

BROKEN THINGS

Why We Suffer

M. R. DeHaan



DISCOVERY HOUSE

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Feeding the Soul with the Word of God

Broken Things: Why We Suffer

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The Need for Brokenness

*For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and
Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and
sow not among thorns (Jeremiah 4:3).*

Break up your fallow ground.” This was the message the prophet Jeremiah was commissioned to bring to the people of Israel. Dark days were settling upon the nation, and Israel, trusting in her false security, was permitting the enemy to destroy her because she was not willing to turn to the Lord. The people of Israel had longed for ease and comfort and had permitted their opportunities and blessings to remain unworked and undeveloped; therefore the Lord compares their nation to fallow ground.

Fallow ground is that which is permitted to lie idle and uncultivated. Instead of producing grain and fruit, the land becomes covered with weeds and thorns, and

disaster lies ahead. So the prophet calls to Israel, "Thus said the Lord . . . Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns."

The spiritual applications of this expression are many and profitable, but the one which comes to mind first of all is that there can be no blessing without effort and no harvest without plowing. Before a thing can be made useful, something must be broken. Before the house is built, the tree must be broken down. Before the foundation can be laid, the rocks must be blasted from their quarry bed where they have long lain in peace and quiet. Before the ripe grain can cover the fields, the soil must be completely broken down. The cutting blade of the plow must turn over the sod, and the sharp teeth of the harrow must pulverize the soil.

Before there can be life, there must be death. Before there can be joy, there must be weeping. The joy that floods the mother's heart at the sound of the first cry of her new newborn babe was preceded by the tears of anguish of childbirth. Our Lord Jesus stated the principle of brokenness in these words: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24). This is the law of life in the natural realm, and it is the law of life in the spiritual sphere also. There is no making without breaking.

We are living in a broken world today. As never before,

all that seemed permanent and enduring is being broken down; the history of the world is but the breaking of governments, systems, ideals, and programs. The history of every human life, too, is the history of breaking.

What memories come back out of the distant past as one traces again the tedious journey he began years ago! Like misty shadows from the past they take form and materialize again, and he relives the days of sorrow over the broken things of life. The toys he laughed over were broken and cast aside with the stain of childish tears upon them. And then, as he grew older, there were broken promises and broken hopes, shattered dreams, and unfulfilled ideals. Then after marriage he built his home and dreamed of peace and rest, but found that the increase of years increased also the weeping over broken things. All his expectations were shattered in a moment as the little darling in that home was rudely torn from his heart. Perhaps his wife, or his health, or his home, for which he had labored all his life in the anticipation that it would be the scene of quiet last days, were suddenly taken away. Yes, broken things are common life. No one can escape them.

To the child of God, however, every broken thing is but the assurance that God is making something useful. How needful it is for you who today are sorrowing over bitter losses and repining on beds of illness, you whose

bodies are broken, to remember that He has said: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

If you are being broken by disappointment or bereavement, by loss or pain, by weakness or sickness, remember that although to us broken things are tragedies, to God they are opportunities to be used for His glory. We cast the *broken* things aside and call them “junk,” but our God casts the *unbroken* things aside as useless.

BROKEN PITCHERS

To illustrate this truth and bring joy to many of you who today are being broken, we shall call attention to a great number of broken things mentioned in Scripture, showing that only the broken things are useful in God’s wonderful dealings with us.

In the seventh chapter of Judges we have the familiar story of Gideon, the sixth judge of the people of Israel after the death of Joshua. Israel was being vexed sorely by repeated attacks of her enemies the Midianites. When the people of God cried to the Lord for deliverance, God raised up a man by the name of Gideon to deliver them. The method of deliverance was unique, for after he had surrounded the camp of the enemy at night, Gideon gave the following instructions:

When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon. So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon (Judges 7:18–20).

With pitchers in their hands, Gideon and his faithful 300 gained a dramatic and decisive victory in the routing of the Midianites.

