

Adult Catechism March 14, 2016

The Old Testament Books of Prophets

Part 1: Scripture Readings:

Isaiah 7: 13-17: Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted. The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on your ancestral house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria.”

Jeremiah 20: 7-9: O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, “Violence and destruction!” For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

Jonah 1: 1-4; 11-12; 15-17: Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, “Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.” But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. . . Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea was growing more and more tempestuous. He said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great storm has come upon you.” . . . So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. But the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Daniel 3: 19-24: Then Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face was distorted. He ordered the furnace heated up seven times more than was customary, and ordered some of the strongest guards in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to throw them into the furnace of blazing fire. So the men were bound, still wearing their tunics, their trousers, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. Because the king’s command was urgent and the furnace was so overheated, the raging flames killed the men who lifted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But the three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire. They walked around in the midst of the flames, singing hymns to God and blessing the Lord.

Part 2: The Prophets of the Old Testament: Prophets in Israel were persons who interpreted the actions of God in the events of history. They tried to keep alive the memory of the Exodus and re-interpret the meaning of the ancient faith for new times, to proclaim God’s

will (based on the Sinai covenant) in national crises. After the national disasters of the fall of Israel (722) and Judah (598-586) they began to speak words of hope and comfort.

The writings are called the major and minor prophets. The terms major and minor have to do with the size of the books, and not the importance of the message. In the Hebrew canon, the prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve. Daniel is included among the writings or historical books in the Jewish Scripture, but in Catholic bibles is usually included among the Prophetic books.

Amos preached in the northern kingdom of Israel around 750 BC. His message included social justice, the coming Day of the Lord, and that the covenant with God carried obligations as well as promises.

Hosea was active from about 745 to 722 BC. He described the relationship between God and Israel as a marriage. He talked about the danger of injustice and reliance on military alliances. He talked about the compassion of God, of God's tender longing for God's people.

Isaiah of Jerusalem was a counselor to kings from 740 to 701 BC. During his time, there was a war with Syria in 734 BC and the Assyrian threats until 701 BC. He said the cause of the wars was social injustice and that God worked our punishment for the people in the international arena. This book is famous for the longing for a Messiah and Isaiah's description of his own call. Also there is a famous prophecy about the servant of God who suffers for the sake of Israel.

Micah preached in Jerusalem between 725-705 BC. He cried out against the injustice practiced in both Samaria and Jerusalem, but also preached about peace and salvation, with Jerusalem as the center of God's Kingdom.

Zephaniah preached in the time period after Micah. Zephaniah's preaching coincided with the finding of the Book of Deuteronomy and national covenant-renewal. He condemned the practice of idolatry and injustice.

Jeremiah preached from 627 to 586 BC. His message changed as world events changed. During his time, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. He called for true piety, social justice, and loyalty to God that would result in a new covenant written in the heart. After 598 BC he preached about hope and new beginnings following a time of punishment.

Joel lived in a time of a great locust plague, which he saw as the beginning of the judgement of God. He called for national repentance.

Habakkuk preached between 625-600 BC, a time when the Babylonians were on the march and overrunning all the kingdoms of the Middle East. He questioned God about this, and received the answer that "the righteous live by their faith".

Nahum was written at the time of the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC. This book includes a hymn about a God who is slow to anger but punishes all those who defy Him.

Ezekiel was a priest taken captive to Babylon in 598 BC. Before 586 BC he preached a message of judgement and doom. After that he preached about hope and salvation in God's own nature and purpose. God is not bound by the destroyed temple and has moved with the people into exile. The sins of the past generations will not keep the present generation from choosing God and life and salvation.

Haggai and **Zechariah** preached in Jerusalem around 520 BC, in the reign of Darius of Persia. They said that the temple would be rebuilt and the people were to come together into a purified and faithful community. God keeps His promises. The temple will raise up the glory of

the house of David.

Malachi told of the coming day of the Lord, and accused the people and priests of indifference, doubt, and immorality.

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament. It is a song of anger towards the Edomites for their part in the destruction of Jerusalem.

Jonah is the story of a prophet driven by God to proclaim salvation and mercy even to Israel's enemies.

Daniel was written to offer hope and consolation to Jews who were suffering persecution. This book shows how loyalty to God brings victory over one's persecutors. The faith of the righteous is in the hands of God and God can be trusted to keep the future safe for His people.

Part 3: The Book of 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.

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. He boldly indicts kings, priests, and leaders (6:1; 7:9, 16–17). He stresses the importance and the divine origin of the prophetic word (3:3–8); one must either heed that word in its entirety or suffer its disappearance (8:11–12). Religion without justice is an affront to the God of Israel and, far from appeasing God, can only provoke divine wrath (5:21–27; 8:4–10).

Part 4: The Book of Hosea: Hosea's ministry began during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel (786-746 BC). The exact dates of his ministry are hard to ascertain, but clearly he prophesied during the last years before the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to Assyria. It was a period of affluence in Israel and many Israelites thought that the rising Assyrian power would prove to be an ally. After Jeroboam II, six kings of Israel ruled in rapid succession over a 20 year period. Four were assassinated by their successor (2 Kgs 15). At the heart of their disputes was the Assyrian issue. After a period of mixed policies, tributes and failed dealings the Assyrians defeated Israel in 722 BC and took the northern ten tribes into permanent exile and assimilation. The Book of Hosea is a loose collection of the prophet's oracles. It consists of two main sections: Ch. 1-3 detail Hosea's relationship with his unfaithful wife Gomer and Ch. 4-14 tell of Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord.

The Lord gives Hosea one of the most shocking commands in the Bible: Marry a prostitute! (1:2). Hosea obeys and marries Gomer and they have three children. Then she apparently returns to her immoral lifestyle, but Hosea seeks her out, redeems her and takes her back (3:2). Their relationship is meant to be a metaphor for the Lord's relationship with his people.

Gomer's unfaithful character mirrors Israel's infidelity to the Lord. Even Hosea and Gomer's children represent problems in the Lord's relationship with his people (See Ch. 1). The people of Israel are in a covenant relationship with the Lord, but they have all but forgotten their commitment to him. Through Hosea, the Lord brings legally-toned accusations against them, a covenant lawsuit against his bride. Israel has committed spiritual adultery against the Lord by worshipping other gods and paying tribute to the Assyrians.

Hosea powerfully presents the image of the nation as the bride of the Lord. Hosea shows the mercy of God who welcomes back his bride after her time of unfaithfulness (3:5). The Lord's willingness to forgive his bride for her betrayal shows his willingness to forgive us for our sins. Not only does the bridal imagery show the intensity of God's desire for his people, it illustrates the extravagance of his mercy.

Part 5: The Book of Isaiah: The book of Isaiah is best understood through its characters. The key players in its saga loom large: the LORD, Israel, Isaiah, King Ahaz, King Hezekiah, Assyria, Sennacherib and Babylon. The whole book functions as a covenant lawsuit. The LORD brings suit against Israel for its infidelity to the covenant he made with the nation in the time of Moses. In chapter one, the prophet calls witnesses and begins leveling accusations against Israel. Isaiah himself functions as the LORD's mouthpiece in the trial. So, how does the contemporary reader learn from Isaiah? Two simple lessons come to mind. First, God fulfills his word. In Isaiah, the LORD foretells many events and they come to pass. Through Isaiah, the LORD speaks of destruction and judgment, but also of salvation and redemption. On all counts, he delivers. Therefore, we can trust in his word for he is always faithful. Second, God's plan incorporates all mankind. Many times in the book of Isaiah, the prophet speaks of a jubilant day when all nations will come to worship the LORD at Jerusalem, on Mt. Zion (cf. 25, 66). This awesome day of feasting and celebration is the goal toward which all history tends. In the end, God wins and we share in his victory. From a Christian perspective, this goal is won by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the true son of David and root of Jesse (11:1). Isaiah's prophecies are so important for the NT that some of the church fathers referred to him as the first evangelist. The key passages regarding Jesus are about the virgin birth (7:14), the coming of Immanuel (9:1-7), the sprouting of the root of Jesse (11), the suffering servant (53-55) and the mission of the Messiah (61).

