

Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 5, Amos, The Assyrian Crisis as Its Background

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Minor Prophets. This is lecture 5 on Amos, the Assyrian Crisis as Its Background.

We are in session five of our study of the Minor Prophets, and we've set the stage with the introductory materials.

Now, we're going to begin studying the individual books of the Minor Prophets. We're going to begin with the book of Amos. I want to begin just by explaining why we're going to start with Amos.

In our last couple of lessons, we talked about the Book of the 12 how there is a literary unity in these twelve books, and the fact that this was recognized by the Jews two hundred years before the time of Christ at least. But as we look at the individual books, rather than following the canonical order, we're going to follow essentially a chronological order. You'll remember that the books of the twelve are essentially arranged in a chronological way.

All of the books that have historical notations and superscriptions follow a basic order and progression where we move from the Assyrian period to the Babylonian period to the post-exilic period. But there are also some thematic arrangements. There may be reasons why the book of Hosea is put at the front to introduce the theme of repentance and apostasy and all of those things.

Chronologically, the first of these prophets to minister in the northern kingdom of Israel was the prophet Amos. We're going to begin there as well. So that's where we're going to begin our study.

In many ways, Amos is a prototypical prophet. So I think it's a good place for us to get an orientation and an understanding in what these prophets are about and what their message was to the people of Israel. Remember, as we go through the book of the twelve, there are a group of Assyrian prophets in the eighth century who are preaching to the people of Israel in the north, Judah in the south, about this Assyrian crisis.

The prophets in the north are going to include Amos and Hosea. Jonah is also a prophet in the northern kingdom and he's going to end up preaching in the city of Nineveh itself. Micah and Isaiah are the eighth-century prophets in the south preaching in the kingdom of Judah.

Then in the Book of the 12, we have a group of prophets that deal with the Babylonian crisis. Then, the last four of the prophets are going to be people that God sent to the post-exilic community to preach and teach. So what I'd like to do is we begin with Amos, sort of the chronological beginning of the ministry of the minor prophets, to talk about the Assyrian crisis and why that was a critical time in Israel's history and what was going on, why God sent these prophets and what their mission and their purpose was.

God raised up the classical prophets in the eighth century because there was a national crisis that was facing Israel. All the way back during the time of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 18, verse 5, 18-15, God said to Moses that he was going to raise up a prophet for the people of Israel. We looked at that verse in our introductory video, and we saw that what's going on there is that God promises that he will raise up a succession of prophets for the people of Israel to announce to them, to proclaim to them the word of God, to essentially carry out for Israel the same role that Moses had done for the people in their formative stages.

In the beginning days of the office of prophets like Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha are primarily going to minister to the kings. But in the eighth century, the ministry of the prophets, and the reason that we have the rise of these writing prophets whose messages are recorded in the Hebrew canon, is that now there is a national crisis. They are preaching not just to the kings.

They are not just the king-makers in Israel. They are preaching to the people and they're calling them to repentance before this terrible national crisis comes. The thing that's looming on the horizon as Amos carries out his ministry is that the nation of Assyria is becoming a powerful empire.

They're looking to the West to expand this empire and that's going to include Israel and Judah and all of the nations of Syria, Palestine. Before we come to the eighth century, it's important to understand that Israel had a prior history with Assyria that extended back into the ninth century. I want to mention just a couple of events.

In 853 BC, we know that King Ahab and a coalition of kings from Syria, Palestine had fought the Assyrian army and basically fought them to a standstill in the Battle of Qarqar. Already at that point, Assyria is looking to the West and the Assyrian kings who engaged in this battle claim a great victory. But the reality is that they did not go further into Syria, Palestine.

The likelihood is that Ahab and these other kings from Syria, Palestine, this coalition, they were able to withstand the Assyrians at this point and to prevent Israel being the target of further Assyrian aggression. The interesting thing about the book of Kings is that Ahab is remembered there as the worst king that Israel had. He married

Jezebel, this wicked woman who promoted Baal worship in the northern kingdom of Israel.

So, the book of Kings doesn't even mention this significant accomplishment at Qarqar, likely because the writer of Kings doesn't want to give him credit for anything. The focus in Kings is more theological than simply historical. So Ahab, this great military accomplishment withstanding the Assyrian army is not even mentioned there.