The record is familiar. Gideon was called of the Lord to go and fight the enemy. Some 32,000 had gathered themselves about him, but of all these volunteers, only 300 were fit. With these Gideon surrounded the camp of the enemy at night. In their hands they held trumpets and pitchers in which they had concealed blazing torches. At a command and signal from their captain, the men were to break the earthen pitchers and thus let the light shine forth in the darkness. Then, blowing the trumpets, they were to give the enemy the impression that instead of 300 men there were 300 companies of men that had surrounded them. The effect was stupendous. Fear gripped

the enemy soldiers, and they fled in disorder throughout the night. The victory was complete.

We are interested in the part the broken pitchers played in the victory. The pitchers were earthen vessels, and hidden in them were flaming torches of light. We who have been saved are the earthen vessels to whom the Lord has entrusted the blessing of the Holy Spirit and the Word of Life. Within us dwells the Holy Spirit, the omnipotent Holy Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, by whom we can do all things. With Him nothing is impossible; for while it is true that without Him we can do nothing, it is equally true that we “can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth” us. In the pitcher was the torch. The fire and the torch speak of the Spirit of power and victory. Again and again the Holy Spirit, the only source of power and light in the Christian life, is referred to as fire. Fire is one of the many biblical symbols of the Holy Spirit. But this light has been placed in earthen vessels.

Earthen vessels are the symbols of these human bodies of ours. At the wedding at Cana of Galilee, it was into empty vessels that the water was poured and made into wine, the symbol of joy and salvation, at the word of the Lord Jesus. It was in earthen vessels that the widow’s small supply of oil was poured until all the vessels were filled. At best we are but earthen vessels to whom have been entrusted the words of life.

In the pitchers were torches. What a picture of the Christian as a result of regeneration! We have been endowed with the Holy Spirit, and within every believer dwells this Holy Spirit with all the possibilities and potentialities of Omnipotence. At our disposal is placed the entire realm of Holy Spirit power.

Yet the average believer goes through life without letting that power flow out. It seldom shines forth. Oftentimes there is darkness. So it was in Gideon's day. The torches were there, but there was no light and no victory until the pitchers were broken. Then the light shone forth and the enemy fled in consternation.

How we need to be broken. How often we bewail and bemoan the sad fact of broken lives, but find later that only broken things are used by the Lord, and that only after we are broken are we our very best for God.

There are two possibilities in the Christian life. One is to be in the light, and the other is to walk in the light—to have light within and to let it shine out. The one possibility is life; the other is the life abundant. There is a carnal Christian, and there is a spiritual Christian. We may have, as we read in the fourth chapter of John, the water of life springing up within us; then again, we may have rivers of living water flowing forth out of us, as Jesus said in the seventh chapter of John. Light may be in the pitcher, but the pitcher must be broken if there is to be victory and power.

A BROKEN BODY

“This is my body, which is broken for you” (1 Corinthians 11:24). This quotation by Paul of the words of Jesus at the institution of the Lord’s Supper voices a principle which, when properly understood, is of great comfort in times of trial and tribulation. Without the broken body of the Lord Jesus we could not be made whole.

In God’s wise counsel everything must be broken before it can be used fruitfully. Jesus expressed this truth when He said, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24).

What a world of memory is contained in the words “broken things,” which characterizes the journey of life from the cradle to the grave. Even at birth we must be broken away from our mothers; and as we journey down life’s pathway, until at last the “silver cord is loosed” and the “pitcher broken at the fountain,” our course is strewn with broken things.

From the earliest days of consciousness, man is in a world of broken things. The crying of the infant over a broken toy, the weeping of the child over the broken sled or kite, the sorrow of the young man over a broken trust are common in this world of broken things. There is the broken heart of the mother as the babe she has nursed at

her bosom crushes her heart by his waywardness. There is the sorrow of the faithful wife who sits alone in the late hours of the night with broken heart and shattered confidence, waiting for the one she thought loved her.

All along the way lie fragments of things that once were hopes and joys, things that were fashioned into dreams of happiness by the hand of fancy on the wheel of hope. That child who was the dream of all your love breaks your dreams. That business venture you envisioned fails. As the days go by, there are more and more of these broken things; and as the twilight of life comes and the old man totters to the broken sod, he looks back upon a world of broken things.

