

Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 1, The Ministry and Message of the Prophets, Part 1

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Minor Prophets. This is lecture 1, The Ministry and Message of the Prophets.

I want to welcome you to our study of the minor prophets. I'm Dr. Gary Yates. I'm a professor of Old Testament Studies at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary in Lynchburg.

I'm excited about this study. I'm looking forward to it. I teach the minor prophets at Liberty, and I'm excited about providing the opportunity for people to study this online as well.

One of the things that I love about my job as an Old Testament professor is that I often have the opportunity to teach parts of the Bible that we don't give a lot of attention to in the church or that people are not that familiar with. And so, if the book of the 12 or the minor prophets are a part of scripture that you've not studied, I pray that our lectures and the time that we have in these books will make a contribution to you. I appreciate Dr. Ted Hildebrand for giving me the opportunity to be involved in this ministry.

His heart and his passion is to provide materials for people so that they can study the Bible on their own. The internet gives us a great vehicle and tool for doing that. And so, if you're a seminary student becoming familiar with the Old Testament, if you're a pastor who maybe has not had resources or opportunities to study these books in formal classes, if you're in a part of the world where that type of education is not available, then this study is particularly for you.

And I'm praying that God will just bless his word and honor it. In being a pastor for eight years and then being a professor for the last 14, I am more and more convinced that one of the greatest needs in the church today is a deeper and fuller understanding of God's word. One of the things that I think we've done as the evangelical church is that we've abandoned in many ways our commitment to scripture and the importance of that as being the cornerstone of our ministry.

I've come to realize in my teaching and my preaching that I do not have the ability to change people's lives, but God's word does and it's powerful. And the minor prophets are powerful. I had an opportunity to study them first in an elective that I took at Dallas Theological Seminary back in 1986.

I not only fell in love with these books, but I fell in love with the God of the prophets. Ultimately, I hope these books will help you know, love, and serve God in a fuller and deeper way. I want to begin this study by talking a little bit about the ministry of the prophets, who they were, the role they played, the mission that they were given by God, and ultimately, the contribution that they made to the Old Testament.

I believe as Christians to know Jesus and who he is and what he's done for us and his place in our lives, we have to know the Old Testament. After his resurrection, Jesus met up with two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24. They did not recognize him.

They did not know that he had come back from the dead. And they were dejected, and they were disappointed. And they said to Jesus, we had hoped that Jesus was the Messiah and he's been crucified.

He's dead. Our hopes have been dashed. Jesus used that opportunity to take the Old Testament and show these disciples why it was necessary for him to suffer, be raised from the dead, and then be exalted.

It says in Luke that he began with the law and the prophets and the Psalms, the three parts of the Old Testament, and he systematically taught them and helped them to know who he was and what his mission was all about. I believe that the Old Testament prophets give us a unique understanding into the role and the mission of Jesus. Trying to go into the New Testament without a background, without an understanding of the Old Testament, and understand who Jesus is and what he did in many ways is like walking in on the third act of the play or the last hour of a movie.

The Old Testament sets the stage and helps us to understand how Jesus is the goal and fulfillment of the entire story of the Bible. As I look at the ministry of the prophets and the work that they did in the Old Testament, Jesus ultimately is God's final prophet. The book of Deuteronomy says that the Lord is going to raise up a prophet like Moses in Israel.

The ultimate fulfillment of that in Acts chapter 3 verse 22 is that Jesus is the eschatological prophet that's promised by God. In many ways, his ministry as he came and he taught and he preached about the kingdom of God was the ministry of a prophet. Once when Jesus asked his disciples, who do men say that I am? They came up with the answers, John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets.

The reason that they understood him in that way is that Jesus had the ministry of a prophet. He was more than a prophet. He was God's son.

He was the Messiah, but being a prophet and a messenger of God was a key part of his ministry and his message. When Jesus stood up, and he wept over Jerusalem, and

he said, your house is left desolate, and he prophesied that the temple would be destroyed and not one stone would be left on top of another, in many ways, he was fulfilling the role of a Jeremiah or Ezekiel, warning them that there was going to be another exile, another judgment before the time when God would ultimately bring his kingdom. If we want to understand the role that Jesus played as God's final prophet, Hebrews 1 says that God spoke to his people in many different ways at many different times, but in these last days, he has spoken to us through his son.

