to God's truth in all spheres is realised, then people will have to admit that there is a better way, an absolute way based on objective truth and not the whim of man.

This realisation of the limited lifespan of all things that raise themselves up against God is evident in the verses that speak of the sentence that was passed on God's people here for the sins that they were guilty of as we have considered. Because of their transgressions, they placed themselves under the threat of severe judgement, starting with their humiliation and impoverishment as we see described in vv. 3–5.

It's as if the Lord responds to their wrongdoing and says, "Have it your way. You want to play like that? This is the just result: You were hoping for lands and possessions and in your covetousness you used unscrupulous methods to gain such, but I will make sure—bet your life on it—that you won't have any land. You will be completely dispossessed. The land which you hanker after, that was even to be your rest, will be removed from you and will be given to some who you despise."

Notice the interaction here. The Jews devised evil against their fellow countrymen and for that they were judged and disciplined by the Lord, who in turn devised disaster to come upon these scheming Jews. The Lord says that he was devising disaster against this family of the Jews. In speaking to the king of Judah (who, at the time, was Zedekiah), the prophet Jeremiah advised, "Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live." In this way, they would avoid the harsher treatment reserved for those who would not submit to God's agent of punishment in the Babylonians. Is God guilty, then, of a double standard? Of not holding himself to the standard that he expected to see among the nation? You see, both were plotting a scheme that would result in the harm of another. So, is there a difference and if so, what is it?

Clearly, the Jews did so sinfully, against what they were called to do. In contrast, God did it righteously because he is true to his word. In any statement of the covenant between God and Israel, it was reinforced that, if they disregarded his law, he would remove his covenantal commitments to them. And there would be no getting out of it, because God is faithful to his word.

There are obligations and expectations for those that would walk with the Lord. We are to be yoked to him as we work together for his glory in this world. If you don't want to be yoked with him, with an easy and light yoke (Matthew 11:28–30), then you must expect to bear the yoke that doesn't bring rest because it's heavy and cumbersome. Choosing this yoke will prove to be disastrous to your covetous desires and it will humble you. This all came to pass to this nation in their exile and captivity. God is true to his word.

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So what's the application for us in the here and now? Well, consider this yoke. What is this yoke other than us being harnessed into joining the Lord in accomplishing his ultimate purpose in the world? We're going to wear a yoke—either the world's one that gets us ploughing fields of unrighteousness, or the light yoke that yields the perfect fruit of righteousness. Oh, the wonder! We get to participate in the execution of God's grand plan—with him! This grand plan of all of history has a conclusion that has already been written in blood. The end is determined and the victor is established and we have the opportunity, even the responsibility, to participate and contribute to the realisation of this ultimate success.

And so why do we hanker after our own agenda? Why do we bow our necks to other yokes? Why do we live confused and depleted and depressed lives if we're a part of the winning team? Yes, your contribution to this winning effort is going to look different from that of the person sitting next to you. And that is by design of the captain of this team. He wanted to ensure that all the bases were covered so he appointed some to be pastors and teachers, and some to be administrators, and some to be hospitable and merciful and givers. We are not the drivers, but we get to join him in the process—for our joy and pleasure and for his glory. God has a plan and he has promised that he will bring it to pass. Let us therefore lay aside every weight and assume his light yoke. Let us crucify the flesh and be done with covetousness and let us pick up our cross daily and press on to the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

But if you're like me, you are hearing this and you say, "I actually do want this. I have a desire to be faithful to what is covenantally required of me, but I've just stumbled and failed so many times. I've made a mess of things." The spirit is willing but the flesh is oh so weak. What's the use? Perhaps God would be better off using someone else. Be encouraged, dear Christian. Stop and look up.

I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob, I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together like sheep of the fold, like a flock in the midst of their pasture; they shall make a loud noise because of so many people. The one who breaks open will come up before them; they will break out, pass through the gate, and go out by it; their king will pass before them, with the Lord at their head.

(Micah 2:12–13)

Yes, God's judgement on the unrighteous is severe and sure, but to those that are his, to the sheep of his pasture, his mercy never ceases and his hand is not shortened and his well of grace never runs dry. Look up and look forward. This beleaguered nation of Jews received this promise of God's future deliverance and salvation, which was realised after their captivity in Babylon for seventy years when the Lord used a Gentile king, Cyrus of Persia, to break his people free. Cyrus was the first breaker, even as Isaiah writes in chapter 45 that God had appointed Cyrus to break his people free and God's almighty power would go before Cyrus and see to it that the gates were broken down, the iron bars cut, the doors thrown open. And why? So that all would know how great and mighty God is. That they would know that God still says as he said to Cyrus: "I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me.... I, the LORD, do all these things."

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And as he did for Israel then, the Lord has done and is doing and will do for his people even still. Romans 9 is clear that God has not forgotten his covenant with the scattered sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that he will restore them even as he draws them to look upon the one that they pierced. He will remove the veil that is upon their hearts and the breaker of the curse of spiritual blindness, who is Jesus, will be embraced as their true and only Messiah. Oh may this day come soon when the breaker will lead them to their true inheritance.

But even still, dear Christian here today, this prophecy is still not exhausted, and you're the benefactor. Micah saw dimly what we see clearly even here as gather for worship on the Lord's Day. The true Israel—the elect of God, Jews inwardly, who have been circumcised in their heart, Christians today—are the true seed of Abraham and have become such by the divine power of the Breaker. He has led his people and gone before them, breaking the power of sin and has set them free. Those who have been born by the Spirit are the true heirs of his covenantal promises. And they—we—who have been given faith to believe in Christ Jesus as the Breaker of our bondage to sin are like these masses who go up with rejoicing and claim the inheritance set before us. In Christ, and because of Christ the Breaker, we will be led to our eternal rest. And so we can labour and work and join him in this sure and victorious quest, to see his name been honoured and revered and glorified and enjoyed!

The psalmist says in Psalm 107: “Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he has broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder” (vv. 15–16). And Peter in his sermon: “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be held by it” (Acts 2:23–24).

And how did the Breaker break the bonds of sin? With a wooden, blood-stained cross! The cross is the weapon that he uses to break a way for them through their enemies and strangleholds. When the breaker comes and smashes the mountain of sin that prevents union with God, sinners are brought forth in a newness of life and they proceed into that life, following their triumphant king, confidently knowing that the victory is secure and that no weapon fashioned against them can withstand the assault of the cross.

This Breaker once made sin to be,  
broke from the curse his people free.  
He broke the power of death and hell,  
and cleared the road for true Israel.

(Charles Spurgeon)

What an assembly that'll be! Like a massive flock of sheep all bleating in joy at their liberation, making a right rowdy racket as their praises rise. In this flock, we see ethnic Jews and Gentiles alike, who have been turned to the truth and have come to follow their King. Christ Jesus is the church's King. He

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leads us from where we were held captives in bondage into the rest that he has prepared for those that are his. So, Christian, take heart. Rise up and stand firm. Fight the good fight and follow your King. What a privilege to be part of the company that follows the Breaker's lead.

And, unbeliever, non-Christian, our hearts are burdened that you are not part of this joyful flock. Jesus said that he has "other sheep" not yet in the fold, whom he will bring. Is Jesus calling you? Do you realise your covetousness that separates you from God and instead feel the desire and longing to be reconciled to God by this Breaker, the Lord Jesus? You are called and may freely come and know of the assurance that he will embrace you and never cast you out.

AMEN