**Daniel and the Minor Prophets**

**Daniel**

The book of Daniel falls into three sections. The first (chapters 1– 6) consists of stories in which Daniel and his three companions are the heroes. The second (7– 12) is made up of revelations told by Daniel in the first person. The third (13– 14) contains short stories that are not found in the Hebrew/ Aramaic text of Daniel but only in the Greek and Latin versions. Jews and Protestant Christians do not accept these stories as canonical, but Protestants include them in the Apocrypha, a collection of ancient Jewish writings, which they consider edifying even if not inspired.

The different kinds of material in the three divisions of Daniel reflect the gradual growth of the book. The stories in chapters 1 through 6 are the oldest part and may originally have been independent stories. We know that the revelations were composed during the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus IV Epiphanes of Syria in 168– 164 bc. The “Additions” were added some time later, probably before the beginning of the Christian era.

The stories paint a picture of the life of Jewish exiles in Babylon. It is an ideal rather than a realistic picture, but it expresses hopes and defines acceptable behavior. There is a certain analogy between the situation of the Jews in a pagan world and the modern situation of Christians in a secular world, which makes the message of the tales still relevant today. This message has two facets: it affirms the possibility of life in a Gentile environment, and insists on the importance of fidelity to the essentials of the Jewish tradition.

Affirmation of the Gentile Environment

Daniel and his companions are taken into the service of the Babylonian king and are trained in “the language and literature of the Chaldeans.” They express no reservations about this training. Indeed they outshine the Babylonians at their own skills (1: 20). The point of chapter 2 is that Daniel can interpret the king’s dream when the Babylonian wise men fail, because of the assistance of his God. His superior ability to interpret mysteries is again in evidence in chapters 4 and 5.

The Importance of Fidelity

Despite their success at the pagan court, Daniel and his companions remain faithful to their Jewish religion. In chapter 1, they refuse to eat the king’s food because it is not kosher. (See the laws concerning clean and unclean food in chapter 11 of the book of Leviticus.) In chapter 3 the three youths refuse to worship the king’s statue at the risk of death, and in chapter 6 Daniel likewise refuses to depart from his custom of daily prayer even at the cost of being thrown into the lions’ den. In each case the Jews ultimately win the respect of their rulers and emerge more successful than before.

Daniel 1 through 6 conveys a sense that God is in control and that all will work out for the best. The kingdom of God can be exercised through the rule of pagan kings. True religion does not require any particular political system. This optimistic view of the world arose from the experience of Jews in foreign lands in much of the ancient world. It is similar to the liberal theology that has flourished in modern times wherever Christians or Jews have lived under tolerant political regimes. It is an attractive view of the world, which emphasizes the good in human nature, and is a viable theology in normal times.

A Symbolic Vision

Chapter 7 is one of the most famous and influential of all apocalyptic visions. In part it resembles Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in chapter 2: it describes four human kingdoms, which will be followed by a kingdom set up by God. The imagery, however, is very different. Instead of four metals, Daniel 7 describes four beasts that rise out of the sea. In biblical poetry the sea is often a symbol of chaos, of all that is opposed to God, and it is sometimes said to be inhabited by monsters (for instance, Is 27: 1: God “will slay the dragon in the sea”; compare Is 51: 9f). When chapter 7 in Daniel represents the pagan kingdoms as beasts from the sea, then the point is that they are rebellious and opposed to God. This represents a view of the pagan kingdoms, which is much more negative than anything in Daniel 1– 6. After the vision of the four beasts, Daniel sees a judgment scene in which an “Ancient of Days” sits on a throne, surrounded by thousands of angels, and the fourth beast is condemned to the fire (7: 9). Then “one like a son of man” appears on the clouds of heaven (7: 13). Christian tradition, beginning with the Gospels, identified this figure as Jesus Christ, but the passage could not have been understood in that way by Jews in the second century bc. Jewish tradition identified the “son of man” as the messiah.

Daniel 8 is a symbolic vision very similar to chapter 7.

Daniel 9. Chapter 9 also includes a remarkable prayer on the lips of Daniel. The prayer is of a type common in the postexilic period.

Daniel’s apocalyptic view of history is most fully laid out in chapters 10 through 12, which make up one long vision.

Daniel 13 and 14 are rightly labeled as an Appendix in the New American Bible, as they are independent stories in which Daniel happens to play a part. Susanna is placed before Daniel 1 in one Greek translation (that attributed to Theodotion), since Daniel appears there as a young boy, but there is no doubt that the story was originally independent.

*Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (p. 938-955). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.*

**Hosea**

Hosea, a prophet from the Northern Kingdom, preached in his homeland, which he addresses as Israel, Jacob or, frequently, Ephraim. Hosea began his mission in a period of prosperity, the last years of Jeroboam II (783– 743 b.c.). This was followed by a period of internal instability, with intrigues at the royal court leading to the assassination of several kings. Hosea witnessed the revival of Assyria, the Syro-Ephraimite war, and the numerous treaties the Israelite kings made with Egypt and Assyria to survive. Hosea’s long ministry (ca. 750– 725) seems to have ended before the capture of Samaria in 722/ 721.

The only information the text provides us about the life of Hosea concerns his marriage. Even if we cannot reconstruct what happened exactly, the text as it now stands speaks of three moments in the relationship: first love, separation, reunion. This marriage is a symbol of the covenant between the Lord and Israel. Hosea speaks about the first love, the short period of Israel’s loyalty in the desert, which was then followed by a long history of unfaithfulness lasting until his day. Hosea accuses Israel of three crimes in particular. Instead of putting their trust in the Lord alone, the people break the covenant: (1) by counting on their own military strength, (2) by making treaties with foreign powers (Assyria and Egypt), and (3) by running after the Baals, the gods of fertility. Israel thus forgets that the Lord is its strength, its covenant partner, and giver of fertility. This unfaithful behavior will lead to Israel’s destruction by Assyria, but God’s love will have the last word. The back and forth movement from doom to salvation is typical of the Book of Hosea.

*Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (p. 4872). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition*.

**Joel**

In the two speeches that make up this book, Joel uses an agricultural crisis to measure his audience’s knowledge of its God, warn them of a worse disaster if they ignore his preaching, and express his conviction that all faithful Judahites would someday enjoy a secure future. Although the superscription, or title (1: 1), does not place Joel’s preaching or the book’s composition in a specific historical context, internal evidence favors a postexilic date for its composition, probably 450– 400 b.c.

Inadequate winter rains and a spring locust infestation have devastated Judah’s grain fields, vineyards, and orchards. Because the people carry on with business as usual, unaware that this crisis is the work of the Lord in their midst, Joel fears that the Lord may soon deliver a death blow by withholding the rains that normally fall in the late autumn. However, Joel’s efforts to avert this crisis are successful. The first speech ends with Joel’s assurance that at the end of the next agricultural year the people will enjoy a superabundant harvest.

The second speech begins with a summary description (chap. 3) of the prophet’s hope that Judah’s God will one day destroy its enemies and make Jerusalem secure once and for all. This divine intervention will create a more inclusive community, cutting across boundaries of gender, class, and age. The rest of Joel’s second speech (chap. 4) uses the imagery of drought and locusts from the first speech and introduces the metaphor of a grape harvest and wine making to describe the attack of the Lord’s heavenly army on Judah’s enemies. In the renewal of Judah’s hillsides by the winter rains, the prophet sees the revitalization of the people because the Lord dwells with them.

*Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (pp. 4915-4916). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition*

**Amos**

Amos was a sheepbreeder of Tekoa in Judah, who delivered his oracles in the Northern Kingdom during the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II (786– 746 b.c.). He prophesied in Israel at the great cult center of Bethel, from which he was finally expelled by the priest in charge of this royal sanctuary (7: 10– 17). The poetry of Amos, who denounces the hollow prosperity of the Northern Kingdom, is filled with imagery and language taken from his own pastoral background. The book is an anthology of his oracles and was compiled either by the prophet or by some of his disciples.

The prophecy begins with a sweeping indictment of Damascus, Philistia, Tyre, and Edom; but the forthright herdsman saves his climactic denunciation for Israel, whose injustice and idolatry are sins against the light granted to her. Israel could indeed expect the day of the Lord, but it would be a day of darkness and not light (5: 18). When Amos prophesied the overthrow of the sanctuary, the fall of the royal house, and the captivity of the people, it was more than Israelite officialdom could bear. The priest of Bethel drove Amos from the shrine— but not before hearing a terrible sentence pronounced upon himself.

Amos is a prophet of divine judgment, and the sovereignty of the Lord in nature and history dominates his thought. But he was no innovator; his conservatism was in keeping with the whole prophetic tradition calling the people back to the high moral and religious demands of the Lord’s revelation. Amos’s message stands as one of the most powerful voices ever to challenge hypocrisy and injustice.

*Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (pp. 4933-4934). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.*

**Obadiah**

This book, the shortest among the twelve minor prophets, is a single twenty-one-verse oracle against Edom. Nothing is known of the author, although his prophecy against Edom, a neighbor and rival of Israel, indicates a date of composition sometime after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587b.c., when the Edomites apparently took advantage of the helpless people of Judah and Jerusalem (v. 11; Ps 137: 7). The relations and rivalries between Israel and Edom are reflected in oracles against Edom (Is 34; Ez 35) and in the stories of their ancestors, the brothers Jacob and Esau (Gn 25– 33).

The prophecy is a bitter cry for vengeance against Edom for its pride and its crimes. Mount Esau in Edom will be occupied and ravaged by the enemy, while Mount Zion will be restored to its former sanctity and security. The triumphant refrain of Israelite eschatology will be heard once more: “The kingdom is the Lord’s!” The opening verses of this prophecy (vv. 1– 5) are very similar to part of an oracle against Edom in Jer 49 (vv. 9, 14– 16), suggesting that Israel’s prophets drew upon traditional language and idioms in the composition of prophetic speech.

*Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (p. 4968). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.*

**Jonah**

The story of Jonah has great theological import. It concerns a disobedient prophet who rejected his divine commission, was cast overboard in a storm and swallowed by a great fish, rescued in a marvelous manner, and returned to his starting point. Now he obeys and goes to Nineveh, the capital of Israel’s ancient enemy. The Ninevites listen to his message of doom and repent immediately. All, from king to lowliest subject, humble themselves in sackcloth and ashes. Seeing their repentance, God does not carry out the punishment planned for them. At this, Jonah complains, angry because the Lord spares them. This fascinating story caricatures a narrow mentality which would see God’s interest extending only to Israel, whereas God is presented as concerned with and merciful to even the inhabitants of Nineveh (4: 11), the capital of the Assyrian empire which brought the Northern Kingdom of Israel to an end and devastated Jerusalem in 701 b.c.. The Lord is free to “repent” and change his mind. Jonah seems to realize this possibility and wants no part in it (4: 2; cf. Ex 34: 6). But the story also conveys something of the ineluctable character of the prophetic calling.

Unlike other prophetic books, this is not a collection of oracles but the story of a disobedient, narrow-minded prophet who is angry at the outcome of the sole message he delivers (3: 4). It is difficult to date but almost certainly is postexilic and may reflect the somewhat narrow, nationalistic reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. As to genre, it has been classified in various ways, such as parable or satire. The “sign” of Jonah is interpreted in two ways in the New Testament: His experience of three days and nights in the fish is a “type” of the experience of the Son of Man (Mt 12: 39– 40), and the Ninevites’ reaction to the preaching of Jonah is contrasted with the failure of Jesus’ generation to obey the preaching of one who is “greater than Jonah” (Mt 12: 41– 42; Lk 11: 29– 32).

Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (p. 4974-4975). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.

**Micah**

This book consists of a collection of speeches, proclamations of punishment and of salvation, attributed to the prophet Micah. Following its superscription (1: 1), the book has two major sections, each with two parts. The organization of the material is thematic, moving from judgment to salvation in both major sections. In the first section (Mi 1– 5), chaps. 1– 3consist almost entirely of prophecies of punishment, and chaps. 4– 5 of prophecies of salvation. The second section (chaps. 6– 7) also moves from prophecies of punishment (6: 1– 7: 6) to confidence in God’s salvation (7: 7– 20).

Micah was a contemporary of the prophet Isaiah. The book’s superscription (1: 1) places his prophetic activity during the reigns of three kings of Judah: Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. It identifies him as a resident of Moresheth, a village in the Judean foothills. The solitary reference to Micah outside the book (Jer 26: 17– 18) places him in the reign of Hezekiah and reports that he went from his small town to proclaim the word of the Lord in the capital, and asserts that his announcements of judgment against Jerusalem moved the king and the people to repentance. Unlike Isaiah, who was a native of the holy city, Micah was an outsider from the countryside and must have been a controversial figure. He would have been unpopular with the leaders whom he condemned (3: 1– 4) and the wealthy whom he criticized (2: 1– 5). He was quick to separate himself from priests and other prophets, whom he considered to be corrupt (3: 5– 8).

Like Is 1– 39, the Book of Micah is focused on Jerusalem, Zion, and the Judean leadership. The Micah who speaks in this prophetic book knows the tradition that Zion is the Lord’s chosen place, but he is critical of the popular view that this election ensures the city’s security (2: 6– 13; 3: 9– 12).

*Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (pp. 4983-4984). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.*

**Nahum**

Shortly before the fall of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, in 612b.c., Nahum uttered his prophecy against the hated city. To understand the prophet’s exultant outburst of joy over the impending destruction it is necessary to recall the savage cruelty of Assyria, which had made it the scourge of the ancient Near East for almost three centuries. The royal inscriptions of Assyria afford the best commentary on Nahum’s burning denunciation of “the bloody city.” In the wake of their conquests, mounds of heads, impaled bodies, enslaved citizens, and avaricious looters testified to the ruthlessness of the Assyrians. Just such a conquest was suffered by Israel, when its capital Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 722/ 721b.c., and by Judah, when its capital Jerusalem nearly fell to invading Assyrian armies twenty years later. Little wonder that in 3: 19 Judah is shown as joining in the general outburst of joy over the destruction of Nineveh!

But Nahum is not a prophet of unrestrained revenge. He asserts God’s moral government of the world. Nineveh’s doom is evidence that God stands against oppression and the abuse of power.

*Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (p. 5009). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition*.

**Habakkuk**

Habakkuk is the only prophet to devote his entire work to the question of the justice of God’s government of the world. In the Bible as a whole, only Job delivers a more pointed challenge to divine rule. Habakkuk’s challenge is set up as a dialogue between the prophet and God, in which Habakkuk’s opening complaint about injustices in Judean society (1: 2– 4) is followed in 1: 5– 11 by God’s promise that the perpetrators will be punished by invading Chaldeans, i.e., Babylonians. Habakkuk’s second complaint about the violence of the Chaldeans themselves (1: 12– 2: 1) is followed by a second divine response assuring the prophet of the reliability of God’s rule and calling for human faithfulness (2: 2– 4).

Two important events frame Habakkuk’s prophecy: the great Babylonian (Chaldean) victory over the Egyptians at Carchemish (605b.c.) and the second Babylonian invasion of Judah (587b.c.), which ended with the destruction of Jerusalem. The desperate conditions in Judah during these years, arising from internal and external threats, provoked Habakkuk’s struggle with difficult and important theological questions about divine justice.

The book may be divided as follows:

1. Habakkuk’s First Complaint (1: 2– 4)
2. God’s Response (1: 5– 11)
3. Habakkuk’s Second Complaint (1: 12– 2: 1)
4. God’s Response (2: 2– 4)
5. Sayings Against Tyrants (2: 5– 20)
6. Hymn About God’s Reign (3: 1– 19)

*Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (p. 5020-5021). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.*

**Zephaniah**

Zephaniah’s prophecy of judgment on Judah and Jerusalem emphasizes, perhaps more than any other prophecy, the devastation and death that divine judgment will bring. Described as the day of the Lord, the day of judgment is pictured as a time of darkness, of anguish and distress, of destruction and plunder of cities, and of threat to all life, human and animal alike. The major sins motivating this judgment, in Zephaniah’s view, are Judah’s worship of other deities (1: 4– 9) and its unjust and abusive leadership (3: 1– 4).

The title of the prophecy informs us that the ministry of Zephaniah took place during the reign of Josiah (640– 609b.c.), not long before the fall of Jerusalem in 587b.c. 587b.c. The protest against the worship of false gods and the condemnation of foreign practices (1: 8– 9) may indicate that Zephaniah spoke during the height of Assyrian influence in the early years of Josiah’s reign, before Josiah launched the religious reforms praised by Israel’s historians (2Kgs 22: 1– 23: 30). If so, the prophecy of Zephaniah would be contemporary with the early prophecy of Jeremiah, with which it shares both language and ideas.

Following are the book’s four sections:

1. The Day of the Lord: Judgment on Judah (1: 2– 2: 3)
2. Judgment on the Nations (2: 4– 15)
3. Jerusalem Reproached (3: 1– 7)
4. The Nations Punished and Jerusalem Restored (3: 8– 20)

*Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (p. 5034). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.*

**Haggai**

Haggai’s words concern conditions in the Persian province of Judah at the beginning of the postexilic period during the reign of the Persian king Darius I (522– 486b.c.). The community in Judah is struggling with its identity in light of the loss of its statehood through the demise of the monarchy and the destruction of the Temple. Haggai’s oracles address both these problems. First, the provincial government, despite its subordination to Persian hegemony, is seen as the legitimate heir to the Davidic monarchy; the governor Zerubbabel, himself a descendant of the Davidic line, and the high priest Joshua together provide political, economic, and religious leadership for the survivors of the Babylonian destruction and the returnees from the Babylonian exile who live together in Judah. Still, the possibility for restoration of Davidic rule is not relinquished but rather is shifted to the eschatological future. Second, the Temple’s ruined state is addressed by a rebuilding program. The prophet links the well-being of the community to the work of Temple restoration, and his exhortations to the leaders and the people to begin work on this project are apparently heeded. The brief period of Haggai’s ministry (August to December 520b.c.) marks the resumption of work on the Temple, the symbol of divine presence among the people.