Understanding Jesus as the culmination of the role in the ministry of the prophets helps us to know him and understand him better. It reminds us of the urgency of our own response to the message of Jesus and the urgency of our responsibility to communicate that prophetic message to others. If we are going to read, interpret, and apply the Old Testament prophets in the proper way, then I think it's important for us to understand who they were and what their message and their mission and ministry was all about.

The first thing that I wanted to emphasize in this lesson is that the prophets were men that were called by God to a specific ministry and message. In fact, the word for prophet in the Old Testament, nabi, cognate evidence helps us to understand that the probable meaning for that word is that it's a person that's called. It's a called one.

And so, the calling of God on the prophets is not just a desire or a sense that they were to serve God. God visibly and audibly spoke to these men and called them to a specific mission and ministry. I remember when I was in high school, I was making decisions about my future in college, and I began to sense this idea that God was calling me into ministry, but the calling of the prophets is something even more definite than that because God appeared to them, God spoke to them, and he called them to be a spokesman.

We see passages that talk about this in Isaiah chapter six. Isaiah sees a vision of God, a holiness of God, and the Lord reveals his greatness as king, and the seraphim around the throne says, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty. And there's a question: who will go and speak for us? And Isaiah says, here I am, send me.

Jeremiah chapter one, God calls the prophet Jeremiah to be a prophet to Israel and to the nations. Jeremiah's response to that is, ah, Lord God, I'm but a child. I don't know how to speak.

God says, Jeremiah, I will put my words within you, and you will be able to speak, and I'll make you strong against the opposition that's going to come your way. In the ministry of the prophet Ezekiel, his ministry begins when God appears to him in exile in Babylon in this powerful chariot vision. God shows up in this storm, and Ezekiel is overwhelmed by the presence of God.

Through that comes to understand that God's enablement and God's power and God's presence will help him to accomplish and carry out that ministry. So, there is always in the prophets a strong sense that God has called them to this mission. We have an example of this in the minor prophets in the calling of the prophet Amos.

And in Amos chapter seven, verse 14, Amos says, I was no prophet. I was not a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. Amos' statement, I was not a prophet nor a prophet's son has been interpreted in a variety of ways.

But what it likely means is I was not a professional prophet. That was not my occupation, but God intervened in my life. God had the right to do that.

And it says in verse 15, but the Lord took me from following the flock. And the Lord said to me, go and prophesy to my people, Israel. God gave him a specific calling.

And when God called you in that way, it was not a suggestion. It was not an option. It was not something that you had the choice of either accepting or rejecting.

It was an obligation that God placed upon these men. We have another example of this in the book of Jonah. God calls Jonah as a prophet.

Jonah is a spokesman for God, but then God gives him a special assignment. Arise and go to Nineveh and speak to that city. It was a unique thing for God to call the prophet to go and speak to this foreign nation.

And Jonah does something that we don't see other prophets doing. He gets up and attempts to flee the calling, to flee from the presence of God. And the Lord is going to work a variety of circumstances ultimately to bring Jonah to the place where he fulfills and carries out the mission that God has given to him.

And so, the prophets are called by God. It's not just an occupation. It's not just something that fits their disposition.

It is a mission that comes to them from God and God is the one who is going to enable them to fulfill it. The second thing related to this is that specifically they are called to be spokesmen for God. More than 350 times in the prophets we see this expression, thus says Yahweh.

So, it's not the prophet giving his opinions or his ideas about the crisis or the situation that's going on in his day. It is a message that comes directly from God. We often see the expression ne'um Adonai, utterance of the Lord.

It's not Jeremiah's word or Amos's word, or Hosea's word. This is an utterance that comes from God. 2 Peter 1:21, one of the important New Testament passages about inspiration and how that was given to the prophets says this, prophecy did not originate in the will of man or the opinions of men, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

The idea there, the illustration behind that, may even be the idea of the wind moving the sails of a ship. The prophets were led to their message as God spoke through them. 2 Timothy 3:16, all scripture is inspired by God.

It is breathed out by God. It is spoken first by God and then it is communicated through a human messenger. With the prophets, their oral message was inspired by God.