It's not even remembered, but it is noted in the Assyrian inscriptions and in the Assyrian records. So we know that in 853, Ahab brought chariots and a significant number of soldiers to this battle, and he helped this coalition of kings from Syria and Palestine to withstand the Assyrians. However, 12 years later in 841 BC, we know that Ahab's successor Jehu is forced to pay tribute and to submit to the Assyrian king Shalmaneser.

One of the more interesting archaeological finds outside the Bible in the Black Obelisk is a picture of King Jehu bowing before the Assyrian king and an inscription about him bringing this tribute to the Assyrians. At this point, what's beginning to happen because of the wickedness and the apostasy and the sin and the rebellion of both the kings of Israel and the people of Israel, the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28 are already beginning to come into effect. God was using the Assyrians to punish his disobedient people.

At this point, I think God is firing a shot across the bow of his people, warning them and reminding them of the need to repent and to make things right with him. So that's the history as we go back into the previous century, into the ninth century. The interesting thing is that after punishing them, God had also, following the time of Ahab and Jehu, God had shown incredible mercy and compassion to the people of Israel because he had given them a reprieve from this international domination from the imperial designs of the Assyrians and had given them a final opportunity, I believe, to change their course, to change their ways, and to be fully blessed in the way that he had designed for them at the beginning.

The kingdom of Assyria went into a period of extended decline. For about 50 or 75 years, the kingdom of Assyria was dealing with its own internal problems. There were financial problems.

There were incursions from other nations closer to Assyria. The Assyrians, the Assyrian kings, and the Assyrian armies had to deal with things closer to home. God had raised up a king in the northern kingdom of Israel who had the longest and most successful reign of any of these kings.

His name was Jeroboam II. We read in 2 Kings chapter 14 that Jeroboam had actually been able to extend Israel's borders beyond anything that they had ever experienced during the time of the divided monarchy. For a number of years, Israel had also been engaged in a conflict with their nearer neighbor, the Arameans or the Syrians.

Jeroboam had extended the boundaries and the borders of Israel. The prophet Jonah, who we're going to also study later in this course, the prophet Jonah was the prophet who announced to Jeroboam that God was going to allow him to expand Israel's borders. We understand from reading 2 Kings 14 that the reason for this blessing that God gave to Israel was not that there had been a national revival.

It was not that the people of Israel had all of a sudden done away with their apostasy and were following the Lord. It was simply the fact that God was showing mercy and grace to his people. Jeroboam II had a reign that lasted for over 40 years.

It was not because Jeroboam II was a godly king. In fact, we would think again in Kings that there would be a much more extended report about this king in light of the fact that he was probably Israel's most successful and effective king, the king who led Israel to its greatest period of prosperity. But all that 2 Kings 14 is going to mention to us about him, we get a handful of verses.

It says in 2 Kings 14, verse 24, he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not depart from all of the sins of Jeroboam I, the son of Naboth. So, what's important in Kings, again, just like with Ahab, is not his political accomplishments, not the prosperity that Israel enjoyed during this time.

It's simply the fact that he did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. All of the kings of Israel, that statement, they continued in the sins of their father Jeroboam is going to be true of them. So, the fact that God restored the borders of Israel, the fact that God gave them a reprieve temporarily from the Assyrians, it was not because of Israel's righteousness.

It was because of God's mercy and God's grace. We've talked a good deal about the covenant curses already, Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, but God did not deal with his people simply according to a strict principle of retribution. He's not just a God who says, you do this. I'll bless you.

God incredibly shows mercy to both the Northern kingdom and the Southern kingdom in spite of hundreds of years of disobedience and rebellion against him. So the Lord is going to show mercy to the people of Israel. God did the same thing for the Southern kingdom of Judah because it's often going to tell us in Kings, in spite of the wickedness of the Davidic king, God left a lamp for David because God had made a covenant promise that he was going to establish David's throne and David's sons would reign forever.

So, during the time of Jeroboam the second, second Kings chapter 14, verse 26 is going to say this, and notice the emphasis and notice the statement that's made here about the grace and the mercy of God. It says there, the Lord saw the affliction of Israel and saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter. Okay.

The initial impact of the Assyrian incursion on Syria-Palestine has already taken place. The conflict that the Israelites have had with the Syrians for a long period of time, the defeat, the loss of territory, and the difficult living conditions that happened as a result of that. The Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter.

For there was none left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. So, at this point, when there was no way that Israel could dig itself out of this problem, God showed mercy to Israel. Verse 27, but the Lord had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven.

So, he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, the son of Joash. So, I think it's important for us to remember that before the Assyrian crisis in the eighth century, we have already had another example of the grace and the mercy of God. God gave the people a reprieve during the time of Jeroboam II and Israel enjoyed this incredible time of prosperity and blessing and wealth, unlike anything that they had experienced in their previous history.

Down in the south, in the southern kingdom of Judah, God had also blessed that kingdom. In the early to middle part of the eighth century, there was a king in Judah, Uzziah, who had a long and successful reign. Judah has enjoyed a time of great prosperity.

It's in the year that Uzziah dies that we learn in the book of Isaiah that God calls Isaiah to his ministry because the people have experienced the reign of this long and successful king. They've looked to him to be their benefactor. And when he dies, the kingdom of Judah also needs a reminder, the Lord is your king.

He's given you this time of blessing, but you've turned away from him. What's going to happen in the near future? So, Israel enjoyed great prosperity before the rise of the classical prophets in the eighth century. Now, did that prosperity and all of the blessings, did the extension of Israel's boundaries and borders, did the positive prophecy that Jonah had given to the people, and ultimately turn them back to God? We think in light of what God did for them, in light of the blessing, the fact that it was undeserved, did that lead the people to repentance? And I think we know the human heart well enough to know that at various times in the Old Testament, whenever Israel experienced great prosperity, instead of leading them to God and leading them to realize that God has blessed us, God has given us this wonderful land, God has fulfilled his promises to us in spite of the fact that we didn't deserve it.

Instead of producing gratitude, what it caused the people of Israel to do was to put God on the back burner of their lives, to forget him, to put their trust in their kings and in their human leaders instead of the Lord. And instead of God being the focus of their lives, their wealth, their prosperity, their comfort, all of those things became the focus. The book of Deuteronomy warned the people of Israel, and Moses very wisely tells the people this before they go into the land, be careful when you go into the land, and you enjoy all the blessings of the land, you enjoy the houses that God has provided for you, the cities that God has given to you.

You're in this place where it's a land of milk and honey. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord. And I think in our own lives, we realize that whenever we have all that we need, whenever we're comfortable, there's a tendency to realize, or there's a tendency to forget that we are ultimately dependent upon God for everything.

And instead of that blessing ultimately leading us to follow God and serve him and be grateful for all that he's given us, there's a tendency to become ungrateful. And there's a tendency to focus on the wealth or the possessions that we have rather than putting God first in our lives. And I think the material prosperity that we have enjoyed as Americans and the prosperity of just people in general in the West has often been something that's led us away from God.

That's what happened in ancient Israel as well. And so, I want you to think about the difficulty of the ministry of a prophet like Amos. Israel is coming off of this time, they're at the end of this period in their history where they have enjoyed this great prosperity.

Down in Judah, there has been a similar experience of blessing and prosperity under the reign of Uzziah. How difficult was it for a prophet like Amos or a prophet like Isaiah or Micah in the South? How difficult was it for them to say, this prosperity that you've enjoyed, it's about to come to an end. And what you don't realize is that while you're enjoying this good time and this time, when it's been a time of national blessing and prosperity, what you don't understand is that disaster is looming right around the corner.

And God is about to raise up in the middle of the eighth century after the reign of Jeroboam and every king that comes after Jeroboam. His dynasty is going to end shortly after that time. And then every king that comes after him is going to be weak and ineffective, and they're ultimately going to be dominated by the Assyrians.

How difficult was it as a prophet, Amos, to step onto the scene and convince the people of the judgment that was about to come? I can imagine as the people have experienced this time of unprecedented prosperity, they would have been saying, Amos, what are you talking about? Why are you such an alarmist? We've enjoyed

this great time of national blessing. Why would God now punish us? But that was the job of the classical prophets. In the urgency of the message, the intensity of the message, sometimes the anger of the message, the extreme rhetoric, the whitewater of God's wrath that we talked about earlier.

