

Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 2, The Ministry and Message of the Prophets, Part 2

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Minor Prophets. This is lecture 2, The Ministry and Message of the Prophets, Part 2.

Our second session is going to continue introducing the message of the prophets.

We are focusing, in this study, on the Book of the Twelve or the Minor Prophets. One of the things I want to encourage you is that we should not be afraid of studying the Minor Prophets. This is not something that you have to be a professional to do.

As pastors and teachers, we should not fear teaching these books. Hopefully, some of the things that we're covering just about their basic ministry and message will give us kind of a basic understanding that will help us with that. I want to continue just helping us to focus on the covenantal aspect of the ministry and the message of the prophets.

Then in this lesson, particularly, to clear up some misunderstandings or misconceptions of the prophets that I think have limited our use of them in the churches. First of all, as a way of review, remember that the prophets are messengers of the covenants. God made a series of covenants in the Old Testament.

The Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic, and the New Covenants. The prophets' messages as messengers of God's covenant are based on those specific arrangements that God has made with different individuals. The message of the prophets, the four parts of that from grasping God's word, you have sinned and you have broken the covenant.

You need to repent. The word repentance in the Old Testament shoves to turn around. If there is no repentance, the prophets warn there is going to be a judgment and that judgment is primarily going to take the form of exile.

And then fourth, based on the promises of the covenant and God's abiding commitments to the promises that he's made, there will be a restoration. I want to continue looking at the covenantal aspect of the message of the prophets. One of the roles that the prophets are given and one of the ways that they describe their ministry is that they will refer to themselves as the watchmen of God.

That's one of the terms that's going to be used. A watchman in ancient Israel or in the ancient world, we get a picture of this in 2 Samuel chapter 18, were men that would stand on the tops of city walls and they would warn the people living in that

town and living in that city that an enemy was approaching. They would announce the arrival of different visitors or messengers.

So that's the role of the prophets. God raises the classical prophets, the writing prophets from the eighth century forward up as a way of warning the people of the judgments that are coming. There's going to be judgment through the Assyrian crisis.

There's a series of prophets that God raises up to warn the people about that. There's going to be judgment in the Babylonian crisis. The Babylonians are coming.

They're on their way. There are prophets that come and warn the people of Judah about that. In the post-exilic period, even though they're back in the land, there is still the possibility of experiencing more judgment.

Ultimately, the people are going to have to turn back to God before they experience the full restoration. The prophets are like these men who stood on the wall and announced the arrival of an impending army or an impending enemy. Sometimes, a watchman would stand in a vineyard, in a hut, or in a shelter, and they would watch over that vineyard for the owner.

That was part of the role of the prophets in Israel as well. In Ezekiel 33, there is a reflection on Ezekiel's role as a prophetic watchman. Here's what the beginning of verse 1 says, and if we're messengers of God, if we're spokesmen for God, this passage in some way applies to all of us.

The prophets had an obligation to warn the people of the judgment that was coming. If they fulfilled that obligation and the people chose not to listen, the responsibility for the judgment and the bloodshed that would come upon them would be on the people for rejecting the message. However, if a prophet was called by God to warn the people, God revealed to him what was in the near future, and the prophet did not have the courage or the conviction to preach the message that God had given to him, then ultimately the prophet himself would also be held responsible for the judgment that came upon the people.

There are a number of places in the Old Testament prophets that refer to these prophets as watchmen. The reality is that they were warning about the judgments that God was bringing, but the people did not listen to those warnings. Jeremiah 6, verse 17 says, The trumpet has been blown.

There's a crisis coming. That trumpet is a warning sign, but the people have not listened and they have not obeyed. Now, specifically when the prophets talk about judgment in light of the fact that it's based on the covenant, the judgments that are going to be announced by the prophets are specifically, in many ways, the judgments

and the curses that are announced in the covenant curses that Moses laid out in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

Again, reviewing what we said in the first session, those curses involved curses in nature. There was going to be blight and mildew.

They would have a lack of rain. Their crops would not produce. This was an incredible land that God was bringing them to.

But if they did not obey God, then that land was going to be blighted and cursed. There were also going to be military curses, and they would become the tail of nations rather than the head. They would be subjected to military defeat.

They would become like Sodom and Gomorrah in the way that they were overthrown. Ultimately, the final warning that God gave to his people is that there would be a judgment of exile, and they would be removed from the land if they did not obey God. Deuteronomy pictures this as the people of God being actually taken back to Egypt.