Then, the writing down of that message was inspired by God for future generations. So those passages factor into this as well. Jeremiah 23 gives us an explanation of what the ministry of the true prophets was about, the source of their message.

Jeremiah says the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet is that the false prophets simply speak the visions, the dreams, and the imaginations of their mind. But a true prophet receives and communicates a message that has been given to him by God. Jeremiah even views himself in that passage as being a prophet who has stood in the counsel of God.

In other words, as God was forming his decisions, as God was announcing his intentions, what he planned to do on planet earth, Jeremiah says, I was in the meeting in heaven and as God announced his plans to the angels, the messengers, the people that would carry that out, I was there, and I heard what the Lord was going to do, what the Lord plans to do, and now I'm communicating that message to you. The prophet Micaiah, 1 Kings 22, stands in opposition to Ahab's prophets, who are all encouraging him, go out into battle, you'll be successful. Micaiah says, if you go into battle and you come back alive then I'm not a true spokesman of God because I was at the meeting in heaven.

I stood in the counsel of God, and I heard the Lord say to his angels and to his messengers, who will go and be a deceiving spirit that will entice Ahab into going into battle? This is a pretty audacious metaphor for the prophets to use. We have stood in the counsel of God with God himself, with the heavenly messengers, the heavenly angels, and we're coming to announce that message to you. One of the formative passages for the understanding of the role of a prophet in the Old Testament is Deuteronomy 18:15.

The Lord says in that passage, talking to Moses, the Lord will raise up for the people of Israel a prophet like Moses. And so, there's been a good bit of discussion. There's a singular use of the word prophet there.

Who is the prophet that we're talking about? Obviously, as Christians, we think that that passage is related to Jesus. Acts 3:22 says that Jesus is the fulfillment of that. But the word prophet in the singular there is probably being used as a collective.

And what that passage is talking about is that the Lord is going to raise up a group of prophets collectively like Moses, who will perform in their generation the same role that Moses performed and carried out for his generation. The people had asked Moses to go up and speak to the Lord, hear the message that the Lord has, and come and communicate that message to us. We don't want to stand in the presence of God, or we might die.

And so, Moses assumed this role where he would speak for God where would communicate the message to God. And the Lord was promising to the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 18 verse 15, I will carry on, and I will continue that message even after Moses is dead. And so, throughout the Old Testament we have a series of prophets like Moses that God raises up for the people of Israel.

Joshua immediately coming after Moses is a spokesman for God. At the end of his life, after he has ministered and served as a prophet, he calls the people to covenant renewal in the same way that Moses did. The office of prophet is probably officially established with Samuel.

And when Israel asked God to give them a king, the authority and the office of prophet is established alongside of that to give direction to those kings. The civil leader is ultimately going to have to answer to the spiritual leader. And so, the role of the prophets, when we think of a Samuel, we think of a Nathan, a Gad, and Elijah and Elisha, their ministry early in the office of prophet in the Old Testament is primarily to the kings of Israel.

They are going to anoint the kings. They're the king makers. They're the ones who announce God's intention.

This is the person that the Lord has chosen as king. Saul is chosen, but then when Saul is rejected, Samuel goes to the house of David and anoints David as one of Jesse's sons. When there is a tension over the succession when David is going to die, it's the prophets who announced that Solomon, this one who is beloved by God, he's going to be the one that rules as the king of Israel.

And so, the role of the prophet in the early institution of the office of prophet is primarily to the kings. We begin to have a transition with the ministry of Elijah and

Elisha because they are going to minister to the kings of Israel. They are going to confront King Ahab and the house of Ahab about their apostasy and their defection to Baal worship.

But Elijah and Elisha are also going to begin to minister to the people at large because there's a national apostasy. The people need to be called back to their commitment to Yahweh. When we get to the writing prophets in the Old Testament, the major and the minor prophets, the major prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, in our English Bibles, Daniel, the Book of the Twelve are the minor prophets.

They are raised up by God in the eighth century and following because there is now a time of crisis. The northern kingdom of Israel the southern kingdom of Judah, for hundreds of years they have ignored the Lord. They have not fulfilled his commands.

