

Dr. Gary Yates, Book of the 12, Session 19, Micah, Introduction and Structure

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This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 19, Micah Introduction and Structure.

We've reached a point in our study of the minor prophets where we're going to be looking at the last of the Assyrian prophets.

Remember that in the Book of the 12, the span of their ministry covers three to 400 years. We have a group of prophets that ministered to the people of God during the Assyrian crisis. We've looked at the prophets in the Northern kingdom, Amos, Hosea, and Jonah.

We also have a prophet who ministers to Judah during this time of crisis as well, warning them of the judgment that is to come upon the Southern kingdom at the hands of the Assyrians. Then we have a group of Babylonian prophets during the Babylonian crisis, and then a group of prophets that God raises up even after the people have returned to the land. Before we begin our study of Micah, I would like to begin with just a few closing reflections on the book of Jonah and an interesting theological issue that we were not able to fully address in our last session.

But in Jonah, chapter four, remember we really have the punchline of the book. It's how does Jonah respond to God's deliverance of the Assyrians? A major part of the book is the contrast between Jonah's thanksgiving when God saves him, even though it is undeserved from death and the response that Jonah has when God saves an entire city that is not deserving of it when they are facing death and destruction. In his recent *Theology of the Old Testament*, Dr. Moberly addresses the issue of why Jonah has a problem with divine mercy. Remember in Jonah chapter four, verse two, why did Jonah not want to go to Nineveh? This is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you're a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from disaster.

Jonah objects to God, showing the same mercy and compassion to the Ninevites that he has shown to the people of Israel. Dr. Moberly raises the question, why does Jonah have a problem with God showing mercy to the Ninevites? Possibly, what we're looking at is a simple idea that Jonah is selfish and only concerned about his own needs. In that chapter, we do see a petulant, pouting, selfish prophet, but actually, the issue seems to go deeper than that.

Some people have argued, and some theologians looking at Jonah have argued, that Jonah has a problem with unfulfilled prophecy or the idea of contingent prophecy. If

Jonah goes and prophesies that Nineveh is going to be destroyed, then if that doesn't happen, it's going to mess up his batting average. Remember that a true prophet of God was supposed to always be accurate in the things that they prophesied.

Perhaps Jonah is struggling with the contingency of prophecy. But I think that's not really a good explanation of this because there seems to be throughout the Old Testament an understanding of this idea that the prophets are merely announcing the shadow of things that will occur unless there is the kind of response to the prophecy that God is seeking. Even when there is an absolute, somewhat kind of unconditional statement, 40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed, there seems to be an understanding of prophecy throughout Israel's history that if there is repentance, there's always the possibility of God relenting and not sending the judgment.

So, I don't think it's simply a case of Jonah being selfish. That may be part of it. I don't really think it's a case of Jonah struggling with the idea of contingent or unfulfilled prophecies or Jonah being labeled as a false prophet.

Others have said that Jonah has a problem with the fact that mercy and God showing mercy and compassion to people ends up creating an impetus for people to presume on God's grace and not to live the kind of moral lives that they should. It's almost like the idea in Romans, should we continue in sin that grace may abound? If God is too merciful, then what motivation do people have to really live moral, decent, and righteous lives? If we champion the mercy, compassion, and grace of God too much, it's going to become subversive of moral effect. The prophet Malachi is going to have to address this issue in Malachi chapter 3, verses 14 to 18.

The people there, as Malachi interacts with them, what good is it to do what's right or do what's just? God doesn't reward people on the basis of their righteousness or unrighteousness. So, is that the issue? I think when we look at Jonah chapter 4 verse 2, however, the major issue that seems to be pushing this agenda in Jonah's mind is that there is the dilemma in this book, as we've already talked about, between the mercy of God and the justice of God. If God shows mercy to the Ninevites who have been the oppressors of the Israelites, how can the people of Israel, and how can the people of God ever know that they can trust in God to make things right? In a sense, Jonah is raising a significant issue.

Kaufman says Jonah is not outraged at God because he's a narrow-minded zealot but because he's a champion of divine justice. Now that God has spared the Ninevites and now that God has shown compassion to them, how can the people of God know that they can trust in God's justice? Jonah also knows that as he goes to Nineveh and if God spares the Assyrians and the Ninevites, this is going to have a significant impact on the future of the people of Israel. If the book of Jonah is composed and put together after the time of the exile and put in its final form after the time of the

exile, the editors and people responsible for its final composition already know what actually happened.

So, there is a serious moral issue that's being raised at the end of the book of Jonah. Jonah is not just a petulant and pouting prophet, he's really raising a great question. He's raising a question that would be serious and important for us to address in an ethics class or a philosophy class or a theology class.

In light of that, it's ironic that as Jonah raises this concern, the way that he's portrayed in the book is simply he's only concerned about his own needs. He's petulant; he's pouting, he's childish, and he's more concerned about his own sunburn than he is about the welfare and the well-being of 120,000 people. If Jonah is raising this kind of serious issue, why is he portrayed in such a satirical way? I think part of the answer that grows out of that is that God wants to say to Jonah, and I think ultimately to the readers of the book, that even though Jonah is raising a serious issue, when it comes to God's mercy, God is willing to show mercy even when it means that for a time divine justice has to be set aside.