We know from the prophets that they're going to be taken into exile to various places, to Assyria, to Babylon, to Egypt. But the prophets are not just warning them of a random series of judgments. The prophets are specifically invoking upon them the covenant curses that are laid out in Deuteronomy 28, Leviticus 26.

Now, when you go back and read those passages, the Lord sets in front of them, here are blessings that you will enjoy. Here are curses that you will experience if you disobey. Seek the Lord and live.

You can choose between life and death. The interesting thing in those passages is that the blessing section is often very short. I think in Deuteronomy 28, less than 10 or 12 verses.

The cursing part of this is the long part because God knows the inclination of the people's heart. He wants to warn them right up front of the seriousness of this and the likelihood and the reality is they're going to experience these curses because they have a long history of not following the Lord and doing what the Lord tells them. But we get an idea of the covenant curses that are going to come upon Israel in Isaiah chapter 1, verses 5 to 8. And remember, Isaiah is a prophet that God raised up during the Assyrian crisis.

And so, he pictures what it's like for the people as the Assyrian army invades and comes through the land. We read in external sources outside of the Old Testament that when the Assyrians came into the land of Judah, they captured 46 cities in Judah, and they trapped Hezekiah during the 8th century like a bird in a cage. Well, I

think that's the background to what Isaiah says in chapter 1, verses 5 to 8. Isaiah says, Why will you be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint.

From the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness in it but bruises and sores and raw wounds. They are not pressed out, bound up, or softened with oil. And so, the whole land is pictured here as this bloodied, bruised, battered individual who is sickened because of these injuries.

That's what the Assyrian army ultimately inflicted on the people of Israel. That's what Moses had warned about in Deuteronomy 28. You're going to be the tail rather than the head because you're going to be subjected to these enemies and all the things that they will do to you.

Isaiah goes on to say, your country lies desolate. Your cities are burned with fire. In your very presence, foreigners devour your land.

It is desolate as if overthrown by foreigners. And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. Why had those things happened? Because those were the specific covenant curses that God had promised to bring against the people of Israel.

Now, the minor prophets are going to do exactly the same thing. And as we look at the judgments that they talk about, we also understand these are exactly, we can line them up in an exact way with the covenant curses that are found in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. Now, I think one of the best examples of this is found in Amos chapter four, where Amos is preaching to the people.

Remember, Amos is also during this Assyrian crisis. He's warning them about judgment that's coming. But in the book of Amos, he also talks about judgment that has already come.

And the judgments that have already come, as he mentions them, they're not just a random list of natural disasters. They are specific things that God is going to do to the people of Israel back in the covenant curses, Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28, if they did not obey God. Listen to Amos chapter four, verse six.

I gave you cleanness of teeth in all of your cities and a lack of bread in all of your places. All right, cleanness of teeth is not dental hygiene. It's a lack of food.

And so, the Lord has cursed their crops. And then Amos says this, yet you did not return to me, declares the Lord. The Lord says, look, I've done these things.

I've brought these disasters on you as a way of getting your attention. There's more judgment to come if you don't change your ways. You haven't returned to me.

Why don't you wake up and understand what it is that I'm doing? Why are these disasters happening to you? Verse seven. I also withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest. I would send rain to one city, but I would not send it to another.

One field would have rain, and on the field which it did not rain, it would wither. So, two or three cities would wander around to another city to drink water and would not be satisfied. That was one of the things that Deuteronomy had talked about.

The Lord would turn the sky to bronze. And in the land of Israel, rain was always an issue. Getting enough rain and making sure that they had rain for the crops was always a problem.

And so, when the Lord withheld that in various places, that was a reminder to the people they had not lived up to their covenant responsibilities. But Amos says, yet you did not return to me. I gave you a lack of food.

That didn't get your attention. I gave you a lack of rain that affected your crops as well. That didn't get your attention.

Verse nine. I struck you with blight and mildew, your many gardens and your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees, the locusts devoured, yet you did not return to me. Other specific covenant curses are mentioned here.

The blighting, the disease of their crops so that it cannot produce and be the land flowing with milk and honey that God had promised. The invasion of locusts coming through the land. Specific curses that are laid out in Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28.

All of these are curses in nature. Verse 10. I sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt.

I killed your young men with the sword and carried away with your horses. And I made the stench of your camp go up into your nostrils, yet you did not return to me. And so now we're beginning to move to the curses that they experience as military curses.

They have been defeated by their enemies. They have experienced diseases that took their children away from them. Verse 11.

I overthrew some of you as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as brand plucked out of the burning, yet you did not return to me.

Deuteronomy, Leviticus again says, one of the curses that I will bring on you people if you do not obey God is I will overthrow you as I did Sodom and Gomorrah. The ultimate example of obedience and wickedness.

And so, God has sent a series of covenant curses. These, in a sense, have been preemptive strikes. What Amos is warning them about is the fact that there is a greater judgment coming, and the ultimate judgment, the ultimate covenant curse, is going to be the judgment of exile.

And so, we often have this misunderstanding of the prophets as if they are these ranting, raving fanatics who are simply angry about everything that's going on in their culture, in their society. Actually, they are doing the people a service because they are warning these people. If God's intention was simply to destroy them and wipe them out, God could have done that without sending his prophets.

The prophets are warning them as a way of trying to help them avoid the further disasters that are coming. And because of that, there's an urgency in their message. And one of the things as a pastor and as a teacher that I'm reminded of as I read the prophets, our message is urgent.

The message that we're telling people about God's kingdom and the gospel and calling people to repentance, it's a life and death message. And the prophets were urgent because their message was a life and death message. Whether the people lived or died depended on how they listened to this message.

I was a college student in 1979 in Florida, and I had the first opportunity to experience firsthand a hurricane. I was in Florida during the time of Hurricane David. Foolishly, having never seen this before, I decided that I wanted to go down to the beach and actually observe it firsthand.

I remember as we were going down before the storm hit, the day before we got there, there was a policeman stationed on the bridge going over the intercoastal waterway. And when we told him that we were going over to the beach, he emphatically, using some colorful metaphors, told us to get out of there. And he was wisely warning us about something.

He wasn't being polite. He wasn't being friendly at that particular point in time. He was urgently warning us of something.

And I think when we listen to the prophets and as they're talking about judgment, we should be reminded of that. They are speaking an urgent message. I was driving down the highway a few months ago on a trip, and the sound of the emergency broadcasting network came across.

And they were testing their tornado warning system. It sort of diminished my urgency about the message when I found out that it was a test. But if that had been a real message, it would have been imperative for me at that particular time to have taken action.

And so, the prophets are going to explain and they're going to warn of God's judgment using the most severe terms possible because they want the people to understand how serious this is. Brent Sandy, when he talks about the prophets in his book *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, talks about the prophet's message being like white water when we're rafting. It is an exaggerated message in the worst, most extreme terms possible.

They want us to see how horrible the judgment is going to be. And so, Jeremiah is going to say, as God brings judgment against his people, it is going to be like death climbing through the window. The prophet Joel talks about God's judgment.

And Joel, in the post-exilic period, after they've already been away in exile, is going to say, you've experienced this locust plague where God has devastated your crops. Well, the day of the Lord is at hand if you don't learn from that. And the danger is that an army, a physical human army, the size of a locust plague, is about to invade your army.

You need to wake up and realize what's going to happen. Amos, when he talks about it, he says as the judgment comes, 90% of the people will be either killed or taken away into exile. Nine out of ten.

In one place, he talks about the remnant, the leftovers, the survivors of this. And he says, when the Assyrian army comes through, when this invading army comes through, Israel is going to be left like a sheep that has been pulled out of the mouth of a lion. That's a vivid picture.

And he said all that's going to be left is a piece of a tail, a bit of a leg, a part of an ear. That's what Israel is going to be like, like an animal that's been ripped apart. And so the prophets are going to take us through the whitewater of God's wrath.

The judgment is going to be as bad and as awful as it is. And this is part of their role in their ministry as the watchmen of God. But the other side of that, and I think the other part of that whitewater, is that the prophets are going to also help us to understand the depths of God's love.

And so, as I've studied the prophets, and I talked about in the last video, it's enabled me to fall in love with the God of the prophets. And that's the thing about these books that consumes me, is I want to seek that God. It's not just an angry God.

It's not just a God who wants to consume his people, but it is also a God who is committed to them no matter what. My kids may do some horrible things, but I'm always going to love them as a father. In a greater way, God is always going to be committed to his children.

The covenants that God made with Israel placed conditions upon them that stipulated they would be judged if they disobeyed, and they would be punished severely if they did not keep God's commands. But the prophets are going to come back constantly to the idea that the Lord will never abandon his people. And so, after this judgment, there is always going to be a restoration.

I tell my students, if you're ever getting ready for an ordination exam and someone wants to ask you a question, what's the message of a prophet? You are safe by answering judgment and salvation. Your ordination counsel will think that you know the Old Testament really, really well. But there is always judgment, and there's always salvation.

Now, critical scholars, as they've looked at that, will often talk about those messages of salvation as being things that were added later to the message of the prophets. But I think one of the problems with that is that in every one of these books, there is always a message of salvation. Amos, probably the most extreme message of judgment in all the Old Testament, still at the end of that book, chapters 9, 11 to 15, there's a promise that God is going to restore what he's torn down.

The book of Jeremiah, the first part of the book is about God's work of dismantling and tearing down. The second part of the book is about hope, what God is going to build and plant, and what grows out of that. And so, there's definitely in the prophets the white water of God's wrath, but there's also the intense, incredible passion of God's love for his people.

Some of the greatest passages about God's love and some of the passages that have spoken to me the most in the prophets are the ones that deal with that. Let me just share a couple of these with you that have meant something to me. In Isaiah 40, when God talks about bringing his people back from exile, he says that the Lord is going to be like a shepherd, and he's going to carry his people in his arms.

And even the most fragile, tender lamb, the Lord is going to carry in his arms. And that gentle picture of the Lord as our shepherd, kind of a living illustration of Psalm 23, that's what God is going to do for his people when he restores them and brings them back from exile. In Isaiah 49, the people of Israel say, the Lord has forgotten me.

The Lord has abandoned me. Zion herself speaks and says, God has forgotten about us. And that would have been a natural response to the disaster that had happened to them.

But the Lord responds back to that statement, and he says, can a nursing mother forget her baby? Even if she could, the Lord will not forget you. And the Lord says that he has the name of Zion on one hand, he has the city of Zion, the image of that on his other hand. I won't get into the issue of whether God has a tattoo or not, but what it does seem to say is that the waking thought of our God who never sleeps, the constant thought, the constant attention, the thing that is always on his mind is the people of God.

He will never forget them. The prophet Jeremiah says to the exiles, I know the plans that I have for you, the plans to give you a hope and a future, and I'm going to restore you. That's not an endless promise to every Christian that God's going to work out every plan in our lives.

It does mean that God is committed to our ultimate good, just in the same way that Romans 8 tells us that all things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to his purpose. In Hosea 11, Hosea is a book where he marries an unfaithful woman as a visual object lesson for the people of Israel of how they've been unfaithful to God. At the end of that book in Hosea chapter 11, the Lord talks about his love for Israel as his wife.

And he says this, chapter 11, verses 8 and 9, how can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? They've been an unfaithful wife to him. He has every right as God and as the one who's been completely faithful to his covenant to completely consume and destroy these people. But he says, how can I give you up? I love you.

I'm counseling people, and they're married to someone. It's like, whatever led you to marry that person? How can you stay with them? As we look at the Old Testament, we say, how could God ever be fully committed to Israel as his wife? But he says, I can't give you up. And he says, how can I make you like Admon? How can I make you like Zeboim? Cities that were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Lord says, my heart recoils within me. My compassion grows warm and tender. Even in the midst of his greatest anger, even in the midst of the times when the Lord was punishing his people because they had been unfaithful to him.

They had cheated on him like an unfaithful spouse. God says, my heart grows warm with compassion for you. It grows warm and tender.

I will not execute my burning anger. I will not again destroy Ephraim, for I am God and not a man. The Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

I'm not a man. I'm not going to give in to vengeance. I'm not going to give in to revenge.

I'm not going to completely destroy my people. As a righteous God, as a holy God, I am going to punish them for sin, but I will ultimately restore them. And so the covenant is not just a message of judgment in the prophets.

It's also a message of restoration. One of my other favorites, Jeremiah chapter 30. And let me just read a brief section.

Jeremiah 30 to 33 is a part of that book that's known as the Book of Consolation. And it's about God restoring the fortunes of his people after he sent them away into exile. In chapter 30, beginning in verse 12, the Lord says this to the people, thus says Lord: your hurt is incurable.

Your wound is grievous. There is none to uphold your cause. There's no medicine for your wound.

There is no healing for you. All your lovers have forgotten you. They care nothing about you.

For I have dealt you the blow of an enemy, the punishment of a merciless foe, because your guilt is great because your sins are flagrant. Why do you cry out over your hurt? Your pain is incurable, because your guilt is great, because your sins are flagrant. Everything that we read in that passage indicates hopelessness.

You've been afflicted. You have this injury that's been placed upon you. There's no healing.

There's no balm that's going to take care of this. The lovers, the false guides, the enemies that you turned to and you thought were going to be your source of security and significance, they haven't helped you as well. There's nothing that you can turn to.

And why did that happen? The Lord says because your sins are flagrant. You deserve this. God had not abandoned his covenant with his people.

They had abandoned the covenant. God had not let them down by failing to protect them from the Babylonian army. They had brought this upon themselves.

So everything about this is hopeless from Jeremiah chapter 30, verse 12 down to verse 15. But notice what it says in verse 16. Therefore, leken.

Okay, here's the outcome. And we expect, wow, this is going to be an awful, devastating message of judgment. But what we have instead is what Tim Keller refers to in this passage as a beautiful expression of God's illogical grace.

Therefore, all who devour you will be devoured. All of your foes, every one of them, shall go into captivity. Those who plunder you shall be plunder.

And all who pray on you, I will make a prey, for I will restore health to you. Your wounds I will heal, declares the Lord because they have called you an outcast.

It is Zion for whom no one cares. Everyone else had forgotten about Zion. Everyone else had neglected them to the ash heap of history.

God says I'm going to restore you. There's no health. There's no healing.

I'm going to give it to you instead. And God's going to do these things because of his abiding covenant commitment to the people of Israel. One of the qualities of God that we're going to study in this course is what is referred to in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word is hesed.

It talks about God's loyal love, his commitment, and his faithfulness. Jeremiah says, I have loved my people with an everlasting love, and therefore I have drawn them with my loving kindness, even after exile, even after judgment. In the book of the 12, there are four prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, Joel, and Malachi, that minister during the time of the post-exilic period.

They remind us that after the judgment of exile, God is going to bring his people back. God is going to restore them. But something interesting happens in those books as well.

We find out there that the people come back to the land, but they still have not fully returned to God. Haggai and Zechariah are going to have to confront them about the fact that they have not rebuilt the temple, they have not followed God's priorities. And so there's the potential for more judgment even after exile.

Joel, you've turned away from God. God's brought a locust plague on you. Rend your hearts, turn back to him. There's going to be more judgment. Malachi, there's this dispute between God and his people because the people haven't really turned back to the Lord. So even after the restoration, even after they come back to the land, they still haven't fully turned back to God.

So, what does God do there? Does God say, well, you know, I've given them a chance, I've promised to bring them back, I bring them back, but they still haven't come back to me? What God does there to show his abiding concern is that the prophets who minister during that time are also going to promise that the Lord is going to cause there to be a return after the return where there will finally be a full restoration of the people. You know, we look at the time of the post-exilic period. It was not the great restoration that we seem to see being expected in prophets like Isaiah or Jeremiah.

It was a depressing, discouraging time. They're still under foreign oppression. And again, it wasn't God's fault, and it was the people's fault.

But what the post-exilic prophets are going to do for us is that they're going to complete this message about God's faithfulness and God's commitment to Israel, and they're going to say, the Lord is going to bring about a return after this return that's going to ultimately be everything that God imagined. And so the prophet Zechariah is going to say in Zechariah 8, verses 7 and 8, thus says the Lord of hosts, behold, I will save my people from the east country and from the west country, and I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and they will be my people, and I will be their God in faithfulness and in righteousness. And we're like, we read that, and we say, well, I thought that's what God had done.

God had brought them back from exile. God had carried them like the lambs in his arms, and he brought them back and restored them. But the Lord says this wasn't the ultimate restoration.

There's going to be one beyond this because even though the people persist in their sins, God, in a greater way, persists in his covenant faithfulness. Zechariah goes on to say at the end of chapter 8, verses 20 to 23, thus says the Lord of hosts, people shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities, the inhabitants of one city to another, saying, let us go up at once to entreat the favor of the Lord and to seek the Lord of hosts. I myself am going up.

Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, in those days, 10 men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, let us go up with you, for we have heard that God is with you. So, the prophets, when the return was not everything that it was imagined to be, they didn't simply say, well, I guess, you know, Isaiah was too idealistic.

It didn't work out the way God had said. They did not say, look, you disobeyed, you forfeited, you gave away your blessing. What they remind the people is the Lord is going to bring about this ultimate restoration.

The Lord is going to keep his promises. The Lord will write the law on your heart. The Lord will bring back his people completely from their exile.

And when he does, even the nations of the earth are going to come and worship. And so, this idea of the extremes of God's judgment is definitely there in the prophets, but there are also the extremes of God's love. And so, as you're teaching the prophets, one of the things that you want to make sure that you do is that it's easy to preach these books and to become very angry or to become legalistic and say, here's the list of sins that you've committed and really to just kind of beat people down with judgment.

But the message of the prophets is also a message of grace that ultimately shows God's answer and God's solution. The prophets condemned the idolatry of the people. We have to give people something to love that is greater than their idols.

And it's God's love that ultimately impacts us with that. Paul, in Ephesians chapter three, says, I want you to be able to understand the height and the depth and the breadth and the length of the love of God. He uses measuring terms to really talk about something that cannot be measured.

One of the things that has helped me to see in my life, the depth and the breadth and the deepness of God's love for me is to understand the abiding commitment of God's covenant promises to Israel. How God is committed to these people no matter what. In Romans chapter eight, Paul reminds us at the end of that great chapter, all the things that God has done for us.

He's foreknown us, and he's predestined us to be like the image of his son. He's working all things out together for good. He's even already glorified us and given us that inheritance.

At the end of that chapter, he says, there is nothing, there is nothing that we will ever experience in life that can separate us from God's love that's in Christ Jesus. Famine, hardship, nakedness, persecution, sword, and even death itself cannot separate you from God's love. God's love is everlasting.

It's eternal. It's permanent. Well, it's interesting as we read the book of Romans, the thing that Paul next turns to in Romans 9 to 11, how do I know that Romans 8 is true? How do I know that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus? Paul turns in Romans 9 to 11 to God's relationship with the people of Israel.

In Romans 11, he even gives us the promise that part of God's plan and part of God's ultimate design for salvation history is that the end, all Israel, a people of Israel are going to be saved and restored. The way that I know God's everlasting love for me is I

can look and see the example of God's everlasting love for Israel. And Christians have all kinds of different ideas about the future of Israel and the people of Israel.

I believe that the covenants in the Old Testament give us a promise that God has a future for Israel because God keeps his covenant promises and God is committed to his covenant commands. Now, after we've seen this, the backdrop, the background, the message of the prophets, how it's oriented to covenant, these four ideas, you've sinned, you've broken the covenant, you need to repent. If there's no repentance, there's going to be judgment.

And then, after the judgment, there's going to be restoration. I hope that some of this helps to clear up some of the common misunderstandings of the prophets and maybe some of the misapprehensions you have about either studying these books or teaching them. So, I'd like to conclude this lesson by just thinking about, here are some common misunderstandings of the prophets that I think we realize are not accurate when we understand what their message was all about.

Some people look at the prophets, and they would dismiss them as nothing more than hysterical babblers. I even watched a documentary on one of the history channels a few years ago, and they talked about the prophet Ezekiel and some of the ways that he conveyed his message, perhaps reflecting the fact that he had a psychological disorder. And that was kind of a prevailing philosophy.

Now there were oftentimes when the prophets did present their message in a state of ecstasy under the influence of the Spirit of God, we see Saul acting as a prophet in that way. That's not the normal experience. They are conveying to the people a very clear, it's built upon the revelation that God has given to his people.

They are not hysterical babblers. They are sent as messengers who, in a very clear way, are reminding the people of their covenant responsibilities in a very logical way. You have done this.

God is going to do this. Here's the opportunity to repent. Some of the most skillful use of rhetoric in all of the Bible is found in the Old Testament prophets.

Amos is going to begin his message. He's sent from the country of Judah in the south to preach to the people in the north. He's not necessarily going to be welcomed there.

And so, Amos begins by talking about the judgment of the nations. And then when he's lured the people in and they realize that, hey, God's going to judge the nations, he drops the bomb on them. God is also going to judge you.

And so, the prophets are not hysterical babblers. They're not simply in a state of ecstasy. There's a very clear message here.

The second misunderstanding is that the prophets are not angry, ranting messengers of a God who simply wants to consume and destroy his people. And we've talked about this already. I grew up in a very fundamentalist background.

I remember going to church and hearing evangelists preach. They would get red in the face and scream. When I was 10 years old, some of that was pretty scary.

And they would have this vein on their neck, and it would bulge out. And that, in many ways, was before I began to study the prophets; that was my understanding of what they were like. What I think we've come to understand is that when they did preach an extreme message, that extreme message was because of the extreme circumstances.

And they did not enjoy preaching that message. Often some of those evangelists, I thought they seemed to enjoy telling people that they were going to hell, or they enjoyed giving us the list of the sins. The prophets don't enjoy this.

God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked. Ezekiel tells us that. 2 Peter 2 echoes that in the New Testament.

God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. One of the reasons that God sent the prophets in the first place is that if the people responded to that message, then they could avoid this judgment. So, the God of the Old Testament is not this angry, raving, maniacal, homicidal, philosophical, whatever type of God.

He's a God who cares about people. The New Atheist Movement has tried to draw a strong distinction between the God of the Old Testament, angry, judgmental, a God who sends plagues and kills people and commands genocide and those kinds of things, the God of the New Testament, who is the Father of Jesus and a God of love. There is both judgment and salvation in the message of the prophets.

The holiness of God, the hatred of God for sin, that's there, that's real. That's something that we need to preach to our culture. But the other side of this is that there is forgiveness, there is grace, there is restoration.

In fact, we have this word from God in Jeremiah chapter 18, that if people would respond to the prophets, there was always the opportunity that that judgment could be avoided. Chapter 18, verse 7 says this: if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and that nation concerning which I have spoken turns from evil, I will relent from the disaster that I

intend to do to it. We're even going to see examples as we go through the minor prophets of where God relents from judgment when people respond to the message.

I think there is, in many ways, a misunderstanding of the prophets. There is a misrepresentation of the God of the Old Testament. When I hear people saying things about God, He's my Father, I love Him, I know His love, I want to defend Him, and I want to defend His honor.

I think the prophets help us to understand what God is truly like. I think a third misunderstanding of the prophets, and this often gets into the way that they've been treated popularly in the church, is that we view the prophets primarily as predictors of the future. Their role was to give us a detailed roadmap of all of the things that are going to happen in eschatology.

Predicting the future was an important part of the prophet's message. Deuteronomy 18 told the people that one of the ways that they would distinguish true prophets from false prophets is that anything that a true prophet predicted or promised would come to pass, that would happen. He had to be right 100% of the time.

A 950 batting average was not good enough. He was always correct and always accurate. We see the prophets in many ways.

They are predicting for the people this is what's going to happen to them if they do not change their ways. But the primary role of the prophets was not to predict the future. It was a part of their ministry, it was a part of their prophetic gift, it was a demonstration that their word came from God.

In the book of Isaiah in chapters 40 to 48 especially, one of the ways that God distinguishes himself from the pagan gods around Israel was that the Lord was able to announce through his prophets the future before it ever happened. I think one of the reasons that Isaiah 40 to 55 gives us this detailed promise about how God was going to bring his people back from exile during the time of Isaiah was to show them that God can predict the future. But predicting the future was only a small part of the prophet's message.

Someone has broken it down statistically like this. They have said two-thirds of the prophet's preaching was primarily forth-telling. In other words, simply preaching the word of God, doing what pastors do on a Sunday, doing what Elijah and Elisha did when they confronted the people about their commitment to Baal or their apostasy.

Two-thirds of the preaching was forth-telling. Only one-third of it was foretelling and telling them about things that were going to happen in the future. When we think about the prophets in eschatology, one-third of those things that they were

foretelling or predicting were also things that were going to happen in the near future.

They are no longer predictions for us, they are things that have already happened. Fee and Stewart say less than two percent of the prophetic preaching is messianic prophecy. Less than five percent of the preaching of the prophets deals with the new covenant era, and less than one percent of their preaching deals with things that are still going to happen in the eschatological future.

And so, when we have people or when we have prophecy spokesmen or when we have videos that are out being sold online, and we're coming to the prophets looking for a detailed roadmap of the future, we're probably not using the prophets for what they were intended for. When we think that we can come to the prophets with our Bible in one hand, and our newspaper in another hand, and we can draw direct lines and correspondences, we're probably reading things into the prophets that are not really there. And that's been one of the things that has characterized the sort of popular study of the prophets.

There's been a recent study in the last couple of years called the Harbinger, talking about Isaiah 9 verses 8 to 10 being a direct prophecy about America. I don't know of any specific passages in the Old Testament prophets that directly talk about America. There was a book back in 1988, 88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988.

You can get that book online now, really cheap. The message had been kind of discredited. When I was in high school, I came to get an interest in prophecy because I went to see the movie The Late Great Planet Earth.

But in studying the prophets, I've come to realize that's not really their primary focus. When I tell people sometimes, I teach Old Testament, I teach the prophets, that usually raises a series of questions. And one of them usually is, are we living in the last days? And what they want to know by that is, does the Bible indicate that the coming of Christ is soon? And I think there probably are ways that we could say that.

But the biblical perspective is, is that the last days began with the first coming of Christ, and they're going to continue into the second coming. There was a book back in 1991 that talked about the Gulf War being a fulfillment of biblical prophecy because of all of the passages in Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Revelation about the judgment of Babylon. Again, I think that's reading things into the Bible.

People have questions, what's going to happen to the state of Israel? Is 1948 Israel, is that a fulfillment of biblical history, of biblical prophecy? The Bible doesn't answer those questions. That's not the goal of the prophets. And as they look at the future, they give us primarily what we could refer to as a soft lens focus on the future, not a detailed specific roadmap.

As the prophets, as they talk about the future, they remind us of four basic things, again and again and again. They're going to remind us that God is going to bring his people back from exile, number one. They're going to remind us that God will restore the Davidic line.

They're going to remind us that Jerusalem will be rebuilt along with the temple. And they are going to remind us that the future blessing of Israel in the eschatological kingdom is going to lead to the inclusion of all nations. But the exact details and specifics of how all of that is worked out, the prophets don't always answer those questions.

The prophets are not there to satisfy our curiosity. They are more to give us a firm, settled confidence that ultimately, God's kingdom prevails and God's people win. In the prophetic visions of Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, we have a succession of human worldwide empires ultimately replaced by the kingdom of God.

As I read the prophets, I may not be able to answer all of those questions about eschatology and prophecy that people want to ask. But I do get a sense that ultimately, we can know that we're on the winning side. If I watch a video of my favorite team, I know the score, and I know that they win that game, I'm not worried about a fumble in the first half.

I'm not worried if they're down by 10 at halftime because I have a settled conviction. I know the ultimate outcome. That's what the prophets are designed to do for us.

One of the things that I think has divided the church is that often we love to argue about eschatology. We have people that are pre-mill and post-mill and a-mill. We have people that are pre-trib, mid-trib, post-trib and all these various flavors.

I think when we really understand what the prophets are about, it may lead us to hold to those ideas with a great deal more humility than sometimes we do. The Bible doesn't give us the detailed charts and maps that we would like to lay out. I have a conviction that I believe God has a purpose for the people of Israel.

I believe that God is going to fulfill his covenant promises to the people of Israel. But the way that that will happen, is it a national restoration? Is it simply a spiritual restoration? The Bible doesn't answer fully all of those questions. The church in many ways is a fulfillment of the promises that God made to restore a new people and to create an eschatological community.

How does the church in Israel relate to each other? We can have our convictions about those things, but we need to hold to those things with humility. If the world looks at us and sees us fighting over eschatology, then I think it's hard for them to

really see and understand and believe us when we talk about the love of God and the love of Christ. Final misconception, and I think this is one that really for a teacher and a pastor, strikes at me, and it's one that I have to deal with my students.

The misconception that the prophets are too hard for me to understand or too difficult for me to preach to my people. When we learn that the basic message of the prophets is judgment and salvation, when we learn that we do not have to fit them into some tight eschatological scheme, I believe that it simplifies the message of the prophets. When we understand the historical context and the things that they're talking about, I think it makes it easier for us to apply and understand what's going on.

When we realize that the prophets use highly figurative language and that we don't necessarily need to find an explicit fulfillment in every detail, I think instead of making the message harder, it makes it simpler. One of the things that we have done is that I think we've taken the message of the prophets and we've made it much too difficult. The prophets are going to focus on three major application issues.

They are going to talk to the people about their idolatry. They are going to talk to the people about the problem of social justice, and they are going to talk to the people about the problem of insincere and false worship. We have those same issues in the church today.

If you're a pastor, I want you to just simply think about what is missing from your church if the prophets are not part of the spiritual diet that you're giving to the people and teaching them. Ultimately, there is a biblical picture of God. We've talked about this, the whitewater of God's wrath, the extremes of God's love.

If we do not teach these books, if we do not study them, we are not going to see God in all of the rich and varied ways. So, I want to encourage you, don't be afraid of the prophets. They have a powerful, relevant, and practical message for us today.

I hope these introductory videos have given us a better orientation to what their message is about.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Minor Prophets. This is lecture 2, The Ministry and Message of the Prophets, Part 2.