The majority of the kings in Judah and all of the kings in Israel, in some way, have been unfaithful to God. So, God raises up the classical prophets or the writing prophets beginning with Amos in the eighth century to warn the people of an impending national crisis and national disaster. So, there is going to be a group of prophets that God raised during the Assyrian crisis.

In the Assyrian empire, God is going to begin to punish the people of Israel. The prophets are warning them that they need to repent and ultimately the northern kingdom goes into exile. The Babylonian crisis for the kingdom of Judah, Babylon replaces Assyria as the major empire in the ancient Near East.

God is going to use Babylon to punish his people if they don't change their ways. So, God raises up another group of prophets. In the post-exilic period, after the people come back to the land, they are back in the land, but they have not fully returned to the Lord.

So, the Lord is going to raise up another group of prophets to call them to repentance, to teach them, to instruct them what God ultimately plans for the people of Israel. So, the role of the prophets, and they are there throughout the entire history of the Old Testament, is that they are spokesmen for God. So, we have seen that they are called by God.

They are spokesmen for God. They are raised up as an office from Moses forward, from Samuel forward. Specifically, their message, the role of the prophets, and the message that they proclaim, they come to the people of Israel as the messengers of God's covenants.

So, to understand the role and the work and the ministry and the message of the prophets, we have to understand the Old Testament covenants and the history of the Old Testament. All its diversity is really a series of God working out the covenants

that he has established as a way of implementing his kingship. When God creates the world, and God creates Adam as his vice-regent, you will serve as my image; all of that plan is marred when Adam sins.

So, God begins a plan of redemption to restore man to his blessing, to restore man to his role as God's vice-regent, but ultimately also to reestablish God's role as the King of all creation and the King of Israel. The Lord implements his kingship in the Old Testament through a series of covenants. I really believe the two prevailing ideas about God in the Old Testament are that God is a King and that God implements his kingdom through these covenants.

The first time that we see covenant mentioned is in Genesis 6-8. God makes a covenant with Noah. God promises Noah that he's going to bring his family safely through the worldwide flood that he's going to use to bring judgment on the earth.

God makes a covenant promise after the flood that he will no longer destroy the earth by water. That covenant is important in God's plan of redemption because it guarantees the continuation of the earth. But God also places an obligation on humanity in that covenant.

It says that man is not to eat blood, and then the larger obligation is that man is to restrain violence. One of the reasons that God brought the flood was because of the wickedness and the violence. God says there is now an obligation placed on humanity that whoever sheds man's blood, by man, shall his blood be shed.

So, there is a responsibility on the part of all people in all nations to restrain violence and to restrain and to prevent the wickedness that led to the judgment of the flood in the first place. So, the message of the prophets, often as they speak to the nations, is going to be based on that original Noahic covenant. After the flood, after the rebellion of humanity again at the Tower of Babel, God is going to begin to work through one nation, through one specific group of people.

And so, God is going to make a second covenant. God makes a covenant with Abraham. And the key passages there are Genesis 12, Genesis 15, Genesis 17, and Genesis 22.

In that covenant, God makes three specific promises to Abraham. God promises Abraham that he'll give him descendants and make him a great nation. That's a significant promise because for a long time in his life, Abraham did not even have a son.

God also promises that he's going to give Abraham and his descendants a land, the promised land, the land of Canaan, where Israel will ultimately come to live. And

then God also says that Abraham will become an instrument of blessing to all peoples. And he says, I will bless those who bless you.

I will curse those who curse you. And through all nations and through all peoples, they're going to ultimately be blessed through Abraham. God has not forgotten about the rest of humanity.

God's creational design in Genesis 128 to bless humans and for them to rule as his vice-regents is still in place, but God is going to use Abraham and his descendants as the instruments to bring that about. God also places an obligation on Abraham. Circumcision is instituted as the sign of that covenant.

It is to be passed on from generation to generation. And God also tells Abraham in Genesis 17, you will have to walk before me and be blameless. For him to be an instrument of blessing to other people, then ultimately, he's going to have to be faithful and obedient to God.

The covenants, all of them contain both promises and obligations. And so, God institutes this covenant with Abraham. The message of the prophets, in many ways, is going to be based on those promises that God has made to Abraham.

After Israel is taken away into exile, they're going to come back to the land because God has not forgotten the covenant promises. God is going to restore them as a great nation because God promised to make the descendants of Abraham as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore. The third covenant that God makes in the Old Testament is that after Abraham's descendants do become a great people, he brings them out of Egypt.

He establishes them as a nation and he brings them to Mount Sinai and he gives them a covenant to live by. It's a constitution that will help them to live out their mission and their role as God's people. And so, we refer to that covenant as either the Sinaitic covenant or the Mosaic covenant.

A key passage for that covenant is in Exodus chapter 19, verses 1 to 6. God says I've carried you on eagle's wings. I've brought you to myself. I've saved you out of slavery in Egypt.

And now I am calling you to a mission. I am calling you to be a holy nation, to live in a distinctive way. I am calling you to be a kingdom of priests.

The role of a priest is ultimately to bless others, pray for others, lead other people to God, and be a mediator. As Israel obeyed the commandments that God had given to them—the 10 commandments that kind of encapsulate the law, the 613 commandments as a whole—they would carry out their mission as the instrument of

God's blessing. The covenant stipulated that if Israel obeyed God's commands, they would be blessed.

If they disobeyed God's commands, they would be cursed. And as we read the covenant blessings and the covenant curses that are laid out for us in passages like Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy chapter 28, we understand what those blessings and curses were. The blessings were that they would enjoy the land.

They would live long lives. They would have many children. This land that was flowing with milk and honey.

They would enjoy all of those things in a rich, full, deep way. God would give them dominance over the nations. They would have military success.

They would be secure. They would lead peaceful lives. But if they disobeyed, God would bring curses in nature that would take away the blessings of the promised land.

And God would bring curses dealing with military defeat and exile. Deuteronomy 28 says that the ultimate punishment is God will take you out of the land. God will send you back to Egypt, the place that you came from.

And so, what we have in the Old Testament from the time that this is established in the days of Moses until the time that the prophets rise with Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and these early prophets in the 8th century, there is a long history of Israel's disobedience and unfaithfulness to the land, to the commands. The prophets are messengers of the covenant, reminding the people of those covenant responsibilities. Also, reminding them of what would happen if they did not obey.

God makes another covenant after the time of Moses and the fourth covenant in the Old Testament that we want to look at is the Davidic covenant. A key passage for that would be in 2 Samuel 7. David desires to build a house for God. God says, ultimately, your family will do that, but more importantly, I am going to build a house for you.

What that entails and what that involves is that God is going to raise up a son for David. Initially, that's going to be his son Solomon, but there is going to be a succession of Davidic kings until the time of Jesus Christ. God is going to establish the family of David, the dynasty of David, and the kingdom of David forever.

There's an unconditional promise there. I will not take away my love from David the way that I did from Saul. I'm going to establish David's throne and David's kingdom.

But there is also, even in the Davidic covenant, there's a conditional element to this. For each son of David that follows in that line, that follows in that succession, he will be blessed or he will be punished based on his obedience to the commands that God has given. Those commands were so important to the king that he was required and he was obligated as he came to office to write out his own personal copy of the book of the law to remind him of his responsibilities.

Maybe that would be a good idea for us to do that for politicians today, but it was a reminder of the responsibility that the king had to obey the law. When the Davidic kings ultimately did not obey the law, they did not fulfill the commands that God had given to them. God ultimately even removed them from the throne.

There has not been a Davidic king reigning in Jerusalem for more than 2,500 years, but God remains committed to that covenant because, ultimately, the promises about David's permanent, everlasting kingdom are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus, not just as God's son, but as the son of David, is ruling and reigning at the right hand of God right now and fulfilling those promises that the Lord made to David. The Davidic covenant was ultimately instituted by God as a way of bringing about both the promises of the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant.

God had promised a great land to Abraham. That land would be possessed and that land would be permanently held on to by the rule and the authority and the military might of the Davidic king. God also raised up a Davidic king as a way of helping the people of Israel to obey his commands.

They needed a model. They needed an example of what it meant to follow God's laws and God's commands. That is what the Davidic king was designed to be.

God also promised the people of Israel that since it was so difficult to cause all of these people to obey God, trying to get the entire nation to be blessed by obeying God, God would bless the entire nation if this one man were to obey. What we see working its way throughout the Old Testament is that when the Davidic king obeys God, there are national blessings that flow out to the whole people. When the Davidic king does not obey God, there are often national punishments that come upon the people.

But the Davidic covenant was a gracious way of God saying, and I'm going to provide a way for the nation to be blessed if this one man will obey me. The sad reality is that even getting this one man to obey God ultimately proved to be a huge task. David, Solomon, and all of the good kings, even those kings, ultimately, in some way, failed God.

So, the role of the prophets was to be a messenger of what the Davidic covenant meant and what the Davidic covenant was all about for the people of Israel and

Judah. On the promise side, the prophets promised that God was ultimately going to raise up the ultimate David, the ideal David, the messianic David, who would be the fulfillment of all that God had designed and intended for the house of David. The other side of this was, however, that God was also going to punish these kings if they did not follow him.

So, the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 22, if you will obey God's commands if you will keep the Sabbath and do what God has commanded you, and if you will practice justice, then you will be allowed to keep your throne. If not, ultimately, there's going to be judgment. After God has established these series of covenants with the people of Israel, the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the people and the leaders and the kings and the religious authorities and the civil authorities after they have disobeyed God for hundreds of years, the prophets confront them about that, but they also promise that God is going to make another covenant.

The promise of the prophets is that ultimately, after this judgment is over, the Lord is going to establish a new covenant with the people of Israel. And so, they have not obeyed the old covenant for hundreds and hundreds of years, and yet the grace of God is that God is going to tear up the old agreement and God is going to make a new agreement with them. The key passage in the Old Testament for helping us to understand this new covenant is Jeremiah chapter 31 verses 31 to 34, and there are two key promises in that passage.

The first part is, I will forgive the sins of the past. I will not remember them anymore, and that's what God is going to do after he carries out the judgment of exile. The second promise is that Jeremiah says, God is also going to provide enablement for your future, and the Lord is going to write the law on your heart so that you will have the desire to obey and the ability to do what God has commanded you to do.

Trying to illustrate that to students, I often use the example of what happens to us when we see a sign that says, keep off the grass. Our desire immediately, as soon as we see that, is not to protect the grass. Our desire is, I want to walk on the grass.

The sign tells me not to do it. There's something in my heart that makes me want to rebel against that. If I see a sign that says wet paint, there's something in my heart that makes me want to touch that, even though that's not what the sign is intending.

That's the way it was for Israel as they heard the law of God. In our sinful condition, we don't desire to obey God's law. God is promising, ultimately, to transform the hearts of the people so that they will be able to obey him and follow him.

These terrible judgments that came, the exile that fell, the Assyrian crisis, the Babylonian crisis, this foreign domination that Israel is going to live under that will

not have to happen in the future because God's going to give his people the enablement to obey that. Jeremiah is the only prophet that uses this specific term, the new covenant. But the idea of a new covenant is all over the prophets.

The prophet Joel says that in the last day, the Lord is going to pour out his spirit on his people. The spirit is the one that is going to provide the enablement for Israel to obey. Ezekiel, mirroring what Jeremiah says in Jeremiah 31, in Ezekiel 36 says, the Lord is going to cleanse you and the Lord is going to wash away the filth and the defilement of your sin.

And the Lord is going to place within you a new heart. And the way that he's going to give you a new heart is through the ministry of the spirit. So, when Jeremiah talks about, I'm going to write the law on your heart, what does that mean? How does it happen? Ezekiel 36 and the other prophets help us to understand it's by the pouring out of the spirit on his people that God's going to give them the enablement and the desire to obey him and follow his commands.

Isaiah 32 verses 14 and 15, the Lord's going to pour out the spirit like water on a barren desert place. Isaiah 59 verses 20 and 21, I'm going to put my words within the mouth of my people so that they will have the desire to know me and follow me and do what I've commanded. Zechariah chapter 12, I'm going to pour out on my people a spirit of repentance.

God is ultimately going to reverse the failures of the Old Testament by giving his people a desire to obey and follow him. And so, we have spent a little bit of time really here tracing the entire sort of history of redemption, the history of the people of Israel in the Old Testament. But this is essential to understanding the message of the prophets because the prophets are messengers of God's covenant.

In their book, *Grasping God's Word*, Scott DuVal and J. Daniel Hayes summarize the covenantal message of the prophets with four statements. And I think they're very good summary statements and I want to share them with you. The first idea that we're going to see about the covenant in the Old Testament prophets is that they are going to tell the people, you have sinned, and you have broken the covenant.

And so, the prophets, in the same way, that an ambassador from the king of Assyria might be sent to the Israelites or the king of the Hittites might send out an ambassador to one of the vassal peoples of his kingdom, the prophets were ambassadors from God reminding the people that they had not fulfilled their covenant obligations. Putting it in legal terms, we could view the prophets as God's prosecuting attorneys. And so, one of the common speech forms in the prophets is that the prophets are often going to give what we call a prophetic judgment speech.

And a prophetic judgment speech basically contains two elements. There is an accusation against the people, and this is what you've done wrong. There is an indictment of the people, and it's typically based on the conditions and the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant.

And then after the accusation, after the indictment, there is also an announcement where the prophet is going to announce to the people of God, this is what the Lord is going to do to you. This is the judgment that you've incurred because of the sins and the ways that you violated the covenant. We have an example of one of these judgment speeches in Isaiah chapter 5, verses 8 to 10.

The prophet says, Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land. The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing, surely many houses shall be made desolate, large and beautiful houses without inhabitant, for ten acres of a vineyard shall yield but one bath and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah. What the prophet does there is he gives us a prophetic judgment speech.

And the first part of this is the indictment, the accusation. You've added field to field and house to house. You have lived in a greedy way where you have exploited and taken advantage of your neighbor so that you could seize their properties for your own profit.

The judgment, therefore, and often introduced by the word therefore or *leken*, is that the Lord says, I have sworn, here's what I'm going to do. The houses, the lands, the properties that you have stolen from these other people are going to be made desolate. And this land that you've taken from other people so that you could enhance your own wealth and property and possessions is not going to produce the crops that you thought it would.

And so, this is a good example of what a prophetic judgment speech entails, accusation and announcement. And often, there's a connection in that speech because the punishment fits the crime. They've been guilty, they've stolen people's lands, they've mistreated, they've abused people.

So, the result of that is that God is going to act in justice to make sure that they do not enjoy that. God's judgments are not capricious. God's judgments are not random.

God's judgments are specifically oriented to the crimes that they've committed. We have another example of a prophetic judgment speech in the Minor Prophets, Micah chapter 3, verses 9 to 12. The prophet says: Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and the rulers of the house of Israel.

So, this judgment speech is for the leaders who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. Its heads give judgments for a bribe, and its priests teach for a price. The prophets practice divination for money, and yet they lean on the Lord and they say, is not the Lord in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us.

And so, here's the crime, here's the accusation. The leaders have been corrupt, they've practiced violence, injustice, bribery, dishonesty. The leaders of the people have not been any better than the worst criminal element.

The prophets have preached for profit. And so that's the accusation. The announcement of the judgment that is going to come falls in chapter 3, verse 12.

Therefore, like Cain, here's the consequence. Because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field, Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height. So, if you've committed this crime, God is ultimately going to judge even the city of Jerusalem; even the temple mount is going to be reduced to rubble because of your disobedience.

And so, the message of the prophets, the first part of this covenantal message, is that you have sinned and you've broken the covenant. And what we see as they bring these accusations and as they accuse the people of sin, they are specifically referring to their violations of the Mosaic covenant, the 613 commandments that the Lord had given to Israel. In Deuteronomy chapter 30, Moses says to the people as this covenant is being established, I am calling today, heaven and earth as witnesses.

And as you enter the land, they are going to silently observe your behavior whether you live up to the covenant, and whether you keep the commandments. In Isaiah chapter 1, as Isaiah begins his ministry and as Isaiah first preaches to the people, he says, listen O earth, and hear O heavens. Isaiah is bringing the witnesses back into the courtroom.

He's saying, let's look at the last six, 700 years of Israel's history. How have they kept the commandments? How well and how faithfully have they carried out God's covenant obligations? And the answer is, they haven't done that well at all. And that's the basis of the indictment.

In Hosea chapter 4, another sort of the Lord uses the prophet as a prosecuting attorney. And in Hosea chapter 4, verses 1 to 3, it says this: hear the word of the Lord, O children of Israel. For the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land.