Part 6: The Book of Micah: Micah was from a village southwest of Jerusalem called Moresheth-Gath. His name is an abbreviated form of the name Mikayahu which means, "Who is like the Lord?" He prophesied sometime during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (750-686 BC). His prophecies may have been compiled in this book after his death. Micah is mentioned in Jeremiah 26:18. The book of Micah follows a simple structure of judgment and salvation. Three times, the prophet announces impending doom followed by a word of hope for the future. The Lord will punish the people for their sins, but then the Lord will re-gather the "remnant of Jacob" in the land (5:8) and re-establish the kingdom with a new David-like king born in Bethlehem (5:2). Matthew 2:6 cites Micah 5:2 to show that the birth of Jesus brings this prophecy to fulfillment.

The Lord's message to his people through Micah is an indictment. The people have forsaken the Lord and sought other gods. Their idolatrous worship has led them to indulge in all sorts of

immoral practices like prostitution (1:7), bribe-taking (3:11), oppression of the poor (2:2), false prophecy (3:5), sorcery (5:12) and fraud (6:11). The Lord places especially heavy responsibility on the leaders for the errors and sins of the whole people (3:1, 11). Their judgment consists in being conquered, in experiencing the disaster of the sword (6:14). The destruction is to be shattering (5:14). Yet there is hope. Micah announces the re-gathering of the remnant (2:12), the worship of the nations at the mountain of the Lord (4:1), the new ruler from Bethlehem (5:2), and the forgiveness of sins (7:18-19).

Micah's message comes to us as a confrontation of our patterns of sin, a call to repentance. It shows the evil nature of sin, how one kind of idolatry leads to another. But Micah's message includes a promise of salvation, inviting us to repent while expecting the Lord's forgiveness. Repentance is how we re-enter our broken love relationship with God.

Part 7: The Book of Zephaniah: Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah (640-609 BC). The Bible does not mention him elsewhere, but from his book we can discern that he was familiar with the Temple workings, the priests and the inner political circle of Jerusalem. His name means "the Lord hides, keeps or stores up."

The book of Zephaniah is a short announcement of God's impending judgment on Judah (1:2-2:3) and the surrounding nations (2:4-3:8) with a note of hope for restoration at the end (3:9-20). The book takes up many themes found in the other prophets: judgment, restoration and the in-gathering of the nations. Zephaniah lived under Josiah between the Assyrian conquest of Israel (722) and the Babylonian conquest of Judah (587). Josiah's reign over Judah was particularly influential in biblical history because he instituted a reform of worship and religious practice (2 Kgs 22-23). Zephaniah probably prophesied before the 622 reform because he speaks against current idolatrous practices, which were suppressed during Josiah's reform. Zephaniah accurately predicted the 612 fall of Ninevah before it occurred (2:13-15). Zephaniah takes us from a terrifying message of judgment where God will "utterly sweep everything away" (1:2) to a beautiful picture of a loving relationship with God wherein he will "rejoice over you with gladness" (3:17). He points to the immediate future as full of suffering and judgment, but the ultimate future as a time of glorious restoration. As Christians, we can embrace the message of Zephaniah by humbly accepting the redemptive sufferings of human life while seeking the Lord, his righteousness and humility. Yet we anticipate a coming glorious age in which he will "restore our fortunes" (see 3:20) and we will see him face to face.

Part 8: The Book of Jeremiah: The book of Jeremiah is one of the longest and most challenging books in the Bible. It is a mix of prophecy and history. Jeremiah was a prophet who ministered to the nation of Judah in its final years before the Babylonian conquest and the exile. God called him at a young age (1:5-7) to preach a hard message to the nation: the sins of Judah had reached their limit and God must execute his judgment by sending the people to exile.

Jeremiah prophesies that the Jewish exile will last 70 years (25:11). Then the people will be brought back to the land, have a new Davidic king (33:15-17) and most significantly, a new covenant (31). The prophecy of the new king and covenant finds its fulfillment in Jesus, the son of David (see Matt 1:1; Luke 22:20). Jeremiah had two scribes who were brothers of each other: Baruch and Seraiah, sons of Neriah. They are probably responsible for the text of the

book as we have it. The book of Jeremiah is not chronological. It is collected from many things that Jeremiah said and did during his ministry. Parts of Jeremiah (39, 52) are parallel to 2 Kings 25. The book begins with Jeremiah's prophecies against Judah (1-25). Then it presents a prose history of Jeremiah's life and the events of the last years of the kingdom of Judah (25-46). Next are Jeremiah's oracles against the nations (47-51). Finally, there is an historical epilogue (52). Jeremiah brings a message of judgment and a message of hope. The prophet announces God's judgment against Judah's sins, but promises a future restoration.