The reason for that is that the prophets have to wake up the people that have experienced this time of incredible blessing. And now it's about time for judgment to come. Paul Gilchrist says this.

He says that Israel's apostasy was the catalyst of Assyrian imperialism. We could look at all of the reasons, both politically and militarily, why the Assyrians became a dominant empire in the middle of the eighth century. But the theological reason, the theological explanation, what the Old Testament tells us about this, is that God is going to raise up this great empire.

God is going to raise up the Assyrian kings with their imperialistic designs and desires because God is ultimately going to use this nation. God is going to use these people to punish Israel and to punish Judah for their covenant unfaithfulness. In the year 745, this is a significant year in all of this discussion.

In the year 745, a new energetic ruler arises in Assyria and his name is Tiglath-Pileser III. Tiglath-Pileser III is going to become the founder of the Neo-Assyrian empire that lasted for 125 years. Tiglath-Pileser was a great leader.

He was an energetic king. He was an effective administrator. One of the things about the Assyrians was not just the effectiveness and the power and the might of their army, but also the administrative skill with which the Assyrian leaders used that army.

God is going to use this new energetic ruler and the empire that he establishes to ultimately bring about Israel's punishment, Israel's exile in the eighth century BC. Prophet Isaiah is going to talk about this in Isaiah chapter 10. He's going to talk about how God uses the Assyrian empire as his instrument of judgment on the people of Israel.

I'd like to take a look at that passage. Isaiah chapter 10, verse 5, the Lord says, Ah Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff in their hands is my fury. So, the Lord says, the Assyrian army is not just a powerful military machine that Tiglath-Pileser III has built.

The Assyrian army is ultimately my instrument to bring about my punishment. So Tiglath-Pileser establishes the Neo-Assyrian empire. He begins to look to the West again, as the Assyrian kings did in the ninth century.

The internal problems have been dealt with. Assyria is strong, it's powerful, it's mighty again. He's going to begin to move his armies and he's going to begin to carry out these campaigns in Syria-Palestine.

The Lord says, Tiglath-Pileser may have his own designs and his own intentions. He's not just a military leader. He's not just a great king.

He is ultimately my instrument because I am sovereign, even over this pagan king and even over these pagan armies. I think one of the benefits for us reading the Old Testament prophets today is that we are reminded of the sovereignty of the God of Israel over all of the things that are going on in our world today. The one who ultimately determines what happens in our world today is not our political leaders.

We often talk about the President of the United States being the most powerful man on earth, but compared to God, ultimately his power is nothing. God uses and controls and moves the kings of the earth to do his will and to do his designs. In a sense, God is presiding over this great chessboard.

Human rulers and human leaders and governments and armies and kingdoms are ultimately responsible to God and answerable to God for the things that they do, for the wickedness that they commit, and for the evils that they are responsible for. But God, even in the midst of their evil and their sin and their rebellion, and even sometimes as nations and kingdoms shake their fist in God's face, God is still accomplishing his purposes. I'm reminded as I read the prophets that God was in control of what was going on in the world in the eighth century BC.

When we read our newspapers today, we should be reminded that God is in control of what's happening in the 21st century in our world. The things that are going on in the Middle East, God knows about that. God is in control of that.

The things that are happening in our country and all the crises, the moral crisis, the economic crisis, God is in control of that. We may pretend that our government or that our armies, those are the ultimate answers. Even those individuals, even that power is ultimately under the control of God.

The prophet Isaiah is going to say, Assyria, yeah, they're a powerful nation, they're a powerful empire, but they are ultimately simply a rod that I am using in my hand to do my will and to accomplish my purposes. The prophet Jeremiah, during the time of the Babylonian crisis, is going to come along and say essentially the same thing about Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. In Jeremiah chapter 27 and in Jeremiah 29, the prophet Jeremiah is going to say, Nebuchadnezzar is my servant.

That doesn't mean that Nebuchadnezzar knew the Lord. That doesn't mean that Nebuchadnezzar had a relationship with God. That didn't mean that God approved of

all of the things that the Babylonian government and army did because, ultimately, they were going to be judged and held accountable for that.

But ultimately, in a final sense, Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant because he was carrying out God's purpose and God's intentions. Jeremiah will say in Jeremiah chapter 50 that Nebuchadnezzar is the hammer. The Babylonian army is the hammer that God is using to punish the peoples of the earth.