Even though Jonah is raising a significant issue and a significant question, compared to the issue of God's mercy and his concern and care for the people of Nineveh, that concern has to take second place. So, the final application that I think we should take out of the book of Jonah is that this book should impress upon us in a deep way. It's something that we should take time, I think, to reflect on as we read it, is the depth and the wideness of God's mercy.

As we wrapped up the last session, we talked about the fact that the book of Jonah concludes with a rhetorical question. Should I not be concerned about Nineveh? Should I not pity this great city that has more than 120,000 people in it? Jonah, if you can't even care about that, could you at least care about the animals? It closes with this rhetorical question. We do not get Jonah's response.

Did he ever come around to God's point of view? But the important thing for this book as it stands in the canon is, are we going to come around to God's view or are we going to share the perspective of Jonah? So, I just want to remind us in sort of a final way that the book impresses upon us the depth and the wideness of the mercy of God. It gives us something to think about in terms of the God of the Old Testament that is very different from the way that God is often thought about as he's portrayed and reflected in the Old Testament, particularly in the prophets. A writer by the name of Virchel says this, thinking about how we reflect on what the book means to us.

Jonah stalked to his shaded seat and waited for God to come around to his way of thinking. God is still waiting for a host of Jonas in their comfortable houses to come

around to his way of thinking. So, we may look at Jonah and sort of snicker when we see the way that he's parodied and the satirical way that he's presented.

He's the antiprophet. He seems childish wanting to die because God has shown mercy to someone. But in what ways do our values and our priorities perhaps reflect the same kind of selfishness? We've received the mercy of God.

We should want to extend that to others. As we wrap Jonah up and think about the wideness of God's mercy, I want us to just be aware of the fact that I think many of us have a tendency to draw a circle around either certain individuals or groups of people. We think that there are people who are inside the circle who are either within the realm of God's mercy or compassion or people who are legitimate objects of God's mercy or compassion, but we tend to put people on the outside of that.

If there was anyone that belonged on the outside of the circle, it was probably the Ninevites, with their violence and the things that they had done to the people of Israel. But what about Saul of Tarsus in the New Testament? God saved a terrorist who was his worst enemy. Do we put outside the circle people who are different from us that we believe are not worthy of the grace of God? Jonah asks us to think about those things.

Can we pray as believers for members of Al-Qaeda and ask for God to change their hearts? When Osama bin Laden was alive, did you, as a Christian, ever pray for him, and what did you pray for? Are there people like child molesters or rapists or people on death row, or people who hold radically different political ideologies that are not in line with Christianity? Do we believe that those people are outside the realm of God's mercy? Jonah certainly thought that the Ninevites were, and I think that we have a tendency to do that as well. I'll close with this. Russell Moore wrote a blog a couple of years ago and he reminds us of the power of God's grace to change people that often we feel are unchangeable or maybe unworthy of God's mercy.

And he says this: as Christians, we need to reflect upon the fact that the next Billy Graham might be drunk and passed out in a fraternity house at this moment. The next Jonathan Edwards may be driving in front of you with a Darwin Fish bumper sticker on his car. The next Spurgeon may be making posters for a gay pride march right now or be a zealous LGBT advocate.

The next Mother Teresa maybe managing an abortion clinic right now. God has the power to change and transform. His grace, his compassion, and his love have transformed us, and God can do that even to the worst of his enemies or to the people who, in our minds, are on the outside of the circle of God's compassion.

And so, I love the book of Jonah for the way that it reminds us of the wideness and the depth and the mercy of God. I've experienced that in my own life. I know that

God is a God of forgiveness when I look at my own sinfulness and my own selfishness and corruption.

And as a Christian, in light of the fact that I've received that, I want to see that shared with other people. So that's an important application, I think, in closing reflection on the book of Jonah. So now I'd like to shift gears and I'd like to begin to look at the final of the Assyrian prophets, the prophet Micah, who ministers in the southern kingdom.

In the opening verse of Micah, we see the historical background and a superscription telling us about the time and date of his ministry. And it says, the word of the Lord that came to Micah of Moresheth, God calls him out of this small village from Moresheth Gath outside of Jerusalem and calls him to be a prophet and a spokesman. We see God raising up these individuals as prophets from all kinds of different backgrounds.

That's an interesting observation. But he was a prophet in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, the kings of Judah, who saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. So, he was a prophet to the southern kingdom of Judah during the reign of three kings.

Jotham, who reigns from 750 or 740 to 732. Ahaz, who reigns from 735 to 715. The reigns of these fathers and sons are going to overlap at times here.

Then there was the reign of Hezekiah from 715 to 686. So, what that means is that Micah ministers to Judah during this Assyrian crisis. It also means that he has the opportunity to minister during the reign of one of Judah's most wicked kings, King Ahaz, and also during the reign of one of Judah's most godly kings, his son Hezekiah.