A BROKEN WORLD

Broken homes, broken hearts, broken bodies, broken hopes, broken health, broken vows, broken lives—what sadness in those words! But this is merely the course of nature. Broken things suggest accidents and calamities. We associate them with disappointments and failure. But all these “tragedies” are known to God, and He can bring out of those broken fragments something far better, more beautiful, more enduring than that precious thing which was broken at our feet.

With the Lord there are no calamities. God knows no disappointments. He knows all things from the beginning,

and nothing that happens surprises Him. Knowing everything from the beginning, He has planned that every broken piece in the lives of His own children will fit in somewhere in the complete portrait of His eternal counsel and will.

Are you being broken today upon a bed of illness or by a heart that grieves over the bitterness of a love spurned and abused? Here is comfort for you. God knows all about it, and He would not permit it if He did not see that in the end it will serve a purpose you do not now know.

I long ago learned the lesson—but need to remind myself of it constantly—that God makes only what He breaks and breaks only what He wants to make. If you are being broken, God is working with you. He is making something—something that will someday astound you with its wisdom and beauty. Each time I have passed through the dark vale of disappointment and have cried in agony, “Oh, why, why must this be?” God has always led me out of the gloom into a greater light, out of the straits into a larger place.

Someone has said, “The narrow straits always lead into the wide, wide ocean.” The Lord deals with us in that way. Things we thought were the greatest trials and tragedies we later find to be God’s way of bringing us something better. We think broken things are a loss, but God turns them to gain. In nature, broken things are cast

aside; but in grace, God will never use a man until he is broken.

NATURE AND GRACE

Grace is always the reverse of nature. In the natural realm the first is first, but Jesus says that in the realm of grace the “first shall be last.” Nature says that the youngest shall serve the eldest, but grace says, “The older shall serve the younger.” Nature says, “He that would be greatest among you, let him lord it over all.” But grace says, “He that would be greatest among you, let him minister to the least of these.”

If you are being broken by disappointment, by bereavement, by loss, by pain, by sickness, remember that while to us broken things are tragedies and worthless, they are the only things God can use.

The Bible is full of illustrations that support this truth. Again and again God uses broken things to gain the victory. Genesis speaks of a broken fellowship, but God uses it for the exhibition of His grace. Exodus tells of a broken law, but God uses it to prove to man his need of salvation and grace. Numbers depicts a broken covenant. Judges speaks of broken pitchers in the hands of 300 men. Samuel tells of a man with a broken back who sat at the king’s table. In the Psalms we read about the outpouring of a broken and contrite heart. In Matthew

we read of broken loaves in the hands of Jesus. Mark tells of a broken roof which enabled a paralytic to approach Jesus for healing. In Luke we read of a broken alabaster box; and John tells of a broken home where Lazarus died.

We think of the broken net and the broken ship, the pieces of which helped to save Paul and his companions during a storm. We remember also the broken body of our Lord on the tree, and we hear Him saying to His disciples, "This is my body, which is broken for you."

In each of these examples the breaking was for a purpose. In every instance a blessing resulted that so far outshone everything else that the pain of breaking was soon forgotten.

A BROKEN LAW

Of the many, many broken things mentioned in the Bible, we want to consider first the broken law of God. You will remember that after God had delivered His people out of the land of Egypt and had led them through the sea into the wilderness, they came to Mount Sinai. There God wanted to teach Israel the truth of grace.

It may seem strange when I say that He gave them the law to teach them the need of grace, but it is true. There upon the mountain God gave, by the hand of Moses, two tables of stone, and on these tables of stone God wrote the law. Before Moses could bring that law to the people

to whom it was given, however, they had already broken it.

Moses did not break the law when he cast the tables at the foot of the Mount. Israel had already broken it when they desired the golden calf and were dancing about it. Moses' breaking of the stones was a pictorial demonstration of the seriousness of Israel's sin.

ISRAEL MUST DIE

The broken law demands death. The law was never given to save. The law was never meant to take a man to heaven. God knew before He gave the law that there would not be a son of Adam who would ever keep that law. Yea, we may go further and say that God never expected even one sinner to keep that law. It was given by God to reveal the need of grace.