It's very similar to what Isaiah says here when he says that Assyria is the rod of my anger and the staff in my hand. Jeremiah will also talk about the Lord is the warrior who ultimately leads the armies of Babylon against Jerusalem. Jeremiah chapter 21.

And in Jeremiah 27, God has given into Nebuchadnezzar's hands control of the kingdoms of the world. He's even given Nebuchadnezzar control over the animals that are on the earth. And the rhetoric of Jeremiah essentially portrays Nebuchadnezzar as a new Adam.

God uses this pagan king to accomplish his purposes. But Jeremiah is also going to say that after God has used Babylon to punish the nations of the earth, after all the nations that Nebuchadnezzar defeats and conquers and destroys, after they drink the cup of God's fury, there is also going to be a time when the Babylonians drink the cup of God's wrath and the cup of God's fury. They are not independent of God.

As the Israelites and as the people of Judah were going through these times of crisis, there was always the tendency to think, are the gods of Assyria in the eighth century greater than the gods of Israel? How could the Assyrians defeat us if the Lord God, who is the ultimate sovereign king, how could the Lord allow us to be defeated by these armies? Does this mean that the armies of Assyria are greater than the armies of Yahweh? During the sixth century and the seventh century, as the Babylonians begin to encroach on Judah, are the gods of Babylon greater than the gods of Judah? Is that why we've been defeated? The Old Testament prophets want to give the people a theological understanding of this. God is not powerless in the midst of this. God is actually accomplishing his sovereign purposes.

The prophet Isaiah in the second half of the book of Isaiah is also going to say about the Persian king Cyrus, that God is going to raise up at the end of this process to ultimately replace the Babylonians. He's going to say, Cyrus is my shepherd. It's even going to say, Cyrus is my anointed one, the Hebrew word Mesiach, the predecessor to our word Messiah.

Cyrus is my shepherd and Messiah. Again, not because Cyrus was a fear of the God of Israel, not because Cyrus is a monotheist. We know from his inscriptions and things that he was not.

Not because Cyrus recognizes the Lord as the one true God, but because God will use Cyrus and the Persians in the same way that he used Tiglath-Pileser and the Assyrians in the same way that he used Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. God is in control of this whole process. In the eighth century, Israel and Judah are about to enter into this time of just national disaster, where they're in the vice grip of these imperial powers.

The prophets wanted them to know that God was sovereign and God was in control of that. As we teach the prophets and as we preach the prophets to people today, I think sometimes it's very important for us just to remind people that God is in control of the international scene. God knows all about international terrorism and God, even at times, will use wicked people and wicked nations to accomplish his purposes.

As this Assyrian crisis began in the eighth century, the prophets are giving the people this theo-political understanding. The prophet Isaiah goes on to say, after verse five, Assyria is the rod of my anger, the staff in their hands is my fury, against a godless nation I send him. Isaiah even talks about Israel and Judah being a godless nation.

Other places Isaiah will compare them to Sodom and Gomorrah. This is why God is going to send the Assyrian army against them. But the problem was that the Assyrian army, Tiglath-Pileser, Nebuchadnezzar, later on, did not necessarily recognize that they were accomplishing God's purposes.

Instead of Tiglath-Pileser coming to Israel because God commanded him to do it, or instead of Nebuchadnezzar coming to Judah because he knew he was doing God's will, ultimately, these kings were carrying out their own imperialistic desires and designs. The Assyrians, rather than doing a holy work, were actually committing terrible atrocities and violence as they moved to the West and began to subjugate people like Israel and Judah. The prophet Isaiah acknowledges that.

He says this about the Assyrian king in this passage in Isaiah chapter 10, Isaiah 10.7, but the king of Assyria does not so intend. In other words, he doesn't intend to come and do God's will. His heart does not so think, but it is in his heart to destroy and to cut off nations, not a few.

And the Assyrian king is going to look at Israel and Judah and he's going to say, are these kingdoms and are these nations any different from the other nations that I've conquered? Are the idols and the images of Samaria and Judah any greater than the idols and the images and the gods of these other pagan peoples? I'm going to conquer them just like I conquered all of the other people. When the city of Jerusalem is later under siege in the southern kingdom, Sennacherib, the Assyrian king is going to come to the people of Judah and say, don't listen to Hezekiah or don't listen to your leaders that are telling you your God is going to deliver you. Your

God is no more effective or going to be no more effective in delivering you than all of the gods of these other people.