Part 9: The Book of 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. This evidence includes: Joel's reliance on an established, possibly written, prophetic tradition; the existence of an organized temple liturgy; the dominance of priests and the absence of a king; and vocabulary characteristic of later material like Chronicles and Zechariah.

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. In Peter's first public speech at Pentecost (Acts 2:16–21), the author uses Jl 3:1–5 to announce the formation of such a community among Christians in Jerusalem and the proximity of the day of the Lord. 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.

Part 10: The Book of Habakkuk: Habakkuk prophesied in Judah during the reign of Jehoiakim. We know little about his life apart from his prophecy. Yet he makes a cameo appearance in Daniel 14:33-39. The book of Habakkuk is a short dialogue between the prophet and the Lord about the judgment of Judah. First, Habakkuk questions why Judah's sins are going unpunished (1:2-4). Then the Lord responds that the Babylonians will come to execute his judgment on Judah (1:5-11). Surprised by the Lord's solution, Habakkuk objects to God using a nation even more wicked than Judah to bring his judgment (1:12-2:1). The Lord replies that Babylon itself, after it has fulfilled its purpose, will fall and be mocked by the people it oppressed and "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord" (2:14). The last chapter of Habakkuk is a psalm with musical indications. The psalm celebrates some of the

Lord's great actions in Israel's history and anticipates his judgment against Babylon (3:16). The major tension in the book centers around the fulfillment of God's plan for his people and the execution of his judgment in the world. Habakkuk's questioning comes from a standpoint of faith and trust, not from doubt. The prophet believes in God's ultimate justice, so he can openly ask for vindication. As the Lord and Habakkuk hammer out how justice will be accomplished, the prophet deals with the deep questions of suffering, sin and violence. Hab. 2:4 is very important in New Testament theology. It is quoted in Rom 1:17, Gal 3:11 and Heb 10:37-38. The best way to translate the verse is disputed. Habakkuk gives us an opportunity to grapple with the unanswerable questions of life. We too must seek to understand suffering and the seeming triumph of wickedness in the face of God's justice. Yet with Habakkuk we can place our hope in God's promise and await an appointed time (cf. 2:3, 3:16) when the Lord will finally and fully establish his justice in our midst. Until then, we can rejoice in the knowledge that God is our Savior (3:18).

Part 11: The Book of Nahum: Nahum was a prophet in Judah after the 722 BC fall of Israel, but before the 587 BC fall of Jerusalem. His name means "comfort." He preached during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah (640-609 BC). Nahum is not mentioned in other biblical books and the location his hometown, Elkosh, has not been identified but probably it was in Judah (1:1). The book's message is simple: God's justice will in the end prevail over human injustice. The Lord brought retribution against Assyria for all of its crimes, but only after a long cruel reign. Assuredly, the people who clap their hands at Ninevah's fall (3:19) felt the Lord was slow to anger (1:3). They had suffered enough; the defeat of Assyria would truly be "good news" (1:15).

Christians believe in the Lord's vindication for his people, but we await his final act of making things right. Though some injustices are "righted" in our history, the complete righting of all wrongs will not come until the end of time.

Part 12: The Book of Ezekiel: Ezekiel is a very challenging book for several reasons. The author uses unfamiliar apocalyptic imagery to describe many things. The historical situation in which Ezekiel wrote is rather complicated and many of the events in the book occur only in visions. Even Ezekiel's geographical location is puzzling. Much of the exacting detail in his visions seems unnecessary.

Ezekiel was a priest and a prophet who was taken from Judah to Babylon in the second wave of exiles (597 BC). His prophecies are very attentive to the Temple, the liturgy and the Sabbath. He takes the ceremonial commands of the law just as seriously as the moral. He calls the exiled people to faithfulness to the Lord even though the signs of the Lord's blessing (the land and the Temple) have been taken away.

Like the other prophets, Ezekiel has a message of judgment and a message of restoration. He announces God's judgment against Judah for its sins against the covenant and he pronounces God's judgment against the surrounding nations which oppressed Judah. When Ezekiel upbraids Judah for its gross infidelity to the Lord, some of the language he uses is so strong that it startles us by its harshness. Yet Ezekiel does not leave his hearers in a state of condemnation, but invites them to turn away from their sins and take advantage of God's promises and covenant. Though the Lord uses Ezekiel to chide the people, he also uses him to give hope to

his suffering people in a time of exile and persecution. Ezekiel is a prophet of judgment and a prophet of renewal.

Part 13: The Book of Haggai: The book of Haggai is a very short collection of the prophet's oracles given in the fall of 520 BC, interspersed with a few historical accounts. Haggai was a contemporary of Zechariah. They both encouraged the people to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 5:1, 6:14). Haggai's name means "born on the feast-day."

The Temple was extremely significant for Judah's relationship with the Lord. It was the only place where the cult could be celebrated, animals sacrificed, feasts commemorated. The Temple was the heart of Jewish worship. While the returned exiles were already sacrificing on the ruins of the first Temple, the Lord wanted them to reconstruct the whole building. They built the second Temple with meager resources and under difficult circumstances. But their work was an act of faith that God would fulfill his promises to them. The second Temple did achieve a greater glory than the first because it was graced by the presence of Christ himself. Haggai is relatively unique among the prophets, in that the people immediately responded to his message in obedience. Haggai roused a people who had forgotten their purpose. Initial obstacles, legal entanglements, resource shortages and the march of time had caused them to forget why they returned to Palestine. They were living their lives in "paneled houses," trying to make ends meet, but Haggai shocked them out of their haze and helped them to realize they had a mission to build the Temple and restore the practice of worship. When our lives get filled with clutter, we can turn to Haggai and his generation for a dose of reality, mission and purpose. God did not place us on this earth merely to live in paneled houses and enjoy our grain, wine and oil. We are made to worship him and our lives should constantly reflect this calling.

Part 14: The Book of Zechariah: Zechariah prophesied about the same time as Haggai, when after returning from exile in 593, the people had still not rebuilt the temple. Only about 50,000 returned. From Ezra 2:36-39 we see that out of the 24 orders of priests, representatives of only four had returned. Only 74 Levites and 392 temple servants came back: Ezra 2:40, 58. Zechariah is the most messianic of the prophets, next to Isaiah. The book is divided into two parts: Zechariah 1-8, concerned mainly with the rebuilding of the temple, and Zechariah 9-14, dealing with future events, notably the coming of Messiah and the glory of His reign. Zechariah begins his book (Zechariah 1) with a reminder that the captivity had been a result of disobedience. He continues by relating a series of visions designed to show that God is in control of history and will bring a glorious blessing to the faithful remnant of His people. Jerusalem is pictured as so prosperous it is having to be enlarged to hold the people (Zechariah 2). The vision of Joshua the high priest, clothed in filthy rags (Zechariah 3) seems to be a definite prevision of the atonement of Christ. Other visions in the book point to the certainty of God's judgment and ultimate victory over sin, culminating in the coming of the Messiah.

Part 15: The Book of Malachi: Malachi's name means "my messenger" or "my angel." He prophesied in Judah after the reconstruction of the Temple, but before or during the rule of Ezra and Nehemiah. He is not mentioned in other books of the Old Testament, but he is quoted in the New Testament (Matt 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27; Rom 9:13).

Malachi's message is in harmony with the other prophets, but some of his points may be surprising to

us. Most of the sins which the prophet brings up are basically ceremonial: impure sacrifices, intermarriage and tithe avoidance. Yet the Lord views these acts as serious offenses against his covenant relationship with his people. What seems trivial is in fact definitive for Judah's relationship with the Lord, revealing the heart of his people. Malachi is the last of the prophets before the arrival of John the Baptist. This book concludes the Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets and the entire Old Testament canon. It reminds us of God's love for us. It reveals the importance of worshiping him correctly and it causes us to look forward to the "sun of righteousness" who will come with healing in his wings (4:2). While Malachi reproves the people for their sins, his anticipation of the joy of redemption sounds a note of hope at the close of the Old Testament.

Part 16: The Book of Obadiah: The book of Obadiah is a book of Prophetic Oracles. The prophet Obadiah wrote it. Its authorship is difficult to date but was possibly written about 853-841 B.C. or 605-586 B.C. The key personalities are the Edomites. The purpose of Obadiah is to show that God will judge all those who are against His children, His chosen people; Edom is used as the example of this truth. Obadiah is only one chapter (the shortest book in the Old Testament) yet it tells of God's prophet Obadiah as he announces God's powerful and authoritative judgment on the nation of Edom. This is the fateful end of the nation of Edom. They had been in conflict with Israel since ancient times, in reality Edom is the descendants of Esau, Jacobs's brother.

Part 17: The Book of Jonah: The Jonah, whose name means "dove," prophesied in the time of Jeroboam II, king of Israel 793-753 BC (2 Kgs 14:25). At the time, the Assyrian Empire was threatening Israel from the north and eventually did overrun the kingdom in 722 BC. Scholars debate the date and authorship of the book of Jonah because there are so few clues as to when it was written. It is possible it could have been written at a later time by an inspired author writing about Jonah rather than by Jonah himself. Scholars disagree over the nature of the book of Jonah. It may be considered an historical narrative or a fictional story. The book of Jonah is a story about a prophet rather than a prophecy. It tells the story of Jonah's rocky relationship with God. When the Lord calls him to preach to Ninevah, Jonah immediately flees in the opposite direction, but the Lord doesn't let him off the hook so easily. A powerful storm and a giant fish combine to thwart Jonah's plan to escape God's call. Even the pagan sailors on their way to Tarshish turn pious in the face of disaster and begin praying and offering sacrifices to the Lord (1:16). Do we have attitudes that contradict God's mercy? Do we run from the Lord when he calls us? Do we do his will only with reluctance? The message of the book confronts us with our sinfulness as we see our own faults in Jonah's heart. Ironically, the people who really "got the message" were the sailors and Ninevites, not the prophet God sent to them! The story of Jonah teaches us respond to God's call and to widen our perspective to embrace the Lord's plan for others even when it contradicts our assumptions or selfish desires.

Part 18: The Book of Daniel: Many today think Daniel was written rather late, in the second century B.C., after the time of Antiochus IV and his persecution. They think many things that seem to be prophecies are really made after the things happened. It is clear that there are two genres in Daniel. One is apocalyptic, which presents highly colored images and often secret things. We still will need to ask whether the writer means to assert that he saws the visions described, or are they only a literary device to convey certain truths. In any case, the original readers knew they must reduce the imagery very much. Within apocalyptic it is permitted to give prophecies of things, as if they were still to come, whereas they are past. The genre lets us know that such retrojected prophecies are apt to be present. In most other genres it is not permitted to retroject a prophecy, though it is possible to retroject things, other than prophecies. The stories of that part of Daniel, and some others too, are in the edifying narrative genre. It is clear that

such a genre was running during that period, e.g., in the story of Ahiqar. In this genre we read stories that are quite interesting, but the relation of the things in them to real history or biography is about the same as the relation of science fiction to science.

The book has three main parts, each from different eras and of distinct literary genres: Chapters 1-6, from the 3rd cent., contain stories about the life and struggles of Daniel and his companions during the Babylonian exile; here Daniel is the interpreter of the dreams of various Babylonian kings.

Chapters 7-12, from the early 2nd cent., is a collection of four apocalyptic visions; here Daniel himself is the visionary, but he needs help from an angelic mediator to interpret and understand his own dreams.

Chapters 13-14 are not found in the Hebrew Bible, but are in the Septuagint (ancient Greek Bible; LXX); they consist of two separate stories involving Daniel that are novelistic, not historical. Daniel reassures God's people that he is sovereign and so encourages faithfulness to him. This is even more the case for Christians who know that the Son of Man has come once to defeat evil, will come again to establish his kingdom, and that they live in the last days of conflict. It is no surprise then that Revelation picks up many motifs from Daniel and encourages believers to stand firm because of God's final victory.