That law was perfect and holy and just. It was the perfect expression of the perfect will of God, and imperfect man could not keep it because it was holy. Sinners could not attain to it. And because it was just, it must condemn everyone who broke it. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" is the language of the law. "The wages of sin is death," says God's law. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," says the law!

God knew that Israel would break that law. God

expected that they would. He knew the heart of man far too well to expect that he could keep His perfect law. He knew that in man—that is, in his flesh—“dwelleth no good thing.” That law must be broken to convince man that he needed grace. The breaking of the law by Israel was the proof and demonstration that “by the deeds of the law” there should “no flesh be justified in his sight.” Thus the broken law became the occasion of the revelation of the grace of God.

THE TABERNACLE

When Moses came down from the mount, he carried, in addition to the tables of the law, the pattern of the tabernacle. The tabernacle is the exhibition of God’s grace, just as the law is the expression of God’s justice. The law knows no mercy. The law demands punishment for all who break it; and, therefore, if no more than the law had been given, man would be forever lost. But God now introduced the tabernacle—the great type of the Lord Jesus Christ and redemption by blood.

Every part of the tabernacle spoke of Jesus Christ, but He was symbolized particularly by one article of furniture in the Holy of Holies: the ark of the covenant, the great picture of redemption through Jesus Christ. The ark, which rested in the Holy of Holies, was an oblong box made of wood and overlaid with gold. In the box,

together with other articles, was the broken law—not the literal stones Moses broke, but the second tables containing the law that Israel had broken. This law called for judgment and the curse and death. It cried for vengeance. It was the ministration of death.

THE MERCY SEAT

But God made provision for Israel. Even though they had broken the law, they could be saved, for over this broken law in the ark was a mercy seat. Note the following carefully:

Once a year the high priest took blood from the altar in the outer court (a type of the cross of Christ) and carried it into the holiest place. He then solemnly sprinkled that blood on the mercy seat over and above the broken law, which demanded death and judgment and the curse. And then when God, the holy and the just One, came down in the Shekinah cloud of glory in the Holy of Holies, He saw the blood instead of beholding the broken law that demanded the eternal death of the sinner. The blood covered the law.

The law, which demanded blood (“without shedding of blood is no remission”), had been satisfied by that blood. God would not curse His people who were under the blood, for He had said, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13).

“WHEN I SEE THE BLOOD”

The law was broken by Israel, and what a tragedy it seemed. Yet it was God’s way of revealing to His people their need of His grace and the power of the atoning blood. God looked upon the blood and was reconciled. Israel was safe. And God has not changed His method of dealing with sinners. He is still just and holy and must condemn the sinner and punish sin. No man can be saved by the law. The law stands to condemn you. But God has provided another Lamb of atonement whose blood was shed on the cross of Calvary and whose body was broken there to save those who had broken His law.

There is, then, only one place of safety and shelter from the wrath of God, and that is “under the blood.” He has said, “Without shedding of blood is no remission.”

Yes, the broken law calls for a broken Savior, and the broken Savior calls for a broken heart. Only through things broken can blessing come. Even Jesus could not be a Savior without being broken. God permitted man to break His holy law to convince him of his need for a broken Savior.

ARE YOU BROKEN?

Some of you are being broken today in body, in spirit, and in material things. Remember—until Jesus was broken, He could not be your Savior. That is God’s way of

doing things. Some of the ingredients of the holy anointing oil in the tabernacle had to be crushed before they were used because until they were crushed their fragrance could not flow forth. For this reason we read: “And thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation” (Exodus 30:36).

Until the incense was crushed, it could not give forth its fragrance. Until Christ was broken, He could not be our Savior. Except He, the grain of wheat, be broken and ground to flour, He could not be the Bread of Life to us.

Oh, friend, do you realize that only the death of Christ can save you? Only as His body was broken, which means that His blood was allowed to flow out, could He atone for your sin. Without His blood there is no salvation. Are you under the blood? Then you have been redeemed from the curse of the law. But if you are not under the blood, you are still under the curse.