And so, because of the blasphemy of these Assyrian kings, because they're part of these human rulers that shake their fist in God's face and say, we will do whatever we want, because they come ultimately to accomplish their own imperialistic desires and because they do this in a violent and a horrible way, God says, I'm going to use them to accomplish my purpose. But I'm also going to hold them accountable for the violence and their wickedness. And so, God uses these kings.

He's presiding over the chessboard, but God does not participate in the moral evil that Tiglath-Pileser, Sennacherib, and all of these Assyrian kings carry out. One of the things that we know about the Assyrian army and about the Assyrian people was that it was an empire that, in many ways, was built upon violence, bloodshed, and intimidation. As Tiglath-Pileser's armies began to spread out and he established his empire, one of the ways that they did this was by intimidating the people around them with their military might and violence.

As we look at the Assyrian inscriptions, as we look at Assyrian records, as we look at Assyrian art, we see a focus on violence, bloodshed, and military conquest. For example, king Sennacherib, who is the king who is going to surround the city of Jerusalem in 701 BC, says this, talking about his enemies and his military conquest; like fat steers, I speedily cut them down and defended them. I cut their throats like lambs.

I cut off their lives as one cuts a string. And so, you get an idea of the violence that was glamorized by these Assyrian kings. Ashurbanipal from the seventh century is going to say this in one of his inscriptions, with their blood, I dyed the mountain red like wool and the rest of them, the ravines and the torrents of the mountains, swallowed.

I carried off captives and possessions from them. I cut off the heads of their fighters and built therewith a tower before their city. I burnt their adolescent boys and girls.

And so as we think about throughout history, the horrors of war and just how much we hate that and how much we're opposed to that, the Assyrians used that as part of their strategy to ultimately intimidate the smaller nations like Israel and Judah into subjection. If we look at Assyrian art, we see pictures, and we see images of severed heads being stacked up outside of city walls. We see bodies being dismembered.

We see pictures of people being impaled on sticks after cities have been conquered. That's what happens to the Jews, both in Israel and in Judah, as they're defeated by the Assyrians. There's one particular piece of Assyrian art that shows various acts of Assyrian atrocities.

In one panel, we see an Assyrian soldier clubbing an Elamite prisoner of war to death. In another place, we see Assyrian soldiers flaying an Elamite prisoner of war, cutting his skin off and peeling it down while he's still alive as a form of torture. Assyrian soldiers are reaching into the mouth of another prisoner and pulling out his tongue.

And so, there is this tendency, and I think this was true of all armies in the ancient Near East. There are no Geneva Conventions of warfare, but it is something that is particularly emphasized as part of the Assyrian rhetoric. When Sennacherib captured the city of Lachish in Judah, he went back to his palace. He decorated the walls with pictures of the conquest of Lachish because this was one of the more significant military accomplishments of his career.

And so it's interesting to think about as Amos, and as these prophets in the eighth century begin their ministry, God is taking a brutal, violent, in many ways, despicable people who have their own designs on these people, who carry out violence, who do all of these horrible things. God is using them as his instrument of judgment on his unrighteous people. We read in Galatians, the principle that whatever a man sows, that will he also reap.

And I think if we want one of the more effective images of reaping and sowing in all of the Bible, we can think about what happened to Israel and Judah in the eighth century. They have sown hundreds of years of disobedience and unfaithfulness to God. They are going to reap the consequences of that sin.

The prophet Hosea is going to say, you have sown the wind, and Israel had done that by their wickedness, by their military strategies, by their political involvement in alliances. You will reap the whirlwind. And that whirlwind was going to be the Assyrian army. They were going to come upon Israel and carry out God's punishment.

We understand the holiness of God, God's hatred of sin, the seriousness of sin and its consequences when we look at what is going to happen to Israel and Judah in the eighth century as a result of their disobedience. So Tiglath-Pileser is going to extend his empire. His armies are going to move to the west and they are going to bring both Israel and Judah under their authority and under their influence.