The prophecies of Haggai can be divided into two major parts:

1. The Restoration of the Temple (1: 1– 15)
2. Oracles of Encouragement (2: 1– 23)

*Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (p. 5046). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.*

**Zechariah**

The Book of Zechariah, because of its great variation in style, content, and language, is widely believed to be a composite work. Made up of First Zechariah (chaps. 1– 8) and Second Zechariah (chaps. 9– 14), the book has been attributed to at least two different prophets. The prophecies of First Zechariah can be dated to the late sixth century b.c., contemporary with those of Haggai; the oracles of Second Zechariah are somewhat later.

The most striking feature of First Zechariah is a series of visions in which the prophet describes the centrality of Jerusalem, its Temple, and its leaders, who function both in the politics of the region and of the Persian empire and in God’s universal rule. (relate to the Temple restoration begun in 520b.c.)

The prophecies of First Zechariah can be divided into three literary units. A brief introductory unit (1: 1– 6) links the prophecies of chaps. 1– 8 with those of Haggai. The visionary unit (1: 7– 6: 15) consists of seven visionary images plus an associated vision dealing with the high priest Joshua. The third unit (7: 1– 8: 23) consists of two parts: (1) an address (7: 1– 14) to a delegation sent from Bethel in anticipation of the end of the seventy years of exile; (2) a series of oracles (8: 1– 23): seven oracles dealing with the restoration of Judah and Zion (vv. 1– 17), followed by three oracles of hope concerning Judah and the nations (vv. 18– 23).

Coming nearly a century later, the prophecies of Second Zechariah are extraordinarily diverse. A complex assortment of literary genres appears in these six chapters, which consist of two distinct parts (chaps. 9– 11and chaps. 12– 14), each introduced by an unusual Hebrew word for “oracle.”

Second Zechariah draws heavily on the words and ideas of earlier biblical prophets. The prophet is acutely aware of the devastation that comes from disobedience to God’s word, as had been spoken by God’s prophetic emissaries. Yet, it was now clear Judah would not soon regain political autonomy and a Davidic king, but maintains the hope of previous prophets by depicting a glorious eschatological restoration. At that time all nations will recognize Jerusalem’s centrality and acknowledge God’s universal sovereignty.

Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (p. 5056-5057). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.

**Malachi**

This short book may have been written before Nehemiah’s first return to Jerusalem in 445b.c.; it is also possible that it was written while Nehemiah was there, or even later. What seems to be the author’s name, mal’ākî, is found in 1: 1 (“ the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi”), but many believe that this is a pseudonym based on mal’ākî,, “my messenger,” in 3: 1 and that the author’s real name is unknown.

God loves Israel (1: 2– 5), but the people return that love poorly. Taking advantage of the negligent attitude of the priests, they withhold tithes and sacrificial contributions (3: 6– 11) and cheat God by providing defective goods for sacrifice (1: 6– 14). People divorce their spouses and marry worshipers of other gods (2: 10– 16). Sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers, and people who take advantage of workers and the needy abound (3: 5). Priests, who could strengthen discipline by their instruction, connive with the people, telling them what they want to hear (2: 1– 9). Underlying all this is a weary attitude, a cynical notion that nothing is to be gained by doing what God wants and that wrongdoers prosper (2: 17; 3: 14– 15). God condemns the wrongdoing and the underlying attitude, issuing a challenge to immediate reform (3: 10– 12), but also announcing a general reckoning at a future moment (3: 16– 21).

The Book of Malachi may be divided as follows:

1. Israel Preferred to Edom (1: 2– 5)
2. Offense in Sacrifice and Priestly Duty (1: 6– 2: 9)
3. Marriage and Divorce (2: 10– 16)
4. Purification and Just Judgment (2: 17)
5. The Messenger of the Covenant (3: 1– 5)
6. Gifts for God, Blessings for the People (3: 6– 12)
7. The Need to Serve God (3: 13– 21)
8. Moses and Elijah (3: 22– 24)

Donald Senior; John Collins; Mary Ann Getty. The Catholic Study Bible (p. 5092-5093). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition.