

## **Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 3, Overview of the Book of the 12, Part 1**

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Minor Prophets. This is lecture 3 on The Overview of the Book of the Twelve, Part 1.

We've opened our study by taking a look in a couple of sessions at the message of the prophets, their role, their mission, and their ministry.

I hope that's given us a foundation to get into the actual study of the Minor Prophets of the Book of the Twelve. We're going to take this lesson to give an overview of these Twelve books, look at them a bit as a unit, and talk a little bit about methodology and how and why we study them in the way that we do. One of the first questions that we probably need to answer is, why do we refer to the books by these two different names, Minor Prophets in the Book of the Twelve? Well, in the Hebrew canon, the Hebrew canon is divided into three sections.

There's the Law, the Torah, the Prophets, the Nevi'im, and the writing to Ketuvim. The prophets are found in the second part of the canon, and they're further divided into the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets are what we think about in our English Bibles as historical books.

There's Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The reason these are referred to as prophets is that the preaching of the prophets is a very prominent feature of these books. Really, the unfolding of Israel's history is determined by the message of the prophets.

It's not the kings, it's not the people themselves, it's the prophets that seem to have the determining influence. The Latter Prophets are more what we think of as our prophetic books. And these include in the Hebrew canon Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

The book of Daniel is in the writings, not because it's not a prophetic text, but because Daniel himself was not officially a prophet. The Minor Prophets are actually in the Hebrew canon referred to as the Book of the Twelve. And in some sense, you have 12 different messages, 12 different prophets.

But there's evidence that at a pretty early time in Israel's history, even before the time of Jesus, they were viewing these as a single book. That's often why when there are discussions of the Hebrew canon, you'll hear discussions of 24 books or 22 books. Josephus makes reference to those numbers with the canon.

It's different from our 39 because the 12 Minor Prophets are actually viewed as one. And they're referred to by this term, the Book of the Twelve. The term Minor Prophets, as I understand it, was a term that was later developed by Augustine and was something that arose in the early church.

When we use the term Minor Prophets, please understand we are not talking about the significance of their message. We're talking more about the size of these books compared to Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. These books are much smaller.

So, they're referred to as the Minor Prophets. But in terms of their history and their impact on Israel's history, at least three or four times in the preaching of these Minor Prophets, they had a significant impact on their culture. Jeremiah mentions that it was the preaching of Micah that led to the repentance of Hezekiah.

He talks about that in Jeremiah 26, verses 17 to 19. The prophet Jonah leads a repentance movement among the people of Nineveh, the Assyrians, and that's a surprising element but a significant impact. The preaching of Zephaniah, in some sense, may have influenced Josiah's reforms and a temporary stalling of the judgment there as Josiah led the people back to God.

When we go to the post-exilic prophets, the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah was what motivated and encouraged the people to rebuild the temple. So, when we talk about Minor Prophets, we are not talking about insignificant prophets. We're talking about prophets whose messages are smaller and shorter.

Again, most of these books may only be a small summary or encapsulation of what these prophets actually preached. When we look at Amos, there is a likelihood that Amos may have preached for five or ten years in the northern kingdom of Israel. So, those nine chapters are not everything that they had to say, but they give us an anthology and a summary of his message.

All right. We talked about the book of the Twelve. In terms of the methodology of studying them, one of the things that you're going to see is that, especially in the contemporary study of the Minor Prophets, there's an emphasis on reading these books as a unity and reading them as a book.

So, do we look at them as a unit? Do we look at them as a single book, the book of the Twelve? Or do we look at them as 12 individual compositions, 12 different prophets, 12 different times, the messages, and their unique contributions? And the answer is we are going to do both. Primarily, as we're working through the Minor Prophets, we're going to look at them as 12 different prophets, their unique messages, their contributions, and their theology, and see them as units. But I think it's also important to understand that there do appear to be ways that the final

editor or the prophets themselves, these books have been stitched together in a way.

They've been unified in a way that leads us to read them in light of each other. And I think sometimes certain approaches to these prophets can overemphasize that. Some of the modern studies of the Minor Prophets as a single composition are going to get into redactional issues and see that at the end of the process, these books are composed as a unit.

But I do think that may be overemphasis, but I do think there are indications that these books are to be read in light of each other. And so, as we approach them, we're going to do a bit of both. All right.

There is evidence that we should look at them as a unit. By 200 BC, there is already evidence to indicate that the Jews viewed the Book of the 12 as basically a unified composition. We have a statement in the book of Sirach, chapter 49, verse 10.

This comes after a mention of Isaiah and Jeremiah and the Major Prophets. It says this, Sirach 49, 10, May the bones of the 12 prophets sprout new life from their burial places because they comforted Jacob and rescued them with hopeful confidence. And so, it's interesting that in all of these 12 the name of the prophet, the specific contribution, the message of this prophet is preserved, but there's already a sense that we should read them as a unit.

If that's true, then how were these books arranged? Were they just put together by size or by order? And the idea, I think, as we look at these as a unit, is that the arrangement is both chronological and thematic. So, it is predominantly chronological, but there are thematic connections as well. The order of these books in the Masoretic text, as we have them in our Hebrew Bible, is slightly different from the order that we have in the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint.

Let's look first of all at the Masoretic text. In our English Bibles, this is reflected. These are the way that the Minor Prophets or the specific headings, historical notations, and superscriptions that identify, this is when this prophet ministered.

And they give us some indication of that. Those six books are Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Zechariah. As we look at those six books, they are essentially in chronological order.

And so, chronology has played a role in this. Hosea, Amos, and Micah prophesy in the 8th century during the Assyrian crisis. Zephaniah prophesies 7th century, 6th century, dealing with the Babylonian crisis.

And then Haggai and Zechariah during the post-exilic period in the 5th century. And they're the prophets that are calling on the people to rebuild the temple. Okay? So those six books are arranged in an essentially chronological order.

There are six other books that do not have chronological notations. And so those are the books: Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Malachi. And if we look at the last four of those six, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Malachi, those books are also arranged in chronological order.

They are placed in the Minor Prophets in the timeframe with the prophets around them. So, Jonah, as we know from the Book of 2 Kings, prophesied in the 8th century. He's included with Hosea, Amos, and Micah.

Nahum and Habakkuk, the prevailing evidence indicates that they prophesied during the Babylonian crisis. They're closely associated with Zephaniah. Malachi is a post-exilic prophet at the end of the prophetic era.

The gift of prophecy is basically going to come to a cease, to come to cease in Israel after his ministry. He's at the end. What that ends up doing is that it places two books near the beginning of the Masoretic text order, Joel and Obadiah, that seem to be somewhat out of chronological order.

I'm not sure that we can fully answer all the questions as to why this happened, but Joel, again, the dating of this book is highly debated. The prevailing conservative opinion used to be that it was probably the earliest of the book of the 12th. And the fact that it's the second book in the order might've suggested that.

However, the consensus today, whether conservative or critical scholars, is that Joel is probably a post-exilic book. And so, we ask the question, how did it end up near the front, Hosea and Joel? In the book of Obadiah, Obadiah seems to prophesy; he prophesies about the kingdom of Edom. It seems to be related to the Babylonian period.

Why is he in the book of the 12 near the front with these other prophets from the eighth century? And I would argue that these two books specifically probably have gained their place in the order and in the arrangement because of thematic concerns. The book of Joel and James Nogalski has talked about this, which may, in some sense, be an orientation to the message of the book of the 12 as a whole. Joel calls the people back to God, and they repent, and they turn back to God, and God sends a blessing in the place of that.

I would see the book of Joel being put near the front of the minor prophets because that's the standard response. That's what God wants to see from his people. Unfortunately, that's generally what's lacking from his people.

The Assyrian crisis, the Babylonian, the post-exilic period, there's never a full turning to God. But Joel gives us the ideal. The prophet preaches, the people respond, God sends blessing in the place of judgment.

If that had happened in these other periods, God would not have had to send the judgment. The book of Joel is also going to talk about the day of the Lord and the judgment of God is going to be the day of the Lord. That is a theme that appears in a number of the minor prophets.

When we compare the minor prophets and the major prophets, both of them talk about the day of the Lord, but the day of the Lord seems to be a more dominant concern in the Book of the 12 than in these other books. So, Joel may be put at the front because, in some sense, it's designed to be an introduction to these other books that come after it, even though chronologically, Joel's ministry was toward the end of the prophetic era.

The book of Obadiah also seems to have a thematic concern behind its placement in the books. It is about the judgment of Edom and the book of Obadiah is going to follow the book of Amos. And Amos chapter nine is going to talk about the remnant of Edom being possessed by the future King of Israel.

There may be an Edom connection. Obadiah also talks about a messenger of the Lord going out to the nations, dealing with the judgment of a foreign people.

And so, it comes before the book of Jonah, who is the only prophet that we know of in ancient Israel that was actually sent on a prophetic mission to a foreign people. So, the order of these books in the Masoretic text is primarily chronological, but it does appear like thematic concerns have had something to do with the order as well. Now, when we go to the Septuagint, the Septuagint order, the prevailing one, the last six books of the Book of the 12, are exactly what we have in the Masoretic text.

It's at the front of the minor prophets or at the front of the book of the 12 that we have a difference. And the LXX order is Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, and Jonah. And the prevailing scholarly consensus is that the Masoretic text is probably the order that came first.

And the LXX, Amos, and Micah are simply attached right after Hosea because they come from the same basic time period. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, all of our eight manuscripts of the Book of the 12, and none of them are complete, all of them seem to support the order of the Masoretic text. There is one manuscript that may seem to indicate that the book of Jonah was at the end of the Book of the 12.

And so, there's some discussion and debate about that. So, the order of all of this, the order of the book of the 12, I think it's important to see this as we begin this study, is that they are dealing with primarily a chronology. We talk about them as the minor prophets, but their ministry actually encompasses the entire range of the classical prophetic era.

It covers about 300 years. And so it covers the time, or even up to 400. It covers the time of the Assyrian crisis in the 8th century.

And the prophets that we have there in Israel, we have Isaiah, we have Amos, Hosea, and Jonah, who are prophets in the northern kingdom. We have Micah and Isaiah, who were prophets in the southern kingdom. And so the ministry of the book of the 12, the prophets that are part of that, they begin during the Assyrian crisis.

Then during the Babylonian crisis, as the Babylonians replaced the Assyrians, and God is going to use them to judge Judah. We have a group of prophets from that period. We have Jeremiah and Ezekiel in the major prophet.

We have Daniel, who has a prophetic role. Jeremiah preaches to the people in the land, finishes his ministry among the exiles in Egypt. Ezekiel and Daniel have a ministry to the Jews that are living in exile.

This is also the time in the Book of the 12, we have Nahum, Obadiah, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk. And their ministries are important to this time period as well. Then in the Persian or the post-exilic period, when the Persian empire is the dominant for Israel's back in the land, they've returned from exile.

They have not fully come back to God, however. Haggai and Zechariah are going to encourage the people to rebuild the temple, to come back to God. Joel and Malachi are going to talk about, there's a problem, there's a fracture in the relationship with God and his people.

And if they are going to ever experience the blessings of the kingdom, the full restoration, they're going to have to come back to God. And so, the minor prophets are going to cover that time period, really almost 400 years, 800 to 400 BC, and they're going to cover the entire time of the classical prophets. The critical model of the book of Isaiah is that Isaiah 1 to 39 deals with the Assyrian crisis.

Isaiah 40 to 55 deals with the Babylonian crisis. Isaiah 56 to 66, the post-exilic period and the time period when the people are back in the land. It's just interesting to note that as we look at the book of the 12, their prophetic ministry is going to cover that entire span as well.

You can trace the chronology. God's going to bring judgment because the people did not listen to God during the Assyrian crisis. God is going to bring judgment because the people did not turn back to God.

Josiah led this temporary revival, but ultimately, they didn't come back all the way and God brought judgment. Then, in the post-exilic period, judgment has come, and restoration is in process, but more judgment is going to come if they don't turn back to God. You can walk through the minor prophets and see that.

But one of the other things that also demonstrates some of these thematic connections that we've talked about is that either the prophets themselves or the final editors and redactors that put these books together, and I would see them being inspired by God in the same way as the people who originally delivered the message, is that often they are going to use a technique that we call the catchword. They are going to use words that link the end of one book with the beginning of another. I think if we could look at this and say, well, it happened once or twice, that's an accident.

But the fact that it occurs in a fairly recurring basis, James Nogalski and other contemporary scholars who deal with the minor prophets are going to put an emphasis on the way that these books have been stitched together. I think there is a design, and there is an intent that we are to read these prophets as a unit. I'm not going to go through and trace all of these catchwords or all of these link words, but I did want to give you just a couple of examples of these.

The first book in the Book of the Twelve, the book of Hosea. Hosea chapter 14, verses 6 and 7. Talking about the restoration, after this judgment God is going to restore his people, and they are going to experience the bounty and the blessing of the promised land. In the passage in verse 6, God says, I will be like the dew to Israel, he shall blossom like the lily, he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon, his shoots shall spread out, his beauty shall be like the olive, his fragrance like Lebanon, they shall return and dwell beneath my shadow, they shall flourish like the grain, they shall blossom like the vine, and their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

Three words there: grain, wine, and vine. Talking about the abundance, the prosperity, and the promised land. When we go to Joel chapter 1, verses 10 and 11, we notice this.

The prophet says the fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain, there's our word again, the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes. Be ashamed, O tillers of the soil, O vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished, the vine dries up, and the fig tree languishes. And so again, we have a three-fold reference to the vine, the wine, and the different types of grain.

There is a direct link between the end of Hosea, talking about the abundance of the future, what it's going to be like when God restores his people. In contrast, there's the judgment that the people have experienced in Joel chapter 1, as this locust plague has come through the land. And the connection between the blessing of chapter 14 in Hosea and the judgment in Joel chapter 1, there's a thematic connection there.

We go to the end of the book of Joel, and we're going to see these connections between Joel and Amos as well. Joel chapter 3, verse 16 says this: the Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem. And the heavens and the earthquake, but the Lord is a refuge to his people and a stronghold to the people of Israel.

Okay, one of the things the prophets are going to confront is that people have taken God for granted. God is like a roaring lion. God is like a thundering storm, and you're going to have to deal with him.

You can't treat him lightly. You can't take him lightly. I think that's why people need to hear the message about the prophets today especially.

Well, we go to Amos chapter 1, and Amos is going to talk about God. And here's the opening introduction in Amos chapter 1, verse 2. Amos said, the Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem. The pastors of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers.

I don't think it's an accident that we have a reference to a roaring God and a thundering God at the end of Joel in the beginning of Amos. Going back again to Joel chapter 3, another interesting connection. Chapter 3, verse 4. What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon and all of the regions of Philistia? There's a mention of some specific people of God.

Tyre and Sidon to the north, the Philistines that were there in the land as well. We go to the book of Amos. Amos chapter 1, verse 6. Amos says this, for three transgressions of Gaza and for four I will not revoke the punishment.

Gaza was one of the five major cities of the Philistines. We go to chapter 1, verse 9. For thus says the Lord, for three transgressions of Tyre and for four I will not revoke the punishment. The same city that's mentioned in Amos chapter 3, verse 4. Now, the purpose of this is to say these prophets are to be read in light of each other.

They are both prophets of judgment and salvation. Their message is harmonized with each other. We don't simply stop at the end of Joel and say we're done with this.

We see a continuation, and we see a continuity. We can overemphasize that I think and view these simply as a later redactor comes in and changes these books or creates these books. I'm not suggesting that, but I am saying that as we study the distinctive message of each of these prophets, there may be times when we need to think about how this lines up with the progression of the minor prophets as a whole.

We have these thematic connections that I think are leading us in that direction. Joel chapter 3, verse 18, one more reference to the book of Joel. Joel has numerous references and numerous apparent intertextual connections to all of the minor prophets.

I think of the 11 times that he talks about the day of the Lord, 10 of them closely parallel something that we read in another book of the book of the 12. But in chapter 3, verse 18, it says this, "...and in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine and the hills shall flow with milk and all of the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the valley of Shittim." So, there's incredible prosperity. Even the mountains are going to be like liquid rivers, rivers of water and wine.

Well, when we go to the end of the book of Amos, and we look at Amos's vision, there's only one real message of hope in the book, Amos chapter 9, verses 11 to 15, Amos says this, verse 13, "...behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes, him who sows the seed. The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all of the hills shall flow with it, and I will restore the fortunes of Israel." So here, it's not just the end of Joel that connects to the beginning of Amos. The end of Joel and the end of Amos, there's this relentless message of hope and restoration that comes out of this as well.

So, as we continue to work forward with this, we go to Amos and we look at Amos chapter 9, verse 12, God is going to raise up the fallen tabernacle of David. God's going to fulfill his covenant promises to the house of David. And here's what's going to happen, verse 12, "...that they may possess the remnant of Edom." The remnant of Edom.

God's going to give David victory over his enemies. "...and all the nations who are called by my name declares the Lord who does that." So, there's a reference to Edom, and the house of David is going to be victorious over the descendants of Esau. Well, the book of Obadiah, the shortest book in all of this section, is a book that focuses exclusively on the judgment of Edom.

In chapter 1, verse 1 says, "...the vision of Obadiah, thus says the Lord God, concerning Edom." And so, one of the reasons that Obadiah may be out of chronological order here is that it's connected to Amos because of this emphasis on Edom. Obadiah 1 says, "...we have heard a report from the Lord, and a messenger

has been sent among the nations." That wasn't Obadiah. Obadiah didn't go out and preach this to the people of Edom.

But in Jonah chapter 1, the Lord says to Jonah, "...arise and go to Nineveh, the Assyrian city." The prophet gets this message to be a messenger among the nations, and he's not terribly enthused about fulfilling that message, he disobeys, and he flees in the opposite direction. It really seems likely that because Obadiah focuses on a foreign nation, Edom, in judgment, Jonah focuses on a foreign nation, the Ninevites, the Assyrians, and now there's hope because they repent, they return, God shows mercy and compassion to them. I think these two books, in some sense, complement each other, and it may have something to do with the order and the arrangement of how the minor prophets have been put together.

Now, I'm not going to go through the rest of the minor prophets and do this, but there are these types of catchwords and connections between the different individual books. What I would like to look at now is that there also appear to be some thematic connections between all of the books. In a sense, there's almost an unfolding message as you go from one book to the other that shows that these books should be understood as being connected.

One of those connections is that the Book of the Twelve is going to particularly highlight an intertextual connection back to a key Old Testament passage. That key Old Testament passage that we're talking about is Exodus 34, verses 6 and 7. It's one of the central confessions about Yahweh in the Old Testament, talking both about his holiness and his mercy, compassion, and covenant faithfulness. This passage or this confession, as Israel was coming to understand who Yahweh is, this covenant God that had brought them out of their slavery in Egypt, is a key statement.

This fills in the blanks for Israel about, here's the character, the nature of our God. And so, this confession is going to be repeated a number of times in the Old Testament. We're going to find it in Psalm 86, Psalm 103, Numbers 14, and in the Minor Prophets.

And here's what that confession says. This is after Israel has sinned with the golden calf, and so it's important for them to know this. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord, a God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and covenant faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.

And again, this becomes a central confession about God. God is a God full of compassion and mercy. He's a God of hesed, of covenant faithfulness, and he shows that to a thousand generations.

However, he's a God who also does not excuse the guilty. And so, when Israel sinned with the golden calf, God kept his hesed. Even though they had cheated on God before the ink on the covenant was even dry, God did not destroy them.

However, God did not also excuse the guilty; there was punishment, there was discipline, and there were consequences for this sin. That aspect of God is going to work itself out throughout the entire Old Testament. Again, I think that's why the prophets teach judgment and salvation.

I think that's why the idea that the critical idea that salvation was something that was attached to these messages later, I don't think that's a necessary idea because God is both a God of judgment and salvation. Well, to emphasize that, the minor prophets are often going to allude back or even directly quote this central confession about Yahweh. And so, one of the unifying things about the minor prophets is that there are a number of places where we have the confession of Exodus chapter 34 verse 6. The first place where we have that is in Joel chapter 2. And we read this in the last session, but I want to read it again.

It's a formative text in the minor prophets. Yet even now declares the Lord, return to me with all of your heart, with fasting, with weeping, with mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments.

Return to the Lord your God. This is a call to repentance. And that's a major part of the ministry of the Book of the Twelve and the major message in the Book of the Twelve.

Okay, but why should they return to God? And I want you to listen to what Joel says, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Okay? The same thing that Moses had learned about God in the aftermath of the golden calf.

That's why Israel needs to come back to God. That was a message as the Assyrian crisis, the Babylonian crisis, and the ongoing judgment in the post-exilic period. The people needed to know that they served a forgiving God, a compassionate God, who was willing to take them back and who did not want to bring these judgments.

And if they would just repent, Joel says, he's also a God who relents. Naham. He changes his mind about disaster.

Why does he do that? Because of the qualities that we read about in Exodus chapter 34, verse six. Okay. So Joel, at the beginning of these books, remembers it seems to be, in some ways, a sort of programmatic introduction to the bond of prophets as a whole.

So, it's not surprising to us, and this may be one of the reasons it's at the beginning that it highlights Exodus chapter 34, verses six and seven. Okay. The next place where we see a reference to Exodus 34, verse six, and this one is a little surprising.

Jonah chapter four, verse two. All right. Why did Jonah not want to go to Nineveh? Was it because he was afraid? Was it because he had other things going on? Was it because he didn't know how the Assyrians were going to react? No, he did not want to go to Nineveh because he knew about God's compassion.

Okay. And it seems strange to us. Jonah is angry that God shows compassion.

And so again, we have another reference to Exodus 34, verse six. Jonah chapter four, verse two. Jonah prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is this not what I said when I was yet in Micah? I knew you were going to do this.

I was going to go and preach to these people, and you were going to forgive them. How did Jonah know that? Well, here's what he says, for I know that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

That's exactly what we read about in Joel chapter two. And the amazing thing now, as we're moving forward in the Minor Prophets, is that God is willing to show the same mercy and the same compassion to the Ninevites that he was to the Israelites. The same covenantal character that God had demonstrated in his dealings with Israel for hundreds and hundreds of years, Jonah is offended by the fact that God is willing to deal with Nineveh in the same way.

I will show compassion, mercy, and grace to them. I will relent from disaster against Nineveh just like I will relent from disaster in dealing with the Assyrians. The amazing thing is the Assyrians responded to this message.

In most cases, the Israelites did not. So, we have a second reference to Exodus 34, verses 6 and 7. We have a third allusion, a third, I think, maybe an intertextual quotation of this great confession that Israel made about God in Micah chapter 7, verses 18 to 20. Again, at the end of this book, ultimately, the hope of people like Micah is that they're going to wait for God to bring deliverance.

They're going to wait for God to reverse the judgment. The enemies that have afflicted Israel are ultimately going to be ashamed. What gives Micah confidence of that? How can Micah, why would God ever act in that way? And here's what Micah says, Micah chapter 7 verse 18.

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on you. And so, as you look at it, do you hear the words of Exodus chapter 34, verses 6 and 7 again? There's compassion, there's passing over transgression, there's hesed, there's faithfulness.

That's why God doesn't stay angry at us. And so all of this, God's hope for Micah, the hope that he gives them, is based on God's character that is revealed to us, Exodus chapter 34 verse 6. On the basis of that, Micah says, God will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities underfoot.

You will cast all of our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old. God's covenantal faithfulness, compassion, mercy, and anger qualities are why Israel knows that God is going to restore them.

And so, that's why the minor prophets are going to keep coming back to this confession. We've already seen it three times. There's one final book that specifically and directly in the book of the 12 is going to reference Exodus chapter 34, verses 6 and 7. And that book is the book of Nahum and the prophet Nahum, and his name means compassion.

There will be the fourth and final reference to Exodus 34, 6, and 7. Now again, this will be applied just like in the book of Jonah. It will take the principles of Exodus 34, 6, and 7 and apply them to the Ninevites and the Assyrians because Jonah was a prophet who preached, and God showed compassion to Nineveh.

God spared them from judgment. 150 years later, Nahum is going to come along, and Nahum is going to say that God's time of compassion and mercy for Nineveh is over. They have returned to their sinful ways, and as a result of that, God is going to judge them.

Okay, why is God going to judge them? What's the basis of this? Verse 2 of Nahum chapter 1 says this: The Lord is a jealous and avenging God. The Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.

The Lord is slow to anger and great in power. And that's why God has shown this compassion to Nineveh. But it also says, verse 3, The Lord will by no means clear the guilty.

And so, after that, Nahum is going to picture God as a storm, as a warrior that is going to attack Nineveh. Why is he going to do that? Because of the principles about

God's character that are found in Exodus 34, 6 and 7. Joel and Jonah and Micah have talked about the compassion side of God. Nahum is going to go further.

He's going to go down to verse 7 in Exodus chapter 34, and he's going to talk about God being an avenging God. God is slow to anger, but he cannot excuse the guilty. And so again, what we have going on here is that as we work through the minor prophets, God is dealing with the Ninevites in exactly the same way that he's dealing with the Israelites.

His character equally applies to both of these people. During this time of judgment and restoration, I think it was highly significant that the prophets referenced and highlighted the importance of Exodus chapter 34, verses 6 and 7. That's another unifying feature. Reference to Exodus 34 is another catch word between Jonah and Nahum that links these two books up.

Okay. All right. Thematically, what kind of unity do we see in the minor prophets beyond the things that we've talked about? And I want to emphasize, and I just want to highlight two things and spend a little bit of time tracing them through these books.

I think one of the major themes and emphases in the minor prophets is that they are going to deal with the central issue of how do people respond to the word of God as it's communicated by the prophets. And again, we have this three to 400-year period, the Assyrian crisis, Babylonian crisis, and Persian crisis. How did the people respond to God? There are only limited examples of repentance, or there are examples of just outright rejection of the word of God.

As a result of that, this judgment is going to fall. How do we understand this three to 400-year period of Old Testament history? Well, it's a story not of God failing Israel, but it's the story of how Israel has not responded to the word of God. And so, the issue of repentance and how do people listen to the word of God? There is a living example, and I think a tangible example, looking at ways that the Old Testament canon connects together.

Jeremiah 18, if I announce disaster on a people and they turn and they repent and they get right with God, I will relent from sending the judgment. On the other hand, if I promise good to a group of people and they turn away from me and they disobey, I will turn that salvation into judgment. We have a living example of that in the minor prophets.

God sent a group of prophets. God sent Amos, Jonah, and Hosea, and based on how people responded to them, the people were spared or experienced judgment. God brought the Assyrians to the Northern Kingdom.

Micah preaches about judgment in the Southern Kingdom. The people obey. They respond.

Hezekiah listens, and judgment is temporarily halted. The Babylonian crisis, the day of the Lord, is coming. You need to get right.

You need to get ready. You need to be prepared for this. Judgment is coming.

And then, in the post-exilic period, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, you need to get busy rebuilding God's house. If you're ever going to enjoy his blessing, you've got to share his values and priorities. You've got to put an emphasis on worship.

You have to restore this place that is central to your relationship with God. The people respond and are blessed by that. But on the other hand, they're going to continue in their sinful ways.

Joel and Malachi are going to confront them about that, and as a result, the restoration is not complete. This whole pattern of judgment and salvation, based on response to the Word of God, is going to transfer to the time of Jesus. And Jesus is going to call the people of Israel to repentance.

And there's going to be another exile and more judgment because they don't fully respond. And all of this is ultimately going to culminate in the eschatological judgment and restoration when this pattern will finally culminate. But an overriding message in the book of the 12 as a whole is that here's a record for us to see, for us to examine how the people responded to the Word of God. A study of the minor prophets in the Book of the 12 that I would like to recommend, and if you want to look at this further, Jason LeCureux has written a book called *The Thematic Unity of the Book of the 12*.

He puts an emphasis on the idea that the word *shub*, the word to repent, or sometimes the word talking about God, restoring, *shub*, bringing his people back, returning them, restoring their fortunes. He believes that that is one of the key themes, key ideas, and key terms that are used in the minor prophets. And so as we work our way through the minor prophets, we're going to spend our time primarily looking at the individual messages and looking at the distinctive contribution of each of the minor prophets.

But we also have to look at what is the overriding larger message, this entire story, this kind of unfolding plot of what happens when people do not respond to the Word of God. Okay. I'd like to take a little bit of time to develop that and to trace that.

And again, this has helped me to read these books in a new way because I see the interconnections between the two of them. Hosea is the opening book of the minor

prophets of the Book of the 12. And Hosea is going to emphasize the fact that the prophet calls the people to repentance.

One of the things that I did last year when I was studying the minor prophets was to go through and highlight and bold all the places where the prophets call the people back to repentance. In the book of Hosea, there are three prominent places where Hosea calls the people to repent and to come back to God. First place, Hosea chapter 6, verses 1 to 3. The prophet says this: Come, let us return to the Lord.

There's our word, shew. Let us go back to the Lord, for he has torn us that he may heal us.

He has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After two days, he will revive us. On the third day, he will raise us up so that we may live before him.

So, God's going to bring this judgment. It's going to last for two days, but after that, God's going to restore us. Therefore, let's return to him.

Verse 3. Let us press on to know the Lord. His going out is as sure as the dawn. He will come up as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.

There's a blessing waiting for us if we will come back to God if we will return, and if we will repent of our sins. Chapter 12, verse 6. Hosea is going to say exactly the same thing. In chapter 12, verse 6, he says this: so you, by the help of your God, they're going to need God's help to do this, but by the help of your God, return.

Hold fast to love and to justice and wait continually for your God. I want you to come back to God, and I want you to demonstrate the characteristics of hesed and justice and trust in God, and that will be the reflection of the fact that you truly have repented. Chapter 14, verses 1 to 3. Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God.

The word shub, again, right at the very beginning, in the imperative. Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Okay? Come back to God.

All right, here's how you do it. Take with your words. Okay? Bring a prayer of confession.

Formulate in your mind and in your heart what you need to say to God and return to the Lord. Say to Him, Take away all iniquity, accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls and the vows of our lips. Assyria will not save us.

We will not ride on horses. We will say no more, our God, to the work of our hands. In you, the orphan finds mercy.

Okay? The prophet says, Take words and return to God, and he's worried that the people don't know how to say those words, so he gives them the words to say. And says, Take away our sin and restore us, and we confess our idolatry and our false trust in these other gods and these other countries. God, save us.

And so, this is not in the Book of the 12 just Hosea's message to 8th century Israel. This is the prevailing message of the Book of the 12 continually and constantly for the people of God. As the opening book of these 12, this idea of repentance is right at the very forefront.

Okay? But the plot and the tension and the struggle is, is this repentance ever going to come about? As we go into these other 11 books, is this really going to happen? And what Hosea is going to say is that along with this idea, I'm calling the people back to repentance. I'm calling them to return to God. The other side of this is that the prophet is saying Israel isn't able to do what God is telling them to do.

Chapter 5, verses 4 to 6, their deeds do not permit them to return to the Lord their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they do not know the Lord. They have sinned for so long.

This prevailing attitude of these commitment to these other gods, these love for things in the place of a genuine, sincere love for God, they have gripped their heart so much they can't return to God. Hosea is going to say in chapter 11 verse 7, you know, are these people ever going to come back to God? That's the struggle. That's the intention.

And God says, my people are bent on turning away from me. And so now he takes the word shub that's used in a positive way, come back to God, and now it's used in a negative way, talking about they're turning away to the wrong things. My people are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, he will not raise them up at all.

And so, we're here, and I'm going to end the lesson at this point, and I want us to think about this. The tension in the minor prophets is raised right here at the very beginning. The opening idea is how people will respond to the word of God. Hosea says God's people are not able to do that.

I'm reminded of the fact that Hosea likely had a very formative influence on the prophet Jeremiah and his message. And remember in the opening chapters of Jeremiah, constantly return, return, return. William Holliday has talked about the fact that shub is a keyword in the book of Jeremiah.

But Jeremiah says, Jeremiah 17:1, my people have their sin inscribed on their heart with a pin that has a diamond point on it. It's written into their character. They can't return to God.

Ultimately, God is going to have to do something for them. And so, in our next lesson, we're going to look at how does this work its way through the Minor Prophets? How does this tension get resolved? But right at the very beginning, we're understanding these 12 books have a unified message and the message is, how will God's people respond to him? A reminder to us, I hope, that God's word and how we listen to it is an issue of life and death. And for those who have been called to teach it, to preach it, to share the gospel with others, it's a matter of life and death.

What we are doing matters and is important to God. We are reminded in these minor prophets that Israel's history was ultimately decided by the ways that they responded to God and to the message of his prophets. This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the minor prophets.

This is lecture number three on the overview of the book of the twelve, part one.