There is no faithfulness or steadfast love. There is no knowledge of God in the land. There is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery.

They break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. What we have here is that five of the 10 commandments that are found in the Mosaic law are referenced. That's the basis of judgment.

The covenantal message is, you have sinned and you have broken the covenant. The second part of their covenantal message is, is that you need to repent and turn around. And the word to repent in the Old Testament, it's the word shub, is a common word throughout the Old Testament prophets.

We are going to learn in later lessons, it is one of the most recurring words in the book of the 12. And what the prophets are encouraging the people to do is ultimately to change their ways. If they will repent, if they will turn from this history of disobeying God, not living up to his commands, in spite of the fact that they have done that for hundreds of years, if they will genuinely repent, there is the opportunity to avoid the judgment that's coming.

The book of Joel, Joel chapter 2, verses 12 to 14, I think, gives us one of the most passionate calls to repentance that we have in all the Old Testament prophets. Yet even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all of your hearts, with fasting, with weeping, with mourning, rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and he relents over disaster.

Who knows whether he will turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering, and a drink offering for the Lord your God. Prophets calling them to repent is not just an external thing, don't just rend your garments, don't just go through some religious rituals, don't just offer some sacrifices, genuinely change your ways. And if they would do that, there is the opportunity that they would be spared.

The prophet Amos is going to say, seek the Lord and live. And if they will do that, there's the chance to avoid judgment. The third part of the prophetic covenantal message was, is that if there is no repentance, then ultimately there will be judgment.

And so, God graciously, he is not just an angry God who wants to zap his people. He's not just an angry God who wants to consume them and destroy them. The Lord gives them an actual opportunity to avoid this judgment.

But when repentance is not forthcoming, then ultimately, there is going to be judgment. One of the things that we are going to trace through the book of the 12, the minor prophets, is that there is a heavy emphasis in the early books of the minor prophets on a call to repentance, the chance to avoid judgment. But what we see is a gradual closing down of that because there are only limited examples of repentance.

And so, once they reject, once they refuse, once they persist in going their own way, God is ultimately going to bring judgment. We have an illustration of this in the preaching in the ministry of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah often performed sort of sign acts, dramas that acted out, and that helped the people to understand his message.

And in Jeremiah chapter 18, Jeremiah one day went to the potter and the potter is shaping a piece of wet clay on the wheel and the clay becomes ruined and the potter has to break it down and start over again. God is willing to do that with the people of Israel. They have become ruined by their sin, but God is willing to reshape them and reform them and to make them into a new people.

However, in Jeremiah 19, we see the second side of Jeremiah's ministry. When the people refused that opportunity, when they rejected the chance to change their ways and be spared from judgment, then ultimately Jeremiah went to the potter. He bought a piece of pottery that had already been fired in the oven, and he stood in front of the leaders, and the people, and he smashed it on the ground, saying, ultimately, that was what was going to happen to the people of Israel.

The fourth part of the covenantal message is that the prophets also promised that after this judgment has taken place if there's no repentance, there's going to be judgment. But after this judgment has taken place, there will ultimately be restoration. The message of the prophets was both judgment and salvation.

We're going to see that in every book that we study. There is judgment and there is salvation. Because even though God was ultimately going to judge his people for their covenant unfaithfulness, God would ultimately restore them.

Remember, God had made covenant promises. God had promised to bless the people of Abraham. God had promised to give them a land.

God was not going to abandon those promises. God had made a promise to David: I'm going to ultimately establish your kingdom and your throne. Your sons will rule forever.

God has not abandoned those promises. And the Lord does not abandon the people of Israel or the covenant that he's made with them. And so, in all of the prophets, there is going to be judgment and salvation.

We are going to study the individual books of the minor prophets, but I hope in the early stages here, we can help you to understand better what the ministry of the prophets were about. They were called by God. They were spokesmen for God.

They were messengers of the covenant. And in that message, they said four important things. You have sinned. You've broken the covenant.

If there is no, you are to repent, you're to change your ways. If there is no repentance, there is going to be judgment. But finally, after the judgment is over, there will be restoration.

We're going to see those details again and again and again, as we work our way through the Book of the 12.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Minor Prophets. This is lecture 1, The Ministry and Message of the Prophets.