By the year 722-721, the northern kingdom of Israel in that particular year is going to fall to the Assyrians. The northern capital of Samaria fell to the Assyrian kings. And at that time, the northern kingdom is going to go into captivity.

The ten northern tribes are going to be lost and Assyria is going to become an Assyrian province. The southern kingdom of Judah is going to survive this crisis. But the southern kingdom of Judah under Ahaz also becomes a vassal of the Assyrians.

The Assyrians moved south at the end of the eighth century; the Assyrian records say that they captured 46 different cities in Judah and trapped the king of Judah, Hezekiah, like a bird in a cage. But ultimately because of the faith of Hezekiah, because he turns to God, Judah is going to be spared for another 140 years. But they're also going to experience the effects of the Assyrian army and the Assyrian invasion.

The job of prophets like Amos and Hosea is to wake the people up to this crisis. Amos comes on the scene in 760 to 750 BC. It's the end of the time of the reign of Jeroboam II.

There's been this great prosperity. It's the job of Amos to say that time is coming to an end, and now God is going to begin to judge his people. And I think as we look at the specific circumstances of Amos's ministry and the timing of this, there are three or four things that are significant about Amos's involvement at this particular point in Israel's history.

I want to begin just by reading the first two verses of the book of Amos and just introduce the historical setting and background. Where does Amos fit in this, in the midst of this Assyrian crisis? And Amos 1:1-2 says, the words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah, the king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, the son of Joash, the king of Israel, and it says, two years before the earthquake. Okay.

So, there are a couple of things about the timing of Amos's ministry in the midst of this larger Assyrian crisis that are significant. As I said, the time of Amos's ministry is generally estimated to be somewhere in the years 760 to 750 BC. What that means is that he is really at the very beginning of these prophets who are going to start warning the people that judgment is on its way.

It's still 30 or 40 years away as Amos is carrying out his ministry. And so it's going to be very difficult for people who have experienced all of this blessing and prosperity to really take his message seriously. Imagine if you're Amos trying to convince these people. That's the difficulty that he has in his ministry.

The reason that Amos is often going to make this judgment sound as awful as it possibly is, is that there's a hope that ultimately the seriousness will wake these people up. The second thing is, is that the seriousness of Amos's ministry and message at this particular time in Israel's history is reflected in the circumstances of his calling. Okay.

We might not have noticed this as we were going through the first verse, but it says, the words of Amos, who was among the shepherds in Tekoa. Tekoa was a town or a village in the southern kingdom of Judah. And God actually calls Amos to leave the southern kingdom of Judah and preach this message in the northern kingdom of Israel.

Okay. This message is serious enough that Amos is going to leave his home in Judah and he's going to go and proclaim this message in the northern kingdom of Israel. It may say something to us about the status of the prophets in the northern kingdom as well.

If God's going to find a faithful prophet to preach this message, he's going to have to call someone from the southern kingdom to do that. And so Amos is going to cross the border between the south and the north, and as an outsider and as a foreigner and as part of the hated people to the south, Amos is going to take his message to the north and preach there. God is also going to call Amos out of a vocation and out of a situation in life that has nothing to do with being a prophet.

We see something else about the calling of Amos and a further statement about this in the statement that Amos makes in Amos chapter 7, verses 14 and 15. Ultimately, one of the priests in the north, Amaziah, after Amos preached this message of judgment, and we don't know exactly how long his ministry lasted. It may have been a short time, it may have been several years, but eventually, Amaziah is going to say, stop preaching to us.

Go back home, go back to Judah, and stop speaking against the king's sanctuary. We don't want to hear your message of judgment anymore. And Amos is going to say, well, when God called me, when God said, I'm only here because God called me and I was no prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs.

But the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, go and prophesy to my people Israel. So, God called Amos out of a very unique set of circumstances. Amos was not a prophet.

And the statement that Amos makes when he says I was no prophet nor a prophet's son that's been interpreted in several different ways. Some people have taken that as a question. Was I not a prophet or a prophet's son? Some have seen Amos distinguishing between the fact that he was a seer, the type of prophet that they had in Judah, rather than a prophet, who was one of the spokesmen in the northern kingdom.