Sometimes, it's interesting to see the contrast between fathers and sons in both directions in the Old Testament. Micah is a contemporary of the prophets we've studied in the northern kingdom. Amos and Hosea are preaching about the Assyrian crisis to the people in the north.

Micah is preaching to those that are in the south. Micah is a contemporary in the south of the prophet Isaiah. And their ministries in many ways are running side by side of each other.

And we're going to look at some ways that their ministries and their messages complement and parallel one another. So, we've already looked at the historical background of the Assyrian crisis, and I'm not going to go through all of that. But I do want to touch on some specific ways that this crisis affected the southern kingdom of Judah and ultimately how that impacts the ministry and the message of the prophet Micah.

Remember that the Assyrian crisis begins in earnest in the eighth century in Israel with the rise of Tiglath-Pileser III. He comes to the throne in 745 BC. He re-energizes Assyria as a kingdom.

He re-energizes their military, their imperialistic designs and desires. And so he's going to turn his attention to the West and to the nations of Syria-Palestine. And particularly in terms of the Bible, the interest is on the effect this has for Israel and Judah.

Remember Paul Gilchrist's quote: it was Israel's apostasy that was the catalyst of Assyrian imperialism. And so as this begins to affect the northern kingdom, it is also going to have an impact on the southern kingdom. An important event that occurred in the years 734-732 is an event called the Syro-Ephraimite War.

I want to briefly just talk about that. The kings of Israel and Syria, who had been enemies for long periods during their history, are looking at the Assyrian crisis, looking at the strength and the might of Tiglath-Pileser's army. And they make a decision, and it's a very understandable military and political one, that if the kings of Syria and Palestine, or if they're ever going to survive this crisis, they're going to need to ally together and to form a coalition.

And so Pekah, the king of Israel, Rezin, the king of the Syrians or of Damascus, they are going to form a coalition. Together, they are going to try to pull their armies, their resources, and their military together and withstand the Assyrian onslaught. As they do that, they recognize the importance of also attempting to bring Judah, the southern kingdom of Judah, into this coalition and their king and their people and their resources and their military.

However, Ahaz, as they approach him and begin to pressure him to join this coalition, Ahaz was a wicked and an ungodly king, but he was also smart enough politically and militarily savvy enough to know that this coalition was not going to work. It was suicide to join this coalition, and so he refused to do that. As a result of that, the Syro-Ephraimite coalition, the king of Israel and the king of Syria, their resources, their armies, and their nations are significantly larger in Judah.

They are going to invade the land of Judah in an attempt to get Ahaz to join their coalition. At this time in Ahaz's kingdom and in his rule, the prophet Isaiah plays an important role. As this crisis is going on and as Ahaz is thinking about how we are going to withstand this and how can I deal with the onslaught of these two armies and two nations that are greater than my armies and my resources, he is out one day checking the water supply in Jerusalem.

He is trying to sort through all the political options. Isaiah comes to him and gives him an encouraging message in spite of the fact that Ahaz has been this ungodly king. He says, Ahaz, don't worry about the coalition.

Don't worry about Pekah and Rezin. They are nothing more than two smoldering stubs of firewood. God is about to snuff them out.

If you will trust in him, God will protect you. The city of Jerusalem doesn't belong to the king of Israel. It doesn't belong to the king of Syria.

They will not be successful in this invasion. However, Ahaz does not have a relationship with God. He does not have a history of trusting in God or walking with God, and he finds it impossible to believe this message.

How can I simply trust in God when I have these two powerful armies that are attacking me? So Isaiah is going to take this a step further and do something that God does not often do to individuals. He says to Ahaz, Ahaz, I'll tell you what, if you can't believe this message, ask God, and God will give you a sign. You can make it as high as the heavens.

You can make it as big as you want. You can ask God to make it snow in July. God will give you a confirming sign and will validate this message for you.

This is an incredible offer. However, Ahaz says, I will not ask God. I will not put him to the test.

He sounds very pious, but the reality is he just simply doesn't trust God. As a result of that, Isaiah turns around and gives him a sign that is this mixed message of both judgment and salvation. Ahaz, instead of trusting in God, does something that displeases the Lord.

He instead appeals to the king of Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser, to come and help him. So instead of joining the coalition against Assyria that Israel and the king of Damascus have initiated and instigated, Ahaz instead appeals for the Assyrians to come and help him. The Assyrian king is more than happy to do that.

When he comes down to deal with the coalition that has been formed by Syria and Israel, he soundly defeats them. Damascus is essentially destroyed. Really, for the last ten years of their existence, Israel becomes really not much more than a rump state that is gathered around the city of Samaria.

There were heavy losses during this Syro-Ephraimite battle that went on in 734 to 732 as Syria and Israel invaded Judah. There were serious losses on both sides. Ahaz failed to trust God.

He was one of Judah's most wicked kings, but as a result of the fact that he did not withstand the Assyrians, at this point, Judah is going to survive. However, because of his lack of faith in God, Judah has now become an Assyrian vassal. They are under the thumb of the Assyrian king and they're going to be controlled and dominated and be forced to pay tribute.

Ahaz totally capitulated to the Assyrians. He brought in Assyrian forms of worship into the Jerusalem temple and he did everything to show to the Assyrians that he was going to be a worthwhile treaty or worthwhile vassal. He was not going to rebel against them.

So, Micah is beginning and carrying out his ministry during the reigns of Jotham and Ahaz and preaching about the judgment of God that God is going to bring against Judah during this time. Ahaz himself, in many ways, was part of the problem and part of the reasons why God's judgment was going to fall. During this time, a few years later, after the Syro-Ephraimite coalition and after the war takes place within ten years, the northern kingdom of Israel is going to fall.

Samaria falls after the three-year siege in 725 to 722. As a prophet in the south, Micah prophesied the fall of Samaria and the northern kingdom. Talking about God coming down as a warrior, the earth is melting, he's going to pour out his wrath and his anger.

Micah 1 talks about that and says in Chapter 1, verse 5 that all of this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? So, Micah, through the prophetic insight that God has given to him, sees the fall of the northern kingdom, but Micah is also warning about the fact that there is going to be a judgment that is going to fall on Judah as well. In Micah chapter 1, verses 10 to 16, Micah pictures the Assyrian army marching through the nation of Judah and capturing and taking away as exiles the people of Judah and the cities and towns of Judah.

There would be violence, warfare, invasion, and bloodshed in those cities, just as it was in the north. Probably his most famous message of judgment in terms of the severity of the judgment that God was going to bring is that Micah announces that this judgment is going to come to the city of Jerusalem and that the city of Jerusalem is going to be destroyed and the temple mount is going to be reduced to a heap of rubble. He says this in chapter 3, verse 12, talking about the corrupt leaders.

Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field, Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height. After the fall of the northern kingdom in 722, Micah warned the people in the south, look, you have evaded and avoided this judgment that has fallen on the house of Israel, but don't

think that you are out of the woods. The same judgment that came to the north is also coming to the south.

Remember that Ahaz, one of Judah's most ungodly kings, when he dies, he is succeeded by his son Hezekiah. In contrast to the ungodly character of Ahaz, Hezekiah is going to be remembered as one of Judah's most godly kings. In fact, in the book of Kings, the book of Kings is going to talk about three kings from the house of David who were incomparable in certain good qualities and attributes.

Solomon, there was no one like him in terms of his wisdom. With Hezekiah, there was no one like him in terms of his faith. In light of what we see Hezekiah going through here in just a couple of minutes, we'll understand why that's true.

The other incomparable king is King Josiah. There was no one like him in terms of his fidelity and obedience to the commands that God had given. But this crisis has reached the south.

Remember, under Ahaz, Judah is a vassal of Assyria. But when Hezekiah comes to the throne, he decides and makes a decision, and it has a huge impact upon his reign that he is not going to capitulate to the Assyrians in the same way that his father did. Now, part of this is simply political.

He doesn't want to live under the domination of the Assyrians. But there's also an underlying religious conviction and faithfulness to the Lord that leads to this idea that he wants the people of God to be independent and not under the influence of the pagan Assyrians. At the death of Sargon, the Assyrian king, in the year 705, Hezekiah sees his opportunity.

He sees the opportunity. He has looked for an opportunity to overthrow Assyrian control of Judah. As often happened with vassals when the overlord and the king died, Hezekiah used this as an opportunity to rebel against the Assyrians and stop paying tribute. Again, the positive side of this is that he wants to bring the people back to God.

Sometimes, the negative side that's going to come out of this is that Hezekiah is going to be tempted to rely on military resources, his army, his political initiatives, and that type of thing. That struggle is going to go on in Hezekiah's life in spite of the fact that he was a man who ultimately trusts God. That wasn't an easy decision to make.

Now, as a result of his refusal to pay tribute as a result of his rebellion against the Assyrians, the Assyrian king who succeeds Sargon II, Sennacherib, is going to respond to that rebellion. Eventually, he's going to invade the land of Judah to try to bring Hezekiah under his control. The Assyrian records are going to tell us that in this

invasion, Sennacherib captured 46 cities within the country of Judah, and he says, I trapped Hezekiah like a bird in the cage.

That's exactly what the prophet Isaiah is talking about in Isaiah chapter 1. That's the setting and the context for the beginning and key parts of Isaiah's ministry as well because it's going to say that in Isaiah 1.8, the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. So, 46 cities were captured in Judah. Jerusalem is left standing but the kingdom of Judah is in some significant trouble at this point because of just the overwhelming strength and power of the Assyrian army.

One of the 46 cities that Sennacherib and his forces ultimately conquered after a significant siege was the city of Lachish, which is a city that was about 25 or 30 miles to the southwest of Jerusalem. It was an important military garrison or fortress that was designed to protect Jerusalem from enemy armies that would march along the coast and then invade inland. When Lachish fell, that was a significant military accomplishment for Sennacherib and the Assyrian army.

After this invasion was over, Sennacherib went back to his palace and decorated the walls of that palace with reliefs reflecting the different things as he captured the city of Lachish. This was a big deal. But it was also a big deal for the security of Jerusalem because this meant that now Jerusalem itself was open and vulnerable to the attacks of the Assyrians.

Initially, Sennacherib had demanded that Hezekiah pay tribute to him as a way of relieving the pressure and bringing this invasion to an end. However, when Hezekiah does pay tribute, and it's a little difficult to figure out some of the progression of the historical events here, and exactly why all of this takes place, it appears that Sennacherib changes his mind. Some people have seen two different invasions of Sennacherib.

Others have argued that Hezekiah pays the tribute to pay him off, and then Sennacherib decides to invade anyway. We don't know exactly the progression of the chronology, but for some reason, Sennacherib changes his mind and decides to conquer the city of Jerusalem as well. The Assyrian army comes down.

They surround the city of Jerusalem. More than 180,000 troops are there. They are going to lay siege to Jerusalem in the same way that they have laid siege to Lachish.

This is a serious thing because they would surround the city. They would starve it out. They would deprive the people of their food and water.

Then, ultimately, when it was all said and done and they took the city, they would kill the people that had led the resistance or lead the people away as prisoners.

Jerusalem was in big trouble. Sennacherib sends his military commander, his Rabshakeh, and he demands the absolute unconditional surrender of the city of Jerusalem.

The Assyrian commander taunts the soldiers who are responsible for the defense of Jerusalem and says, look, don't listen to Hezekiah. Don't continue this resistance against us. You will not succeed.

Ultimately, you are going to be starved to death. You are going to be reduced to cannibalism. You are the ones that are going to have to experience the horrors of this siege.

Don't let Hezekiah deceive you. Theologically, they make an arrogant boast, and they say, don't think that the God of Israel or the God of Jerusalem is going to protect you. All of the idols and images and gods of these other people that we have conquered haven't been able to withstand us.

They haven't stood against the power of the Assyrian gods. The image of Samaria didn't protect them. Don't think that your god or your image or your idols are going to protect you either.

So, at this point in this dilemma, in this crisis, Hezekiah is at a place where he doesn't really have too many other options. Hezekiah makes the choice to throw himself on God and God's mercy and God's help. This individual who has struggled between following the advice of his military advisors and following the inclinations of his own military plans decides, and he makes a great decision here, the right decision that we can always make, to fully and to completely and to exclusively trust in the Lord.

Hezekiah does something very significant here. He takes the letter, the diplomatic letter that has come from the Assyrians demanding his surrender, taunting God, blaspheming God, and he takes that letter to the Jerusalem temple, and he pours out his heart in prayer to God, and he lays the letter in front of God and says, Lord, I want you to read this. I want you to notice and to take note of what the Assyrian king has said.

He has blasphemed you. He has said that his gods are greater than you. He has said that you are not able to protect your people.

Lord, we are surrounded by this enemy, and we need your help. And in response to that prayer and in response to this act of faith, which contrasts in a significant way to the way that his father capitulated and refused to trust the Lord, God promises to save the people. And that contrast between Ahaz's lack of faith and Hezekiah's trust and belief that God would save him and deliver him in the midst of the crisis is a major part of the book of Isaiah.

The two narrative sections that are found in the book of Isaiah, in Isaiah chapters 7 and 8, the story of Ahaz's lack of faith, Isaiah chapter 36 to 39, and Hezekiah's ultimate trust in God in spite of the fact that he made mistakes as well and often tried to bring himself into military coalitions. Hezekiah, in contrast to his father, ultimately trusts God. Isaiah was the prophet who counseled him and who ultimately advised him during this time of crisis.

Because of Hezekiah's faith, the Lord says to him through Isaiah, the Assyrians will not take this city. They will not capture Jerusalem. I will not allow this to happen.

They will not fire a single arrow into the city. The story goes that in the middle of the night, the angel of the army goes out and destroys and slaughters the Assyrian army. Again, without the people of Israel having to defend themselves or having to protect the city.

Sennacherib gets back on his horse, goes back to his homeland, and ultimately, several years later, is assassinated by his own sons in the temple of his God. So, God was able to protect his people and deliver them. He did that because of the faith of Hezekiah.

Critical scholars will often look at this story of the angel of the Lord destroying the Assyrian army and they will view this as something that was simply legendary. But whatever happened here, we do know this fact. Sennacherib did not capture the city of Jerusalem and because of Hezekiah's faith, the city of Jerusalem was delivered.

So, we look at that and we say, wow, Isaiah had a significant role in protecting and helping the nation of Judah to be spared from the destruction and the judgment that came upon the northern kingdom. Isaiah did play a significant role. Isaiah, as a prophet, was an insider who had access to the royal family.

Tradition tells us that he was even related to the house of David. So, he's an insider. When Hezekiah needs spiritual advice, Isaiah is the man that he's going to contact.

On the other hand, the prophet Micah, who is ministering during this time, he's kind of the epitome of an outsider. Instead of being invited to advise the king at the palace, I imagine that Micah is preaching most of his messages in the streets of Jerusalem. He's a country preacher from Moresheth Gath.

He does not have the connections to the royal family that Isaiah did. However, here's the interesting thing. In the next century, as the people of Judah and as Jeremiah himself look back on the history of what happened and the reasons why Jerusalem and Judah were ultimately spared from God's judgment in contrast to the northern

kingdom, they are not going to focus primarily on the ministry of Isaiah and the advice that he gave to Hezekiah.

They're going to talk about the preaching of Micah and the spiritual impact that the preaching of Micah had upon King Hezekiah. I'd like us to look at that in Jeremiah chapter 26. Remember, Micah, was preaching this relentless message that said Jerusalem is going to be invaded; it's going to be reduced to rubble.

Even the mountain of the temple is going to be nothing more than a pile of rubble after God's judgment is completed. As the Assyrian army had surrounded the city, it was not hard to figure out what Micah was preaching about and what Micah was talking about. In spite of the fact that Micah was an outsider and in spite of the fact that we have no historical records that he was ever invited to the palace or that he ever had any direct contact with Hezekiah, when the prophet Jeremiah and the people of Judah in the century that follows when they look back as to why God spared Judah from destruction and exile at this time, they're going to remember the preaching of Hezekiah.

In chapter 26, Jeremiah goes to the temple, preaches his temple sermon, warns the people, and says, look, God is about to destroy Jerusalem. Don't think that the temple is going to protect you. Remember what he did at Shiloh and how he destroyed the city that was the home of his sanctuary there.

God's going to do the same to you if you do not change your ways. As a result of that, the people are going to demand the priests, the leaders, the prophets who hear this message, and they are going to demand that Jeremiah be put to death. And it's not simply the idea that Jeremiah's message is unpopular for them.

Part of the problem is they look at Jeremiah as a false prophet because how could any true prophet of God not affirm that the Lord dwelled in Jerusalem and that he would protect his city? And they may have even looked back at what happened in 701 when God had delivered Jerusalem from the Assyrians and said, look, God delivers and protects his city. If you're talking to us about the possible destruction of the temple, you must be a false prophet, and you deserve to die. Jeremiah says, look, you can do whatever you want with me, but just remember that if you put me to death, I have simply told you what God has told me to tell you, and if you kill me, you will be bringing innocent blood on yourself.

At some point in the debate and discussion and the proceedings that are going on, there are some people who stand up that are leaders in the land, and it says in chapter 26 verse 16, then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, this man does not deserve the sentence of death for he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God. Hey, they affirm, we can't put this man to death. He's told us the word of God.

He's a true spokesman of God. And to make their case and to prove their argument, the prophet that they recall is the prophet Micah. And then it says, certain elders of the land arose and spoke to all the assembled people saying, Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, and said to all the people of Judah, thus says the Lord of hosts, Zion shall be plowed as a field, Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

Now, if I gave you a quiz right now and asked you where's that reference from, hopefully you'd remember. It's Micah, chapter 3, verse 12. So that's a message.

And just like with Jonah, it is a message of sort of absolute unconditional judgment. Jonah says to Nineveh, 40 days and Nineveh will be overturned. But remember, the people repented, and God relented.

So, there's this just sort of absolute unconditional message of judgment. Micah doesn't say, look, Zion's going to be plowed like a field and the temple mount reduced to a heap of rubble, unless you repent and get things right with God. But again, part of the prophecy in Israel and Judah was this realization that even when a prophet makes these absolute statements of judgment, there is always the possibility that God will relent and change his mind.

And that's what happens with the ministry of Micah. So, these elders go on, and they continue, and they say, all right, now that was Micah's message. Now let's think about Hezekiah's response.

Did Hezekiah, the king of Judah and all of Judah, put him to death? Did he not fear the Lord and entreat the favor of God and did not the Lord relent of the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great disaster upon ourselves. So, they say, hey, let's go back. Let's remember Micah preached this message, and Hezekiah listened to what the prophet said, and he repented; he got right with God.

And so, in a very real sense, it was the preaching of Micah, as well as the preaching of Isaiah, that played a major role in the sparing of Judah from the destruction and exile that came upon the Northern kingdom in the eighth century BC. So, we need to be careful of our use of the term minor prophet. If we use that term to think that, in some ways, these prophets are lesser than the major prophets like Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah.

Here is a clear example where in God's eyes, the ministry of one was just as important and significant as the ministry of the other. And I think it's a great encouragement. It's a great illustration of the fact that God raises these prophets up

from all kinds of different situations and circumstances and backgrounds and environments.

And God can use them in great ways wherever they come from. Isaiah is an insider who has access to the king and to the palace and we see him interacting there. We don't necessarily see that with Micah, but both of them are used by God.

And I think sometimes when we look at ministry, we see people in our culture, in the evangelical world, they are significant pastors, they pastor mega-churches, they write books, they are people that are consulted by the media, they have done great works for God, and God has blessed their ministries often in very significant ways. But one of the things that we have to keep in mind is that in terms of God's scorecard, sometimes the people who have made a real impact upon the culture or the world may not always be the people that we recognize or see at the forefront. There may be faithful pastors and missionaries and disciples and people who minister on college campuses and reach out to students or people who plant churches in parts of the world that we've never heard of.

Those people may play as significant a role in the kingdom as the people that are at the forefront, and that we know through the media or through their large churches God's scorecard is not the same as ours. So, we have the ministry of the prophet Micah and Micah warning the people of the judgment that was coming was a significant factor in the sparing of the nation of Judah. Now, as we prepare to look at the book and walk through the book again, trying to understand the structure of this book and how it's put together, it's not always easy for us to do that as modern readers.

So, I'd like to talk about the structure of Micah and the way this book is laid out. Just as we saw in the book of Hosea and just as we see in many of the prophetic books, the alternation between the prophet's messages of judgment and salvation are an important thing that help us to understand the way that the book is laid out. Now, there's a lot of discussion.

There are a lot of alternate opinions about the book of Micah. I'm going to try to just give us a very simple one here that I think has helped me to make sense of the book. We have three major sections of the book that are all identified by an imperative given at the beginning of these sections to hear the word of the Lord.

For example, in chapter 1, verse 2, hear you peoples, all of you, pay attention on earth and all that's in it. So, Micah called the whole world to listen to the message. Chapter 3, verse 1, I said, hear you heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel.

And then in chapter 6, there's hear what the Lord says, arise and plead your case before the mountains. So, this call to hear the prophetic word, stressing the

importance of the message, is a structural device that I think helps us to see these three major sections. The structure that I'm unfolding and developing here is the one that Leslie Allen provides in his book in the New International Commentary on Micah.

You can look at this in more detail if you want to see that. What happens as we compare these three sections is that each section contains a message of judgment that is followed by a word of salvation. And so, we have that in chapters 1 and 2, 3 to 5, and 6 to 7. Now, in the first section, we have a fairly extended message of judgment.

And then we have this very brief message that God is going to reverse that, chapter 2, verses 12 to 13. Here's what's going to happen after the judgment is over. I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob, and I will gather the remnant of Israel.

I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like a flock in the pasture, a noisy multitude of men. He who opens the breach goes up before them. They break through and pass the gate going out of it.

Their king passes on before them, the Lord at their head. And so he's going to reassemble the people. He's going to bring them back after exile like a flock of sheep.

They're going to be great in number, and they're going to have a king. God is going to bring judgment, but God is going to reverse that judgment. In the third section of the book, we basically have the same thing.

We have a fairly long and extensive message of judgment that goes from chapter 6, verse 1 until chapter 7, verse 7. However, at the end of that section, we have a closing promise of salvation. Micah says in chapter 7, verse 7, But as for me, I will look to the Lord. I will wait for the God of my salvation, and my God will hear me.

Rejoice not over me, O my enemy. When I fall, I shall rise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.

And so, the Lord is ultimately going to vindicate and deliver his people. The Lord is going to bring about a reversal of Judah's present condition. Instead of Judah and Israel being the ones who are humiliated, the enemies that have defeated and subjugated Israel are the ones that are going to be humiliated.

So, in the first section of the book, chapters 1 and 2, there is a long message of judgment and a short message of salvation. The same thing is in the third section of the book: the long message of judgment and a short message of salvation. Then in the middle of the book, again, we have this alternation between judgment and salvation.

However, in the middle of the book, which I think is the place where, in terms of structure, we're really to focus our attention on what we have, there is we have a short message of judgment. And then we have a long and extended promise of salvation. Two of the most important and most significant promises, not just in the book of Micah, but in all of the Old Testament prophetic literature, are found here because we have a powerful, beautiful portrait, a salvation portrayal of the future glories, peace, and justice that will prevail at Zion, chapter 4 verses 1 to 6. We also have a significant and important messianic prophecy in Micah's chapter 5, verse 2. And so in this passage in Micah chapter 4, it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills, and the people will flow to it.

And many nations shall come and say, come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob. And so, in the future, instead of the nations coming to Zion to attack it and to assault it, and to destroy the city, they are going to come, and they're going to come to learn the ways of the Lord, to worship him and to honor him. And God is going to rule over the nations.

They're going to beat their swords into plowshares. And this is going to be a kingdom where there is incredible peace. It is a reversal of what is going on in the present.

There is also going to be a king who will reign over Israel and all of Israel, the northern and the southern kingdoms that have been reunited. And in chapter 5, verse 2, you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be a ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. And he will be the one who leads the people.

He will be the one who brings about this kingdom of peace. So, in the middle section of the book, instead of there being a long message of the present situation and the exile and the judgment that God is going to bring against them, there is an extended promise of salvation. And in the middle section of this book, and right in the middle here, this is what is to be the focus of our attention.

That God is ultimately going to reverse these situations and these conditions. Now, as we look at these three sections of judgment and salvation, what we are going to find is that as the prophet moves from judgment to salvation, one of the things that happens in all of these things is that salvation is not just a general promise of future blessing and deliverance, but the future salvation is going to directly reverse the conditions of judgment that are described in the previous part of the section. So, in chapters 1, verse 1, to chapter 2, verse 10, there is going to be an Assyrian invasion.

There is going to be an onslaught. It is going to happen to Samaria. It is going to happen to Jerusalem.

But in chapter 2, verses 12 to 13, God is going to bring back the exiles, and they are going to be like a numerous noisy flock that are going to pass by before the Lord. It directly overturns the conditions of exile. The same thing is in this extended prophecy and extended passage of the hope for Israel's future in the middle section of the book.

In chapter 3, verse 12, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height. The mountain of the Lord is going to be brought low. It is going to be nothing but a wooded height.

It is going to be a barren, abandoned place. We have a direct reversal of that in chapters 4, verses 1 and 2. The mountain of the house of the Lord will become the highest mountain on the face of the earth. I don't know that we are talking about something literal here where Mount Zion is going to become like Mount Everest, but it is a poetic way of describing the glory and the importance and significance that Jerusalem will have because it will be the center of God's kingdom.

The dismantling of Jerusalem and the lowering of the Temple Mount in chapter 3, verse 12, is directly reversed by the exaltation of the Temple Mount in chapter 4. The corrupt leadership in chapter 3 that brings about this judgment is going to be replaced by a new David who will restore the Davidic dynasty. God doesn't just save his people, and he directly reverses the conditions of judgment and exile. And then again, as we go to the third section of the book, again, the salvation that God brings directly reverses and overturns the judgment that the people are going to experience.

In the first part of chapter 7, the prophet says: Woe is me, for I have become as when the summer fruit has been gathered, as when the grapes have been gleaned. There is no cluster to eat, no first-ripe fig that my soul desires. The godly have perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among mankind, and they all wait in blood and practice violence and injustice.

The prophet mourns the condition of Jerusalem and Judah in the present. Woe is me because Jerusalem has become like a grape cluster with no fruit on it. Jerusalem is ultimately going to be completely wiped out.

Beyond that, there are no righteous people in the land. There is a tone of mourning in the first part of chapter 7. However, in chapter 8, as the message begins to turn to joy and rejoicing and celebration, Rejoice not over me, O my enemy. So, the mourning at the first part of chapter 7 is turned to rejoicing in the second part of chapter 7. So, there's a consistent pattern here, not just where these three sections

move from judgment to salvation, but there are specific ways that the promises of salvation directly reverse and overturn the conditions of exile.

One final thing to point out about this structure. In every one of these promises of salvation, a keyword that is found there is the word remnant. In chapter 2, verse 12, we have a statement about the remnant that God is going to provide and deliver for his people.

I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob, I will gather the remnant of Israel. The word remnant simply means survivors, the leftovers. The word remnant provides hope because that means that the people of God are not going to be completely wiped out in this judgment.

Chapter 4, verse 7 says this, And the lame, those that have been crippled and injured and hurt and harmed by this exile, I will make the lame, I will make them the remnant, and those who have cast off a strong nation, and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and evermore. And so, they have been made lame and crippled and injured and weak by the exile. They are ultimately going to become a remnant and a great nation as the Lord saves them.

Chapter 5, verses 7 and 8, Then the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples, like dew from the Lord, like showers on the grass, which delay not for a man, nor wait for the children of man. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep. And so, this weakened nation that has been devastated by its enemies, that has been put under the thumb of the Assyrians, and that goes through all the horrors of warfare, ultimately they will become a great and powerful nation once again as God fulfills his covenant promises to the people of Israel.

Finally, in the last section of the book, we have the final use of the word remnant. It says there, In that day they will come to you from the cities of Egypt and from Egypt to the river, from sea to the sea, from mountain to mountain, and the Lord is going to bless, and the Lord is going to build up the remnant of Israel. And so, there is a focus on the survivors that will come out of this. And actually, the place where we have the final use of the word remnant is in chapter seven, verse 18.

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity, passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? Now, when Micah talked about the remnant and when Micah talked about their survivors, it in no way diminished the seriousness or the severity of his message, but it did promise to us, and it did promise to the people of God that after this time of judgment, there would be a time of salvation. The covenantal message of the prophets was that God was going to bring judgment against them and that judgment would take the form of military defeat and exile when there was

no repentance. But even the structure of the book of Micah, these three sections where there is judgment and salvation and the specific promise that God would restore a remnant, reminds us of the fact that God was faithful to his people.

God would keep his promises and God would one day ultimately restore them and make them again a great nation. We are going to see as we study the book of Micah, both the judgment of God as he brings the judgment of exile, the Assyrian invasion, but also the incredible hope and promise that the Lord gives to the people based upon his covenant faithfulness to them.

This is Dr. Gary Yates in his lecture series on the Book of the 12. This is lecture 19, Micah Introduction and Structure.