Other people have taken Amos to say, I was not a cultic prophet or a state prophet or an official prophet. But probably the most natural understanding of this is that I was not, by calling a prophet of God, until the time that God interposed and God intervened in my life and said, I want you to go to the northern kingdom of Israel. And at that point, Amos' vocation became one as a prophet and a spokesman for God.

So, out of that unique circumstance where Amos is not a prophet, he is a herdsman. He is a dresser of sycamores. He's a farmer.

And God sends him away from that. The urgency of this message is that the Lord just picks him up and moves him. And as a seminary professor, I have either been a student, or I've been a teacher that God has called from all kinds of vocations, politics, athletics, the practice of the law, and business.

And God has said to people, I want you to go, and I want you to preach for man. And people respond to that call. That's what Amos did.

But the circumstances of Amos' calling reflect the seriousness of the message that he's been called to preach by God. I think there's one other thing about the calling of Amos that we need to correct. When we talk about Amos being a herdsman and a dresser of sycamores, and he was involved in farming and those kinds of things, I often hear people describe Amos as a country farmer or a country preacher and that God called this country preacher to go to the northern kingdom.

Actually, if we look at the descriptions of Amos, the text probably suggests something more. The word that is used to describe Amos as a shepherd in Amos chapter one, verse one, is not the normal Hebrew word for shepherd. Instead, it's the word *noqad*.

And that word *noqad* is used in 2 Kings chapter three, verse four, I believe it's the only other place where it's used, to describe Mesha, the king of the Moabites, saying that he was a herdsman. And so, the suggestion of that word is that Amos is not just a poor country preacher, an unlearned person, but Amos is a landowner with extensive land holdings and an extensive number of livestock. He is a herdsman and an owner of herds on par with a king.

And in the midst of his busy life, in the midst of all of this wealth, God's calling on his life is serious enough that God says, I want you to go and proclaim to the northern kingdom. And I think even as Amos conveyed to those people the circumstances of his calling, and it was a way of God showing them the seriousness of the message that Amos had come to proclaim to them. Unfortunately, as Amos preaches, Amaziah ultimately reflects the response of the people.

We don't want to hear this. Go away from us. The fourth thing about Amos's calling and the timing of this and how it fits in the Assyrian crisis is what we see in Amos chapter one, verse one, what also happens in the aftermath of Amos's ministry.

And remember that it tells us there in verse one that he preached in the days of Uzziah, the king of Judah, in the days of Jeroboam, both of these prosperous and wealthy kings, but he preached two years before the time of the earthquake. I believe that the specific purpose, design, and intent of Amos's ministry was to preach to the people about the judgment that was coming, and God sent them a warning after Amos had preached to them. Two years later, there was an earthquake that was experienced in Israel and Judah.

And it was a reminder; it was a wake-up call. It was another shot across the bow by God on the people of Israel to remind them that judgment was coming. And I think this incidental detail is mentioned in verse one to say that this was the authentication of Amos's warnings and messages of judgment.

God sent this earthquake as another way of showing his people that greater judgment was on the way. Archaeologists have confirmed for us that the earthquake that Amos talks about actually took place. In the city of Hazor in the northern part of Israel, there has been an archaeological discovery in Stratus 6 of damage to the walls that occurred in the city of Hazor in the 8th century BC that confirms for us the seriousness of this earthquake.

God was serious about what was going to happen. God was warning his people about what was going to take place in the future. Later on in the post-exilic prophets, toward the end of the minor prophets, we have this statement in Zechariah chapter 14, verse 5. Zechariah 14.5 says, You shall flee to the valley of my mountains, talking about the future judgment of the day of the Lord, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal.

And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, the king of Judah. And so that earthquake was significant enough that in the post-exilic period, after all the things that had occurred in Israel and Judah, they still remembered this. Amos' message was a warning of the judgment that was going to come.

It was a preparation for the Assyrian crisis. And this earthquake was an authentication that the people of God needed to take this message seriously. God calls people to minister at times in very difficult circumstances.

God called Amos to prepare the people for judgment. And God has called us to proclaim both his judgment and salvation. And he calls us to proclaim that even when that message is not popular, even when it's not something that people want to hear.

And Amos' faithfulness to his calling, I think is a reminder to us that God wants us to do the same and God will reward us if we faithfully proclaim his word.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Minor Prophets. This is lecture 5 on Amos, the Assyrian Crisis as Its Background.